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Redefining Biological Horror: The Aesthetic Evolution of an Infected Body in HBO's The Last of Us

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Abstract: The post-apocalyptic genre has seen a resurgence in 2023 due to HBO's *The Last of Us*, a television adaptation based on Naughty Dog's video game of the same name, where the society has collapsed due to an infection that causes human bodies to gradually mutate and become violent. There have been debates on whether the infected humans should be called "zombies", as the word was banned on the production set and the creative director of the video game has refused numerous times to use the word when labeling the infected bodies. In this article, I am taking a closer look at the infection presented in the series, its impact on the human body, the mutation and transformation that precedes it, and the question of zombification in relation to an existing and real-world infection, as in the case Cordyceps fungus. Moreso, I will discuss the validity of considering analyzing *The Last of Us* through the body horror filter, due to the exploration of an infection that happens in stages, and the different anatomical and aesthetical changes it provokes to the human body.

Keywords: horror, television, video game, body horror, adaptation.

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Introduction

From a collective point of view, horror has always been perceived as being concerned with showcasing a monster as its central asset. Contextually, the monster interacts with the characters, resulting in tense and anxiety-ridden situations that take by surprise both the characters involved and the viewers as well. However, the danger only affects the former of these sides. The moviegoers are left physically unharmed, while psychologically, they present behavioral changes related to a higher surrounding awareness brought forward by certain brain activities.[2] In other words, the monster represents the threat that elicits the thrill. Ultimately, we, as horror spectators, seek the thrill. We are addicted to it. It does not harm us, yet it opens a world of unexplored psychological possibilities that we learn from, but also adapt and employ in our lives. In this regard, the monster, and its interference with horror, acts as an endurance test: are we capable of withstanding repulsive bodies that are enacting acts of explicit violence and cruelty? Probably not at first, but in time, yes.

However, horror is an exhaustively potent genre. While the monster, a menacing entity on its own, causes anxiety and fear at the mere sight, there are multiple other methods to induce a frightening state in the spectator. Psychological horror seems to master the art of subtle menaces: the monster becomes a secondary trait in the anatomy of the film, whereas the setting, the atmosphere, and their relation to the characters become the main facilitator of terror. In psychological horror, one tends to question anything, because everything enables fear. A dimming light in a room does not offer comfort, nor does it a bright sunny day in the middle of a flowery summer field. Moreso, one often finds casual characters in a position to be doubted and even feared, because they are narratively built to be psychologically ambivalent: are they a threat or a friend? We do not know, so we are left with our own devices to interpret their motivations. Thus, the lack of trust becomes the backbone of psychological horror. Doubt becomes the ever-present monster. It is both uncanny and effectively terrifying.

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[2] Matthew Hudson et al., "Dissociable neural systems for unconditioned acute and sustained fear," *NeuroImage*, 216, August 1, 2020, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053811920300094.

Biological horror or more commonly known as body horror,[3] borrows this concept, the lack of trust, to great effect. As its name suggests, this horror sub-genre focuses on the body as the enabler of monstrosity. The body becomes the monster that inflicts violence and suffering, physiologically and psychologically alike, on the characters. In the former regard, the individual suffers from a variety of health conditions: diseases, infections, mutations, and fungal infections that biologically transform the body and often culminate in death or, even more terrifying, a gradual and often conscious loss of bodily autonomy.[4] In the latter regard, the lack of trust in one's body's diseased transformation evokes intense feelings of disgust, and it plays upon the anxieties of losing all physical prowess.[5] In many ways, body horror resembles gory slasher films with a psychological horror sensibility: the violence scares but it becomes overwhelming due to its proximity and its unavoidable nature. Biology cannot be tamed, and it does not discriminate. It is a volatile and incredibly ruthless killer. It becomes such an intense threat that we are often left with nothing but the chance to surrender to its evolutionary metamorphosis.

Such biological metamorphoses are explored in HBO's *The Last of Us*, a post-apocalyptic drama where the world is ravaged by a fungal infection that turns its human hosts into violent and brutal killers.[6] Adapted from Naughty Dog's eponymous video game, *The Last of Us* takes a unique approach to the body horror concept of "zombification", even though the showrunners insist that it is not a "zombie show".[7] Partly, I tend to believe them. The

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[3] Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 40, no. 4 (2012): 160–168, doi:10.1080/01956051.2012.654521.

[4] Peter Hutchings, *The A–Z of Horror Cinema. A–Z Guides 100* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

[5] Davey Davis, "The Future of Body Horror: Can Our Art Keep up with Our Suffering?" *The Rumpus*, January 26, 2017, https://therumpus.net/2017/01/26/the-future-of-body-horror-can-our-art-keep-up-with-our-suffering/.

[6] Kyle Hill, "The Fungus that Reduced Humanity to The Last of Us," *Scientific American*, June 25, 2013, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/but-not-simpler/the-fungus-that-reduced-humanity-to-the-last-of-us/.

[7] Zack Sharf, "*The Last of Us* Crew Was Banned From Saying Zombie On Set: We Weren't Allowed To Say The Z Word," *Variety*, February 14, 2023, https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/the-last-of-us-crew-banned-saying-zombie-set-1235522423/.

infected in *The Last of Us* is not the classical zombies found in horror films. They are the result of a biological evolution that exists in the real world, but cannot yet infect humans, much for our sake. However, the video game and its HBO television adaptation theorize a scenario where the evolution of the Cordyceps fungus has happened and humans are its victims. Moreso, the infection happens in stages: there are no more than four versions of infected bodies in the TV adaptation of *The Last of Us*, and no more than six versions of infected bodies in the video game. Aesthetically, they all represent different types of monsters found in the body horror subgenre.

In this paper, I will take a closer look at the way biological horror is explored through infected bodies in *The Last of Us*. For the sake of this article, I will only discuss the HBO television adaptation, although, I will closely link it to its source material, Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* video game. My main intention is to showcase how the different stages of the fungal disease impact the aesthetic of the infected body, while the second most important issue that I will be discussing in this article is the concept of zombification and the question of its consideration in *The Last of Us.*

Uncanny biology – the premise of *The Last of Us* and its narratological development within the body horror genre

In an excellent display of free adaptation, HBO's *The Last of Us* begins its very first episode with a subtle threat: fungal infections are entirely different biological beasts compared to bacteria or viruses, and – if the world were to gradually experience an increase of temperature, say climate change – the human body would not be able to withstand them. This premise is thoroughly explained by an epidemiologist, especially emphasizing the fact that there is no cure nor an effective treatment in case it would ever happen. Some decades later, it happens. The evolution of fungi is taking place and humans immediately become ravaged by it, on a global scale. Most of the population becomes infected, but instead of dying, they become parasitic hosts that violently seek to spread the infestation. The premise of *The Last of Us* would fall into the post-apocalyptic narrative: society collapse followed by desperate attempts to restore whatever order is there to be restored. But it can also be analyzed through the body horror filter.

Post-apocalyptic worlds and settings are often brought forward by violent incidents of biological nature. If we take a close look at it, *World War Z*, *The Walking Dead*, *28 Days Later*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Road*, or *Station Eleven*, all present a world brought to ruin by a certain virus that behaves violently and erratically. All the examples feature zombified bodies born out of an unexplained virus, engaging in cannibalistic behavior to survive, thrive, and infest, and aside from *Station Eleven*, where the virus just kills, all these examples end the same: a gone world, and the few left alive struggling to survive. Zombification, however, is never explored and explained in detail, or at least, the scientific reason has diminished importance enough to reconsider these examples as part of body horror. Ultimately, the zombified bodies become the monsters, the physical threat, unequivocally aimed at one thing: annihilation.

However, body horror rarely resorts to immediate violence to violate or transform the body.[8] It seeks to question body autonomy, body integrity, and body unity and then it inflicts psychological torture on its characters before finally making them succumb to whatever parasitic motivations biology stands for. When this final process occurs, the body experiences biological transformations. All the transformed bodies lead to the collapse of society. In *The Last of Us*, even when society is ruined, biology continues its evolution. It continues to mutate the body into new forms: more violent, more potent, and more efficient to spread the infestation everywhere. It not only kills the human, but it also uses it to create a new consciousness, or as the television adaptation calls it, a fungal "network" that accurately resembles a mycelium.[9]

In this regard, *The Last of Us* exists in the body horror genre in an equal manner to the post-apocalyptic genre. Contrary to the examples that I mentioned earlier, in *The Last of Us*, the human body does not stagnate to a single form when the infection happens: it gradually suffers from a continuous metamorphosis until it becomes mature enough to infest. After infestation occurs, the human body becomes a surveillance point in the fungal network.

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[8] Peter Hutchings, *The A–Z of Horror Cinema. A–Z Guides 100* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

[9] A mycelium (or mycelia) is a fungus structure with a root-like appearance, consisting of a mass of branching hyphae. It can grow to expand on acres of land, according to M.D. Fricker, L. Boddy and D. Bebber D, "Network organization of filamentous fungi" in *Biology of the fungal cell*, ed. RJ Howard, Nar Gow (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2007), 309 -330.

> The fungus also grows underground. Long fibers, like wires, some of them stretching over a mile. Now, you step on a patch of Cordyceps in one place, and you can wake a dozen infected from somewhere else. Now they know where you are, now they come. (Tess, The Last of Us, Episode 2: Infected, dir. Neil Druckmann)

Body transformation is one of the strongest arguments in favor of including *The Last of Us* in the body horror genre. Infected beings do not simply kill, but they also act together and move together per their biology. Moreso, they are always evolving and, in their evolution, they become far more dangerous, as they develop new anatomical forms. They also become perfect archetypes of body horror monsters. One would argue that they were innately monstrous, or just biology expanding and defending their territory. In *The Last of Us*, the latter seems to be more appropriate.

The video game and its television adaptation emphasize the uncanny trait of biology. Not only this exact infection exists in the real world, but the theory of humans being susceptible to it due to global warming transforms it into an even greater and almost urgent threat. We are just some evolutionary steps away from experiencing it. Further, we can also recognize the remnants of human biology in the infected bodies: fungus is tearing apart the skulls to make their way outside, and scales made up of fungal parts are enriching and feeding on a human body, similar to the real world fungal symbiosis. In many ways, the uncanny biology is the driver of unrelinquished anxiety in *The Last of Us*. Much like cosmic horror, body horror represents the uncanniest of fears. It happens in our vicinity; our bodies are involved in it and we have no control over it.

Fatal biology – The aesthetic and anatomic metamorphosis of an infected body in *The Last of Us*

An infected body constitutes the most dangerous threat in *The Last of Us*. It is a body of unpredictable nature, an erratic and cannibalistic behavior, a parasite in human form with no tracks of empathy, emotions, or consciousness of its own. It is a former human body infected with a mutated version of

Cordyceps and it gradually suffers from an active anatomic transformation. Depending on the time of the infection, an infected body will evolve over the years into more lethal forms. Per their stage of evolution, in *The Last of Us* universe, these bodies are colloquially known as Runners, Stalkers, Clickers, and Bloaters, while in the video game adaptation, two more forms are encountered, the Shamblers and the Rat Kings.[10] They are all different and their behavior, while still the same, proves to be more efficient at spreading infestation as evolution occurs.

A Runner[11] is the first stage of the infected body. They usually turn in approximately two days after the initial infection. They are described as being physically weak, but fast and their behavior is hesitant: in the video game, they are seen as being psychologically distressed, like crying, after attacking. It is suggested a Runner's psychological state is still intact, and psychologically, it is still a human mind. However, from an anatomical perspective, the human body cannot resist the infection, thus compelling it to act violently and erratically. In the television series, the first stage of the infection triggers muscle spasms, as seen in the character of Nana, an elderly woman, who violently attacks members of her family. Aesthetically speaking, a Runner has minor to no anatomical changes initially. It has tendrils coming out of its mouth as a means to spread the infestation via biting, but it retains the human body, although it suffers transformations as physical trauma is inflicted upon it. Later, as the infection is taking hold, more anatomical changes happen: the eyes and skin become yellow, because of jaundice, a condition caused by the lack of liver functionality, while fungus becomes more present on the surface of the skin.

[10] In a node to biological horror, a Rat King is a real biological phenomenon. It is a collection of rats whose tails are tied or bound together in some way. There is no conclusive theory on why it happens, some scientists agree that one of the explanations could be the need for a nest and warmth during the colder seasons.

[11] The name Runner is not officially mentioned in the television adaptation of *The Last of Us*. In the adaptation, this infestation stage does not have a colloquial name, it is only mentioned as the infected. However, in Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us*, this stage of the infected is called a Runner and, per *The Last of Us* Podcast, the name Runner was used in interviews and on-set.

Fig. 1: A runner in HBO's *The Last of Us*

A Stalker[12] is the next stage of the infection. Taking place over several years after being infected, the body of a stalker is severely changed and mutated to a degree where fungi have sprouted over it. Anatomically, its skin and eyes are yellow and fungal masses cover the head and parts of the body. Usually, the eyes are destroyed in the process, as Cordyceps takes hold. There are remnants of a former human, but the fungi have slowly incapacitated these remnants. Both anatomically and aesthetically, a stalker is a human body taken to its limits, in a pure body horror fashion.[13] The television series has not explored the anatomical capabilities of a stalker in-depth, but aesthetically, it seems to possess abilities that would make it even harder to face in combat. As in the scene with Tess, the stalker seems to know when someone is infected and it behaves accordingly, adding the victim to the fungal network. But it does so in a tender manner, almost abandoning all

[12] Similar to the Runner, the Stalker is not officially mentioned in HBO's adaptation. In the adaptation, this infestation stage does not have a colloquial name, it is only mentioned as the infected. However, in Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us*, this stage of the infected is called a Stalker and, per *The Last of Us* Podcast, the name Runner was used in interviews and on-set.

[13] Matt Cardin, *Horror Literature Through History: An Encyclopedia of the Stories That Speak to Our Deepest Fears*, (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2017).

violence in favor of savoring the victory of infestation: tendrils are coming out of its mouth, engulfing the victim with a lethal kiss. Aesthetically, a stalker is no longer a human, but not yet entirely a monster. It is the perfect embodiment of the uncanny.

Fig. 2: A stalker in HBO's *The Last of Us*

A Clicker is the third stage of Cordyceps infection. It is no longer human, neither in psychology nor in anatomy and, while it resembles a human form, the fungal evolution exists in an animalistic territory. The clicker is extremely dangerous, incredibly ferocious, and lethally skilled in hunting its prey. In a single confrontation, it managed to bite and inflict wounds on both Ellie and Tess, the latter ultimately dying because of it. Anatomically, the

fungal masses are covering all its body. The face is unrecognizable, the Cordyceps maims the head, destroys the eyes, and renders its host completely blind. It uses echolocation to hunt through its clicker sounds and shrieks. A veritable display of biological evolution, the clicker is a true body horror monster: it is disfigured and mutated, pushing the human body to an extreme limit, crying, and shrieking in tortured screams, motived purely by the desire to infect, and spreading the infestation.

Fig. 3: A clicker in HBO's *The Last of Us*

A Bloater is the fourth stage of the Cordyceps evolution. Similar to the Clicker, this type of infected body is a rare sight in *The Last of Us* universe. Its mutation precedes that of the Clicker, and it takes a great amount of time for the evolution of this kind to happen. The Bloater is enormous as seen in episode 5. It is also slow, and it cannot run to such a speed as the other infected, but it is also the strongest infected body. Anatomically, they are an amalgam of fungal masses sprouted all over the human body, erupting into carcasses sort of armor, that offers its host a protective skin resistant to many firearms. They possess incredible strength capable of inflicting fatal violence on anyone near it. In a display of pure horror, the Bloater manages

to easily rip and tear limbs of non-infected humans. Aesthetically, they are the perfect embodiment of a body horror monster, a fungal-infected Frankenstein, large and disfigured. Covered in Cordyceps, they have a thick and yellow shell resembling scales, and their metamorphosis emphasizes a crude and exaggerated transformation of the human body.

Fig. 4: A bloater in HBO's *The Last of Us*

The HBO's adaptation only features these 4 stages of the infection. However, in the video game, two more forms are encountered, which emphasize the argument of considering The Last of Us as part of the body horror genre. The Shamblers and the Rat Kings are distinct forms of Cordyceps mutation which are dependent on certain biological circumstances. The Shambler is infected that thrives near water settings and it can release spores to infest the environment, while the Rat King is a monstrous infected organism made up of several infected brought together by the Cordyceps fungi. The former is like a Runner, while the latter is larger than a Bloater and far more dangerous.

The biology featured in *The Last of Us* is dangerous and fatal to the characters of this universe. It not only causes a global collapse, but it also proves to be the subject of continuous evolution, an organism that increases its threatful

nature with each form. But despite its many monstrous versions, ultimately, the Cordyceps is just natural biology. It does not shape, nor manipulate reality in such a way other similar works of fiction would – Jeff VanderMeer's the Southern Reach Trilogy comes to mind. But it is also not imaginary biology, as in other works mentioned earlier in this article, and its evolution is very dependent on real circumstances of space and time. These mutated bodies have been transformed due to several conditions being met, conditions that are based on and exist in our pragmatic reality. One would argue that *The Last of Us* could present a possible scenario of fungal evolution,[14] and we often rest assured that a Cordyceps fungus can't infect humans,[15] but the exact type of fungi presented in *The Last of Us*, does exist. It makes biology uncannier.

The issue of zombification – Is *The Last of Us* a zombie show?

There has been a debate on whether the infected bodies on *The Last of Us* make it a zombie show or not,[16] and even the video game's creator, Neil Druckmann, has refused many times to label the infected bodies as "zombies". The word has become so forbidden, it has even been banned from the production set,[17] and it is keenly avoided in interviews, podcasts, or any other similar contexts.

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[14] Allison Parshall, "Could the Zombie Fungus in TV's *The Last of Us* Really Infect People?," *Scientific American*, February 10, 2023, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/could-the-zombie-fungus-in-tvs-the-last-of-us-really-infect-people/.

[15] Robert Hart, "*The Last Of Us* Zombie Infection Is Real - Here's What Scientists Say About The Threat To Humans," *Forbes*, January 16, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2023/01/16/the-last-of-us-zombie-infection-is-real-heres-what-scientists-say-about-the-threat-to-humans/.

[16] Cindy White, "Is *The Last of Us* a Zombie Show or Not?," *AV Club*, February 21, 2023, https://www.avclub.com/the-last-of-us-tv-show-hbo-zombie-debate-1850130814.

[17] "We weren't allowed to say the Z word on set. It was like a banned word. They were the Infected. We weren't a zombie show. Of course, there's tension building and jump scares but the show's really about our characters; The Infected are an obstacle they have to deal with." Hugh Hart, "*The Last of Us* Cinematographer Eben Bolter on Episode 4 & more," *Motion Picture Association*, February 6, 2023, https://www.motionpictures.org/2023/02/the-last-of-us-cinematographer-eben-bolter/.

The reluctance to label *The Last of Us* a "zombie" show might come from the idea that a zombie narrative would not make justice to the quality of the story. *The Last of Us*, the video game, has been trying to avoid the survival horror label, that similar video games, such as Resident Evil, have gotten in the past, by avoiding making any reference to the concepts of zombie or zombification. In part, it worked, even though, there have been some critics calling the infected "not zombies"[18] in a cynical approach to the struggle of avoiding zombification at any cost. By any means, Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* is often referred to as one of the greatest video games ever made. Contributors to publications such as IGN, USA Today, Esquire, Polygon, The Irish Times and many others all agree the game brought an authorial and cinematic aspect to the medium, while its story, characterization, depiction of loss, tragedy, and love, and the philosophical subtexts of morality are highly regarded by critics. But almost all the reviews also treat the narrative through the lens of zombification and while dozens of critics agree it is not a story centered around zombies, one cannot ignore the concept.

There might be several theories on why the showrunners avoided labeling the adaptation as a "zombie" show. One central reason is that zombification would have diminished the story. The focus on surviving a zombie apocalypse would have been larger than exploring the story of the characters. In the video game, zombification provides action, and action is needed when the gameplay is involved – in fact, zombies are an instrument of ludology, an obstacle to overcome to unlock new rewards. Translating so many action scenes involving infected from the video game into television would have taken away the necessary space to develop the story of Joel and Ellie properly. And along with space, the label would also shift the attention to zombies, creating expectancies hard to build on a medium, such as television. Another personal reason why I tend to believe the label of zombification has been avoided is its ability to trivialize the story. In the past 20 years, a lot of similar series and films have been avoiding the word "zombie" because it has been used in a parodic manner. The popularity of zombie narratives such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* has shifted the cultural meaning of the word

[18] Gabriel Aikins, "The Last of Us Makes Players Feel Really Bad – and That's Great," *Wired*, October 15, 2022, https://www.wired.com/story/the-last-of-us-makes-players-feel-really-bad-and-thats-great/.

in a comic terrain. Nowadays, the collective opinion often finds the word infantilizing.

Now, is *The Last of Us* a zombie show? Yes and no. It all depends on how we approach it. I tend to believe it is not a zombie show. I would label it a biological horror by the way of Garland's Annihilation (based on Vander Meer's Southern Trilogy books) and a body horror by the way of Cronenberg's filmography but seemingly rooted in pragmatic science. In many ways, I would even label it as a psychological horror, because the uncanny biology of this universe is enough to unsettle us and makes us wonder if we truly are in danger. In other ways, I would label it a "prestige HBO"[19] a drama that tackles hard subjects of loss, tragedy, and coming of age and depicts beautiful friendships and romantic love stories that left so many of us in awe.[20]

Do I look at zombies when seeing infected bodies in *The Last of Us*? Tentatively, I would say yes, but this is only because collectively we associate any kind of "aggressive human that bites" trope in fiction as being automatically a zombie. However, if we take a closer look at the history of film, starting with *Night of the Living Dead*, to *The Walking Dead*, and *Dawn of the Dead*, all the creatures known as "zombies" are narratological described as dead, and aesthetically they are portrayed as decayed and rotting creatures. However, in *The Last of Us*, the infected humans do not die, their consciousness might be gone or faded, as it is never stated, but their bodies are alive. Not only thriving with life but evolving as well, in a body horror manner. The Cordyceps kills the weaker bodies eventually[21], while the strongest of them evolve and push the human body to its limits. The infection is an evolving biology, to begin with. They are not decayed, nor rotting, but biologically metamorphosed.

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[19] Monica Marie Zorrilla, "*The Last of Us* is a Zombie Show Without That Many Zombies – and That's a Good Thing," *Inverse*, February 20, 2023, https://www.inverse.com/entertainment/the-last-of-us-fewer-zombies-hbo.

[20] Episode 3 of *The Last of Us*, *Long Long Time*, is a case study of free adaptation where the series deviates from the story of the video game. The episode centers around a couple, Bill and Frank, and their romantic relationship in a post-apocalyptic world. The narrative deviates from the video game, where the characters are romantically involved there too, but the end of their relationship is far more tragic than the one portrayed in HBO's adaptation. Critics called the episode one of the best TV moments in history, and it was well-received by the public.

[21] Kyle Hill, "The Fungus that Reduced Humanity to The Last of Us," *Scientific American*, June 25, 2013, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/but-not-simpler/the-fungus-that-reduced-humanity-to-the-last-of-us/.

It would be unfair to call them zombies because they are not. They are not entirely dead; they are transformed by biology, and they are brought anew to an animalistic life that evolves and thrives outside of the human consciousness.

Conclusions

The Last of Us stands as one of the many works of post-apocalyptic fiction that focuses on transforming the human body into a monstrous hunger-led creature that revels in cannibalistic practices. Its unique approach to an existing fungus that decimates humanity based on biological evolution, makes it a work with an unparalleled uncanny characteristic. Adding to this particular sentiment is also the evolution of the infected body. All the creatures and their versions are intrinsically tied to body horror: they were human once, and they still are, but unrecognizable, dangerous, and insatiable for infecting others. Their behavior is unlike anything the creatures from this kind of fiction would behave. They are tied together, they act together, and if Episode 2 would tell us anything, is that they also sense when someone else is infected. These arguments alone would label The Last of Us as a body horror work of fiction. Ironically, it redefines the genre of biological horror, by redefining (or rather, deconstructing) the concept of zombification: the infected are not zombies, but they are not something very different from them either. They still bite, they still infect, they still spread the infection and ultimately, they still bring the world to the brink of collapse.

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