

Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy

No. 6 – 2022

- Editorial Board** | Adelaide Serras
Ana Daniela Coelho
Ana Rita Martins
Angélica Varandas
Diana Marques
João Félix
José Duarte
- Advisory Board** | Adam Roberts (Royal Holloway, Univ. of London, UK)
David Roas (Univ. Autónoma de Barcelona, Spain)
Flávio García (Univ. do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Henrique Leitão (Fac. de Ciências, Univ. de Lisboa, Portugal)
Jonathan Gayles (Georgia State University, USA)
Katherine Fowkes (High Point University, USA)
Ljubica Matek (Univ. of Osijek, Croatia)
M^a Cristina Batalha (Univ. do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
Martin Simonson (Univ. of the Basque Country, Spain)
Susana Oliveira (Fac. de Arquitectura, Un. de Lisboa, Portugal)
Teresa Lopez-Pellisa (Univ. Autónoma de Barcelona, Spain)
- Copy Editors** | Ana Rita Martins || Ana Daniela Coelho || David Klein Martins |
João Félix || José Duarte
- Photography** | João Paulo Serafim
- Site** | <http://messengersfromthestars.letras.ulisboa.pt/journal/>
Contact | mfts.journal@gmail.com
- ISSN** | 2183-7465
Editor | Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa |
University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies
Alameda da Universidade - Faculdade de Letras
1600-214 Lisboa - Portugal



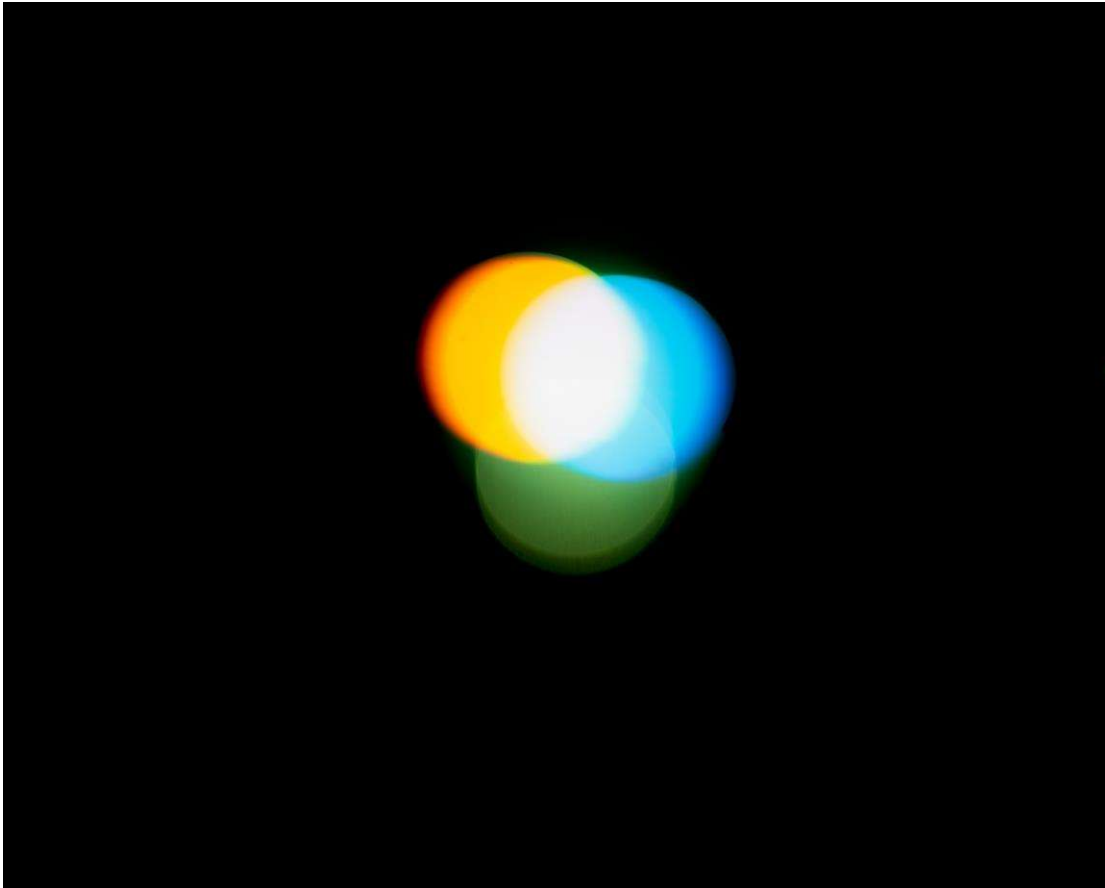


Photo: João Paulo Serafim

**It's not Just the Virus: Unfurling Layers of Identity, Power and Emotion
Beneath/Beyond the Plot in the Movie *Containment* (2015)**

Sonia Malik

Hindu College Sonapat

Abstract | The fear of human extinction – real or illusionary – is essentially rooted in the layers of the human subconscious mind. Since the 1918 flu, the world film industry has been intermittently exploring and encasing subjects like zombies, viruses, pandemics, epidemics, and apocalypse. The present article discusses a less talked about but highly promising British thriller film, *Containment*, which hit the cinemas in September 2015. *Containment* is around 80 minutes long movie hitting at the very core of conflicts and crises in a situation where a group of people has been trapped inside their homes without any prior information. They are left with no food, electricity, and other essential commodities. The movie is a beautiful projection of vulnerability of human values, lost love, cooperation, sympathy and empathy, individual v/s community, morality and immorality, freedom and subjection, power dynamics, identity politics, intellectual and emotional responses in the face of unprecedented and undesired tragedy. More than what the movie shows, it is discussed and debated for what it hides, controls, and does not deliver. Along with the apparently delivered scope

of the movie, the article looks for “what isn’t there” right away. The purpose is to bridge the gap between the fictional environment of the plot with socio-political aspects of life which go beyond the story. It lays bare the filmmakers’ encoded concepts and motifs in the movie – intentional and unintentional both.

Keywords | Pandemic; Containment; Identity; Power; Psychosocial.



1. Introduction: Plot and Setting

The fear of the unknown and unseen has been plaguing humans in the real and the imaginary world since the inception of humanity. It has found expressions in different art forms, be it literature, documentaries, folklores, movies, and other imaginative forms. The present outbreak of COVID-19 has made humanity rethink this praxis. Since the Flu in 1918, Hollywood and world cinemas have intermittently been exploring and encashing subjects like zombies, viruses, pandemics, epidemics, and apocalypse as threats to the human existence on Earth. For example, movies such as: *Virus* (2019), *Flu* (2013), *World War Z* (2013), *Contagion* (2011), *Black Death* (2010), *Blindness* (2008), *Quarantine* (2008), *I Am Legend* (2007), *28 Days Later* (2002), *12 Monkeys* (1995), *Outbreak* (1995), *Death in Venice* (1971), *Strain* (1971), *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) have made their imprints in cinematic history. When only imagining situations in literature and witnessing them on screen send chills down our spines, COVID-19 has propelled us to experience that in real life.

In modern times, cinema plays a ubiquitous role in shaping and reshaping the human phenomenological experience. It makes visualization of everything experienced and imagined possible. In “Pandemic in Cinema” Professor Pena remarks that “[w]e often turn to the cinema not just to reflect on our lives but to see possibilities of lives which we have not lived (...) these become ways in which we can experience our darkest fears safely”. Therefore, motion pictures inspire and encourage viewers’ cognitive actions. Notably, the projection of pandemics on screen can affect viewers in two ways. On the one hand, the audience may replicate the negative responses depicted on film like terror, frenzy, violence and homicide. On the other hand, the denouement in the movie, reflecting the victory of life over death and humanity over pandemic, may enthuse hope and optimism among the audience to face real-life situations. The present

article takes a less talked about but a very promising movie, *Containment*, which hit the cinemas in September 2015. More than what the movie shows, it is discussed and debated for what it hides, controls, and does not deliver. Along with the apparently delivered scope of the movie, the article looks for “what isn’t there” right away. The purpose is to bridge the gap between the fictional environment of the plot and the socio-political aspects of life which go beyond the story.

Directed by Neil McEnery-West, *Containment* is a British thriller film starring Lee Ross, Sheila Reid, Louise Brealey, Pippa Nixon, Andrew Leung, William Postlethwaite, and Gabriel Senior. The film is set in the 1970s era council block in Weston, Southampton, UK. Mcenery-West began shooting the film in 2008, fulfilling a lifelong dream of directing a thriller. Based on the novel *Lord of the Flies*, West’s original concept had one main character confined in an apartment. But writer David Lemon expanded on this concept, and the two collaborated to create *Containment*. The movie carved out a niche in the hearts of movie critics and the East End Film Festival awarded *Containment* the Accession Award in 2015.

Containment is around 80 minutes long and addresses core conflicts and crises in a situation where a group of people has been trapped inside their homes without any prior information – with no food, electricity, or essential commodities. The movie is a beautiful projection of the vulnerability of human values, lost love, cooperation, sympathy, individual v/s community, morality and immorality, empathy, power dynamics, identity politics and intellectual and emotional responses in the face of unprecedented and undesired tragedy. It expresses the idea that the freedom all of us take for granted becomes an ultimate priority when taken away. *Containment* shares the prospect and premises with earlier applauded pandemic films: *Rec*¹ and *Quarantine*².

The opening scene displays sealed apartments inside leviathan buildings. Mark, a failed artist who is estranged from his wife and son, awakens to find himself trapped in his flat with no way out. He observes strange figures in Hazmat suits guarding the grounds outside where a military tent has been erected. Sergei, Mark's next-door neighbor, tears into the wall between their flats to find an escape. Gradually, all fellow

¹ *Rec*. (short for record) is a 2007 Spanish found footage horror film with claustrophobic settings where the residents are quarantined in their building in the wake of an unknown virus breakout.

² *Quarantine* (2008) is the USA remake of *Rec*.

residents – Enid, Sally, and Aiden, ally with Mark and Sergei to defend themselves from the ‘Hazmats’. In their struggle to make out what is happening outside, Mark and Sergei rescue Nicu (Sergei’s younger brother) and kidnap a Hazmat nurse (Hazel). When Hazel reveals that the real danger is inside the building – a virus of unknown origin that might infect any one of them, tempers fray and fear takes over. With a handful of characters, the movie showcases the different hues of human nature. The violent Sergei, the silent Nicu, Mark – the one with the humane side – Sally and Aiden – a grumpy couple where the woman is trying to give her best to manage the relationship – and Enid – the cranky old woman – have to come together in a battle for survival. All of a sudden, their yet another ordinary day turns out to be the crack of doom. Pushing everything mundane to the background, freedom and life become their priority.

2. Gaps and Silences: A Reader’s Response to *Containment* as a Visual Text

Life is utterly convoluted and contradictory and so are its representation in the form of creativity. Like artists in other fields, filmmakers too have their limitations when it comes to capturing every aspect of existence. Invariably, every film informs something but remains silent about many more possibilities as one perspective cannot encapsulate real life. This way, the visual text is one of the ways of attributing ideals to things by excluding or including them. Like true creative piece, *Containment* displays certain aspects in-depth but simultaneously leaves room for the viewer’s imagination. These gaps and silences allow the readers to churn out their understanding of the story. “Meaning comes into existence only in the act of reading” (Martin 161) and even a literal silence in day-to-day life has its ramifications and what to say of metaphorical silence? As Wolfgang Iser alleges, “reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative” (“The Reading Process” 377). The present effort is to skim through the literal meaning and conceptual understanding of *Containment* as a visual text. The essay does not aspire to analyze the technical aspects related to cinematography.

Containment does not offer all its concerns directly as the silence and absence of such topics would raise more curiosity, leading the audience to think and ruminate on those issues more seriously. Thus, the study of gaps and silences can be an effective instrument to extrapolate beyond-the-plot issues in the movie. As Iser explains: “no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a

story gains its dynamism. Thus, whenever the flow is interrupted, and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps” (“The Reading Process” 380).

Containment is full of examples where the filmmaker has knowingly left numerous gaps and silences. Questions such as where does the virus come from? What will the consequences be once the majority of the population is infected? Why is Nicu quiet throughout the entire film? Why is it that only some apartments are portrayed, leaving out the rest of society? Why does Sergei knowingly succumb to the crowd? What does ending refer to? What was the last message on the phone? Why did Nicu keep Mark and his family’s picture? A massive cloud of questions lingers in the minds of the audience. This adds to the beauty of the movie that leaves the audience to find answers for themselves. Every viewer could have a different perspective to fill in the gaps; the present attempt is one from such innumerable possibilities.

The claustrophobic setting of the movie is highly suggestive. The mammoth buildings with similar architecture signal the predominance of man-made structures. People make and occupy them for security purposes, but these structures help the authorities to seal the windows and doors more quickly, keeping the residents trapped inside. It indicates the Frankensteinian nature of human progress. In his movie review, Taylor Holmes argues that the movie’s setting conjures Chicago’s Cabrini Green developments, which were demolished later on. He maintains that, “When I lived in Chicago and drove by Cabrini Green, they exuded this sort of illness. Tall. Imposing. Distinct. With an air of poison to them. And that is how the apartment buildings of *Containment* feel to me when you first see them”. Four identical apartment towers belittle everything else in the area and become omens of violence and conspiracies. This is how “*Containment* cultivates a consistently enigmatic atmosphere, and invokes an eagerness to hurry along with each scene, not because the film needs to end, but because it arouses an appetite of anticipation” (Ward).

Intermittently, the movie resorts to close-up shots of the animals like ants, birds, and sometimes flies, which were the carriers of various pandemics throughout human history. These multiple signals confuse or keep the readers in suspense that any of them can be responsible for the virus. Therefore, despite being conclusive, the plot is open to myriad interpretations. Elements of suspense are scattered through all means – in the story, settings, characters, cinematography, dialogue, and props.

2.1 The Vibrant Kaleidoscope of Characters

However, in a Sci-Fi horror movie, there is not enough scope to fully develop the personality of the characters who are frequently reduced to stereotypes or are underdeveloped. Generally, they do the bare minimum because one can tell who is who and their fundamental personality. Partially, this idea seems right about the characters in *Containment* too. However, the movie's characters deserve to be analyzed as each character exhibits disparate human values and attributes. There are three generations involved in the characters. By bringing three generations together, the filmmaker was able to bring the past (Enid), the present (Mark, Sergei, Sally, Aiden) and the future (Nicu) in concert. The death of every character shows how their attitude and action take them to their destiny.

Moreover, the response of the characters from different generations do vary at certain points, but the strife for survival somehow seems very common across generations. Nonetheless, all the characters in the movie seem to represent different reactions in face of the worst-case scenario. The old reminiscent Enid looks pretty calm and composed most of the time. She can envisage death creeping up on her. Life is not much better than death to Enid as she ageing and lives alone . She (who symbolizes the past) dies in her sleep very peacefully. The adult characters have different personalities. Mark is very caring and supportive and seems to be the promising agent of resilience and survival. He is a compassionate harbinger of humanity. The expectations of the audience are glued to him until the end. What is more, Mark's death seems to be a bit less painful than remaining ones; rather, one can say that he does not die at all. There is a possibility of him being alive later on because his body is not shown dead. So, with the hope of Mark being alive, there is hope that humanity and human values, like sympathy, love, compassion, are alive too.

Then, we have Sergei – a hot-headed, violent, self-centered person, who represents psychopaths during quarantine in pandemics and his lynching by a mob forestalls the fate of such people. His cruelty is paid off in his brutal death. Another character , Sally – a true epitome of her profession – strives to save others. She dies trying to persuade people not to use violence. Sally's boyfriend, Aiden, is a conspiracy theorist who comes up with different theories about the people in hazmat suits being terrorists, authorities, or war teams. The sceptical Aiden wanted to conspire against

others to sneak out alone. He tries to escape from the building by stealing the only vaccine but becomes a victim of his self-perpetuated conspiracy as a sniper from the rooftop shoots him down. Hazel, a comrade from the hazmat team, does her duty as the governmental agency. As an individual, she does not take sides – the authority’s or the residents’. Consequently, she becomes a *Trishanku*³ (a Hung), welcomed nowhere. Sergei kills Hazel in his frenzy of self-protection. The youngest one, Nicu, seems to be the most frightened in the entire movie. The terror on his face displays the fear inside his heart as he does not utter even a word. Nicu – the observer – m does not get involved in the situation and unconditionally follows adults’ instructions. He accepts the course of destiny and ultimately survives. All adults (the present) pull their weight in saving Nicu – the future. This ending indicates humanity will survive on this earth regardless of all kinds of threats in the form of natural and unnatural disasters.

Another theory may be that Mark is dreaming it all. Mark is a jilted husband and an estranged father. The day on which the movie opens is his son’s custodial hearing day. His subconscious fear that he may lose his son is reflected in this dream where he glares at an old family photograph time and again. The story seems to be a dream because Mark finds the front door and windows of his and other buildings glued shut. It is infeasible that governmental authorities could seal such a large number of doors and windows in a night without anyone knowing or without disturbing anyone’s sleep.

The fear of losing someone very close to one’s heart disturbs humans to the core. In dreams, we do not see the people in their real personalities and form. The dream always manifests its meanings through symbolic figures. The disguised form of his son in this dream is Nicu, wearing his son’s spacesuit, whom Mark tries to save until his last breath. Karen’s appearance (Mark’s wife) in the dream, who is callous and apathetic towards them, could be Sergei. Just like Karen uses her role as a mother to dominate and imprison Mark’s, Sergei’s domineering authority as a guardian has made Nicu numb and silent. Thus, the movie suggests that a failed marriage affects both the physical and the psychological growth of children. In the end, the saving of all the children by the authorities is an emblem of divinity safeguarding the human future from

³ *Trishanku* is a legendary character from Hindu mythology who hangs upside down between Heaven and Earth, belonging nowhere.

the ugly face of human conflict and selfishness. It is like the Biblical Armageddon.⁴ The movie suggests that the Armageddon happens when all the corrupted elders die and the human race rejuvenate afresh, pure and divine. It also hits the point that despite human beings living with lots of categories and boundaries in the name of caste and class, the very essence of all boundaries is shattered when it comes to survival crises.

2.2 Why is Nicu Silent?

Actor Gabriel Senior portrays Nicu, Sergei's younger brother, who is reclusive yet attentive. At the beginning, Nicu is lost in his own world. He does not say anything, but his intent eyes take everything in – be it the rising tensions between citizens and outside forces or his older brother's growing potential for violence. Nicu's silence is the most intriguing and potent aspect of the plot. His silence promises numerous meanings. One of the reasons for Nicu's silence could be that his function is that of an observer, watching the furore of the crumbling human civilization. The filmmaker makes him wear an astronaut suit as he is alone in a strangely devilish society. Maybe all the children at the end imply that only children are uncorrupted and redeemable. If one takes Nicu just as a child – innocent and inexperienced – in his silence means children have no rights. They are stifled voices, not worth listening to. He remains silent because he relates to the future generation that cannot intervene in what is happening in the present. The future can thus only act when its time comes.

Moreover, Nicu's brother Sergei is a psycho. In his brother's company, Nicu has endured a traumatic childhood. He would have had to face dangerous outcomes if he were to speak, as Sergei gets violent whenever anybody speaks. So, for Nicu, to be silent is to be safe. That may be the reason Nicu develops a very quick and profound bond with Mark. In Mark, he finds a father figure. With him, Nicu experiences the love, care and compassion that a child longs for in a family. He even keeps a photograph of Mark with his wife and son all the time with him. He seems fed up with Sergei's belligerent and violent attitude. He is not shocked and terrified when the agitated mob lynches Sergei; instead, he weeps and is distraught when Mark is hurt and they have to separate. This attitude of Nicu puts his parenting in the dock. What is more, he is the

⁴ Armageddon refers to the final battle between good and evil before the Judgment Day. The New Testament describes it as a dramatic and catastrophic conflict, especially if it is viewed as potentially destroying the entire world or the human race.

symbol of the kind of generation that will come into shape in an inappropriate and uncondusive family environment. Therefore, it cannot be a coincidence that NICU is an acronym for Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. It is a section of the hospital dedicated entirely to the treatment of infants. Most babies admitted to the NICU are either premature or have a medical condition that needs particular attention.

Furthermore, Sergei makes it clear to Mark that Nicu does not have any speech disability. If one considers the effects of this virus on the human body as told by Hazel, the virus catches the throat first, and the infected person loses the capacity to speak, then it spreads down the body and finally results in multiple organ failure. There is a chance Nicu is the virus carrier, and it has taken away his voice. If this hypothesis proves true, the viewers can conjecture another sequel of the movie where Nicu – the rampant virus carrier – will move freely in society and the chain of infection will never be broken no matter what the authorities do.

2.3 Power Dynamics and Identity Politics

The movie reinforces the role of the state in its citizens' lives. It raises serious questions like: is the state a protector or a hegemonic entity? The colony residents are contained in their houses by state authority without any prior information. The intercom repeats the message at regular intervals that they should not panic as the situation is under control. However, the Oslo residents do not believe the state and its machinery; instead, they take it as an offence to their lives and freedom. They try to retaliate and get out of the situation by killing the state representatives who claim to save them. Citizens' mistrust of the state and its machinery is a serious question over the state's role in the present scenario. Stapleton argues that:

Despite the threat of a virus, it is the unknown, the power and position that the strangers have because of their protective suits, and the 'man versus man' nature of events that the protagonists (and audiences) are invited to fear most. (...) *Containment* is a thriller with a great human angle to play on: the true threat is not the airborne virus, but the behaviour that it elicits in all those reacting to it. (n.pg.)

Foucault alleges that each process of modernity has crucially impacted the state-citizen relationship. His most influential work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, provides a picture of a current society where he investigates how the

government has exerted ever-greater control over personal elements of our life. Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's nineteenth-century jail reforms as a paradigm for what happens to a society in contemporary times. He criticises and contextualizes Jeremy's panopticon as an epitome of state tyranny.

Foucault explores the transition from what he terms a "culture of spectacle" to a "carceral culture". Whereas in the former punishment was effected on the body in public displays of torture, dismemberment, and obliteration, in the latter punishment and discipline become internalized and directed to the constitution and, when necessary, rehabilitation of social subjects. (Qtd. in Felluga).

The panopticon model⁵ seems in operation in the movie where there is one-way control and communication from the authorities. The lack of transparency is disconcerting to the residents of Oslo Tower. The residents have to listen and follow the intercom. They are left with no means of voicing their issues or concerns. It is a panopticon way for the minority to control the majority. The sniper on the rooftop of the tower's building is an analogue to Bentham's guard in his panopticon model. Therefore, the film is a political parable censoring the modern-day state services in the United Kingdom. Hazel's hostage is an emblem of civilians' rebellion and resistance against the so-called state intervention and protection provided against the deadly virus. The audience is informed that there is a disease, but one does not find anyone dying from it. Under the capitalist gaze, all are in the "Hobbesian Trap" compelled to the fear-motivated, pre-emptive, and self-defensive responses.

History shows that during pandemics identity politics take over and stigmatization and scapegoating come into play. "Viruses know no borders and thus become easily entangled with contemporary anxieties over migration and refugees. Asian populations in Chinatowns of various Western cities were victimized in the wake of a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)" (Han and Curtis). In *Containment*, Enid holds immigration responsible for virus outbreaks. Later on, when gases are released to neutralize the Oslo residents, the movie is symbolically referring to ethnic cleansing, such as the one committed by Hitler during the Holocaust.

⁵ In his book *The Panopticon Writings*, Jeremy Bentham proposed that the ideal jail would have cells open to a central tower. Individuals in the cells do not interact with one another. They cannot see if there is someone in the tower, so they believe they are being watched at all times.

There are fleeting references to the changing features and physiognomy of power. Enid keeps referring to the World War time and again. Whenever she looks at the situation, she says that “it wasn’t like this in the war” (*Containment*), which suggests she must have witnessed the Second World War – the first major war in Europe with technical weapons. Hence, the continuous comparison between the past wars and this present unseen enemy invokes the future threat humanity must face with biological wars taking the place of wars with machinery.

3. Social Response and Psychosocial Consequences

The film very aptly addresses how a person’s true self emerges when his/her survival is endangered. Ideas like home, freedom, fear or morality are dismissed when survival is at stake. The movie picturizes a new social order in the wake of capitalism where all needs and services are catered at one’s home at the snap of one’s fingers. This has reduced human interaction to the minimum. The Oslo residents epitomise a reclusive lifestyle – a by-product of capitalist culture. Mark does not even notice the people living on the other side of his apartment’s walls. Enid, Mark’s old-aged neighbour, complains about it incessantly; she says, “It was ages you [Mark] said hello to me. People around here not good enough for you?” (*Containment* 20:16-21). He does not even recognize Sally, his other neighbour, who remarks that Mark does not care to meet the people living around him. However, a question arises: can capitalist consumerism be a substitute for philanthropy or the human touch? The movie answers this with a big “No”. Humans’ mutual love, care, and support could be the only panacea in a catastrophic situation like a pandemic.

The movie trailer announces that “nothing can contain fear”. It is not the virus the authorities threaten; it is the human (citizen’s) response that shakes off the state. The challenge lies in maintaining peace and harmony. When the residents of the Oslo Tower come to know about a virus, a dogfight starts for vaccines even when no one is sure whether they are infected or not. A paranoid mob manifests an inevitable social response – existentialist agony, avarice, self-interest, and pessimism. Pappas posits that:

Historically, there has been an exaggerated fear related to infection compared to other conditions. Infection possesses unique characteristics

that account for this disproportionate degree of fear: it is transmitted rapidly and invisibly; historically, it has accounted for major morbidity and mortality; old forms re-emerge, and new forms emerge; both the media and society are often in awe. (n.pg.)

Oftimes, without knowing the actual situation, people start overreacting and fear spreads even faster than the virus. The movie shows, very aesthetically, that no one dies because of the virus; instead, most people die because of their fears, insecurities, violence and self-centeredness. The principal fear among the characters is the fear of extinction. The uncertainty of life and particularly a peaceful and happy life is focused on. The story previews the idea that death is imminent; one may talk about death nonchalantly, but human philosophy does not come to the rescue when one has to face it. In face of possible extinction, people resort to action and violence.

Containment emphasizes the notion of civilization as a mirage. The mutual killings by uncouth and uncontrolled Oslo residents question the metanarrative of culture and civilization. The modern psychosis of man (showing the animal within) interrogates the inner morals of humanity at large. The viewers tend to ask: Is there any possible response other than violence? If yes, why do people resort to violence in such a situation? Is it just the mob mentality of “knowing little and processing nothing” that leads to social unrest? Who is included in the mob? Is there not any individual accountability? Psychological studies have proved that in people of criminal nature (for instance Sergei in *Containment*), “fear is actually the root of all anger” and resultantly of violence (Bonn n.pg.). Though the movie shows many examples of violence, the message seems to be that violence cannot be a solution. It espouses that, even under the threat of death, love finds a way. The imperturbable bonhomie of Enid, Mark, Nicu and Sally exemplifies the possibility of hope in desperate times.

Another important idea that the movie brings home is the importance of freedom in human life. The movie compels us to regard freedom as a human necessity, not a social privilege. When something is taken away from us, we realise its importance. Likewise, we, the self-proclaimed most superior organisms on Earth, consider freedom to be a natural phenomenon. But what if this freedom is taken away from us and when we try to get it back, it costs us our life? In such a situation, home, the most coveted and safest haven, looks like pandemonium or hell. Home matters if it includes the freedom to go in/out at any time. Not going much into the philosophical discourse on

liberty and freedom, let us take Berlin's straightforward and inclusive meaning of freedom. In Berlin's words, by virtue of freedom, one will "wish to be a subject, not an object" (131).

In *Containment*, due to quarantine, Nick's home (the utopia) becomes a heterotopia.⁶ The home became heterotopia as deranged neighbours gather to save their lives. The sense of freedom materializes the idea of home, which in captivity is no better than a prison. Referring to the German invasion and exploitation that took away liberty from people, Satre altercates, "The very cruelty of the enemy pushed us to the extremity of the human condition by forcing us to ask the questions which we can ignore in peacetime" (Qtd in Manzi). When Satre writes it, he highlights the importance of freedom for human beings, which becomes especially valued during enslavement. Similarly, the Oslo residents want to be the subject, not the objects.

The neighbours break Mark's wall to come together when facing a threatening situation. The breaking of walls suggests that the personal can become public when it comes to survival. The message is to convince the viewer that even microbes, like the virus, are interconnected with all organisms on Earth. Similarly, people realize that every life is relatable and affects one another when such a pandemic comes about. If the realization that peaceful co-existence through interdependence is possible and becomes common knowledge among all people, most human problems will be resolved.

4. What does the Ending suggest?

The ending of *Containment* is a puzzle with multiple interpretations. On the one side, the movie has been criticized for having an unresolved ending with all the major protagonists dead. Only some children survive but those too end up in the clutches of the state which they have been trying to avoid since the beginning. So, their struggle for freedom seems to fail towards the end. Contrarily, if one goes with the positive aspects in the last scene, which shows a group of young children safely sitting in the camp in the care of the state representatives, the message is that everything is fine now. These young children are hale and hearty, referring to the next generation sitting together, happy and hopeful. Therefore, in the end, the existence of human life on this

⁶ Heterotopia is a term coined by the philosopher Michel Foucault to describe cultural, institutional, and discursive environments that are unpleasant, intense, incompatible, contradictory, or altering.

Earth is being reemphasized. Although the movie envisions a conflict between the state and the residents of the Oslo tower, by safeguarding the children it also indicates the protective role of the state.

The movie touches upon the concept of “self” and “other” as well. The building residents often talk in terms of “we” (the Oslo residents) and “they” (the hazmats). The communication gap on the government’s side has made them think there are two sides. Nevertheless, this is how tragic stories are born: due to communication gaps and miscommunication. They allow future generations to learn from human follies. If the residents had been well informed and had followed the instructions given by the authorities, then their fate would have been different. There would not have been any story to tell, though, any mistake to improve upon or learn from. This is how human frailty leads to tragedy and leaves stories for the coming generation.



WORKS CITED

- Berlin, Isaiah. “Two Concepts of Liberty.” *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969, 118-72.
- Bonn, Scott A. “Fear-Based Anger Is the Primary Motive for Violence.” *Psychology Today*. 17 July 2017. Web. 10 July. 2021. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/wicked-deeds/201707/fear-based-anger-is-the-primary-motive-violence>.
- Containment*. Directed by Neil Mcenery-West. Bandoola Productions, 2015.
- Felluga, Dino. “Modules on Foucault: On Panoptic and Carceral Society.” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. 31 Jan.2011.Web. 26 June 2021. [purdue.edu/guidetotheory/newhistoricis/modules/foucaultcarceral.html](http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/newhistoricis/modules/foucaultcarceral.html).
- Gerassi, John. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Hated Conscience of His Century*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989.
- Han, Qijun and Daniel R. Curtis. “Social Responses to Epidemics Depicted by Cinema.” *PMC*. 26 Jan.2020. Web. 30 July 2021. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6986850/.

- Holmes, Taylor. "Containment Movie Explained and Reviewed." *Thinc*, 13 Dec. 2015. Web. 29 July 2021. Taylorholmes.Com/2015/12/13/Containment-Movie-Explained-And-Reviewed/.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "Interaction Between Text and Reader." *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*. Eds. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 106-119.
- . "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Modernism Through Poststructuralism*. Ed. Davis, Robert Con. New York: Longman, 1986. 376-91.
- Manzi, Yvonne. "Jean-Paul Sartre: Existential 'Freedom' and the Political." *E-International Relations*, 23 Jan.2013. Web. 15 July 2015. www.e-ir.info/2013/01/23/jean-paul-sartre-existential-freedom-and-the-political/.
- Martin, Wallace. "From Writer to Reader: Communication and Interpretation." *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986. 152-72.
- "Pandemic in Cinema". *Columbia Global Centers*. 29 June 2020. Web. 10 July 2021. globalcenters.columbia.edu/news/mumbai-pandemics-cinema.
- Pappas G, et al. "Psychosocial Consequences of Infectious Diseases". *National Library of Medicine*, 15 Aug. 2009. Web. 30 July 2021. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-0691.2009.02947.x.
- Quarantine*. Directed by John Erick Dowdle. Screen Gems, 2008.
- Rec*. Directed by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza. Casteleo Production, 2007.
- Stapleton, Shelby. *Review of Containment*. *Bizarre Culture*, 13 Aug. 2015. Web. 27 July 2021. bizarreculture.com/film-review-containment/.
- Ward, Jordon. Review of *Containment*. *The Up Coming*, 7 Sept. 2015. Web. 26 July 2021. <https://www.theupcoming.co.uk/2015/09/07/containment-movie-review/>