

Zombie nation

Phil Mellows



I was hanging about outside some offices the other morning and among those who hurried past me into work was a suited chap with a briefcase and rotting flesh. For a moment I puzzled over whether he'd come straight from an all-nighter or decided to save time by getting the slap on before work so he was ready to go straight on the shuffle after logging out. Or possibly both. Anyway, I didn't worry about it too much. It was Hallowe'en. And it was Brighton.

This year they extended the zombie season by bringing the zombie beach walk forward a week, presumably to ease congestion on Hallowe'en weekend. You got used to seeing people who looked like they've been in some horrible accident, covered in blood with bits hanging off them. If anyone had actually been in a horrible accident they might have had trouble attracting attention, which would have been bad luck.

Down here flesh-eating has lost its shock factor. My favourite moment from last year's zombie walk was the glass collector who went up to a group of zombies drinking round a table in a pub. "These all dead?" he asked, without a flicker of irony.

Zombies, as you know, have their roots in an anxiety about a world in which people have been deprived of their free will. A world in which they have to exhaust their human vitality in working for others, a world in which, as famously suggested in *Night of the Living Dead*, meaning is reduced to robotic consumerism.

It was Brighton's genius to invert that. Being a zombie meant you were refusing to conform, rejecting the system. Hallowe'en was a day in the spirit of carnival – literally 'farewell to the flesh'. Now it seems more like dressing up without having to put too much effort into your costume. I did hear about someone on Hallowe'en who turned up as the shower scene from *Psycho*. Fair play to them. Not all of us have the time and the creativity for that.

Being a zombie has become a default position. A reversion to consumerism after all.

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