

YOU CANNOT **KILL**
WHAT IS ALREADY
DEAD





**CURATED BY
SUZANNE CARTE**

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

**ATOM CIANFABANI
EMILY GOVE
PATRICK LUNDEEN
NADIA MOSS
ALEX MCLEOD
MARIO SCHAMBON
MAYA SUESS
LENA SUKSI
HOWIE TSUI
JUAN ZAMORA**

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Mario Schambon, *Cara Falsa*, 2012/2013

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BE
ZOMBIE

BY SUZANNE CARTE

Honestly, I can't look at images of zombies. The glamour of gore has an uneasy power over me. Horror films make me retch and haunted houses get me running for the door. I am the perfect audience for all zombiephiles to scare. In the presence of the ghastly, undead wanderers, I am terrified, sickened and revolted.

Poring over artists' gruesome zombieified sketches during studio visits would make me nauseated. Brooklyn-based artist Mario Schambon proclaimed that he likes to create work that makes him uncomfortable. So taking Schambon's lead I organized an exhibition that made me uncomfortable, very uncomfortable.

How can one make efforts to overcome fear? There has to be a certain amount of pleasure in that pain. There has to be a particular amount of reassurance in fear, ease in anxiety, or solace in distress. Does one then find comfort in discomfort or is that impossible by its very definition?

I never feel desensitized. More images of carnage just made me feel more vulnerable, more horrified, and uneasy. So one could wonder: how can someone who does not participate in zombie culture comment upon it? I am not approaching the exhibition as an authority; I am working through the fear to investigate parallels between the seemingly apolitical action of the walking dead phenomenon and recent radical civic gatherings and ideologies in North America, through consideration of artists' visions, fascination and representation of the monstrous creatures in a post-apocalyptic landscape.

BE ZOMBIE: RELATING TO THE UNDEAD

The zombification of all things pop culture has exploded. Mobs are taking to the streets covered in fake blood and ghostly makeup, garbed in

tattered clothing, and letting out gurgled moans with outstretched arms and heavy feet. Zombie walks are mobilized to gain attention. The masses march (or shuffle rather) to express their dissatisfaction with political ennui in times of economic upheaval, war and environmental collapse. The undead are the perfect empty vehicles to mirror numerous involvements, interests, and issues; therefore the collective zombie gathering has no defined agenda. Devoid of any individualization, a walk can represent a number of concerns and fears within one action. Participants walk to protest neo-liberalist economics, comment on anti-social social media, uncover power dynamics, and express anti-consumerism sentiments by exposing the mass consumption of zombie capitalism.

Zombies are imaginary creatures used to illustrate problems about consciousness and its relation to the physical world.^[1] They are never just one thing but a stand-in for an assumed lack of agency. They rally against compliancy by illustrating the abjectness of conformity. As Simon Orphana reminds us, "Romero's first three zombie films suggest specific anxiety over technology, consumerism and the military, and a general sense that an undead collectivity threatens human society and individuality. The calamitous breakdowns of social order depicted in zombie apocalypse narratives offer a critical perspective on the various horrors implicit in everyday social life."^[2]

The upsurge in interest in the undead phenomenon has elicited numerous critical analyses on topics including anthropological studies; essays by geographical area; zombies in the media (Internet, television, etc.); zombie walks, performances, and other cultural expressions; new technologies and audiovisual media; reappropriations from Hollywood zombie movies; zombie cinema in the United States; and literary adaptations to cinema. The undead – that which is alive and dead at the same time – are great

metaphoric framing devices to critique everything from capitalist structures to racism to gender-based politics.

End-of-the-world fears are mounting. Threats of nuclear war, bio-terrorist attacks and disease outbreaks have spawned real concerns about the unpredictable ways in which our genetic makeup could be altered and distorted. The artists in *You Cannot Kill What Is Already Dead* have works in their practices that are based on the notion of the paranormal apocalypse in a way that can at times come across as comical, but is based in this panic and dread.^[3] The works do not rely on existing sci-fi stories or popular narratives (as it is not fandom) but inhabit their own accounts of a frightful future or present reality.

Setting the stage, Mario Schambon brings the viewer into an apocalyptic wasteland. *Black Body*, a large snaking construction, emphasizes the precariousness of the space and warns of the impending zombie barrage. Schambon's eschatological environment is equipped with low base frequencies and flickering black light to emphasize the catastrophic destruction. Being faced with annihilation, we can piece together what a future might look like and the haunted house-like exhibition leads us on that trail of darkness and despair.

In the darkness of goth teen death culture, Emily Gove's practice is born. Examining the drives and desires of the subculture, Gove's research led her to discover online fan groups dedicated to idolizing the sexy zombies of popular cinema. Fetishizing the incidental female characters, these groupies drool in the blogosphere. The female "sexy zombie" character is a staple in horror films. Relegated to the role of stripper or wild punk-rock groupie turned undead, the sexy zombie is designated to walk the earth partially

or completely nude to titillate for all eternity. Iconic scream queen Linnea Quigley participated in the 2013 Toronto Zombie Walk festivities by throwing the severed head to kick off the parade. Best known for her role as the sexy, dancing punk zombie girl "Trash" in *Return of the Living Dead*, Quigley's face is emblazoned on Gove's fabric swatches. As homage to the characters, the feminine touch of stitchery removes the layer of pornographic residue imbued within the poor-resolution, digital stills online. The women are lovingly transformed into haunted feminist souls rather than vapid, sexualized creatures.

Teenage angst is not relegated to the drama of unfulfilled sexual desires alone but can also be found in the anxiety of newly adopted social and political affiliations. Patrick Lundeen conveys that anguish through the horrific masks he creates from vintage *Mad Magazine* Fold-Ins. Part of America's teen culture since its inception in 1952, *Mad* focused on propagating non-conformist thinking on current politics and was best known for the old school interactivity of the back page spread. With a quick bend of the page, the seemingly innocuous image becomes a secret satirical message philosophizing on beliefs, debates and popular culture. In manipulating the pages of the publication, one is drawn into the hidden idea and implicated in its lesson. It is often the first exposure in adolescence to being able to decrypt a message that is designated for them alone, away from the prying eyes of parents or adults. The comics allow young (predominantly male) audiences to formulate opinions and bias by decoding the image for themselves and deciphering the real message concealed behind the veil of comic relief of the initial image.

Lundeen asks the viewer to fold into his work and consider donning the mask of the vacant minion. He invites the audience to become one of the faceless zombies staggering forward with arms outstretched,

consuming all that is in its path, joining the angry mob with a hidden agenda. Many wear the mask of the zombie to conform, to blur into the masses and no longer feel ostracized, but under Lundeen's candy-coloured masks lies a darker secret of disillusionment and anguish.

What would you do in a zombie apocalypse? Would you be the first to die, would you fight, or would you take your own life? Maya Suess and Atom Cianfarani have asked themselves that very question. As survivalists, the two artists have joined forces to build new strategies and emergency gear to battle the impending zombie army. Or at least so it appears on first inspection – yet perhaps it is not the undead that they fear. They turn a (suspicious) interrogative eye not to the monsters, but to their fellow human survivors. Fight the Dead. Fear the Living.^[4] Armed with duct tape, straws and hankies the artist-survivalists demonstrate a grassroots activism in their seriously constructed tools for foraging and protection.

We also fear that our own bodies will deceive us – turn on us – and decay before our very eyes. Bacteriophobia is already rampant. Sanitizers have become necessary amenities for public institutions in North America. Nadia Moss feeds off of that fear. Her characters spin out of control, floating in space while bacterial forces penetrate their bodies. Moss sustains our fear of contamination, of the body, of mortality, disease and infection. There is a distinct discomfort with our own bodies and the ways in which they react to infection and viruses. The walking corpses are an illustration of that fear. Zombies' insides are visible on the outside and peepholes burrowed through flesh expose the mortal inner workings of our flawed forms. Moss's delicate drawings on transparent plastic sheets can only be seen as light passes through them – making the insides perceptible. As zombie academic Sarah Juliet Lauro states, we are all, in some sense, walking corpses in awaiting death.^[5]

The bodily dread of Moss's work can also be seen in the horror and anxiety in Howie Tsui's *The Unfortunates of D'Arcy Island*. Yet these are creatures not of the imagination but of truly distressing and real human conditions. Feared to be highly infectious, between 1894 and 1924 immigrant Chinese leprosy sufferers were ostracized by their communities and sent to live in a colony far from society in Greater Victoria, British Columbia. Family members were abandoned to fight the disfiguring disease alone and lived in isolation on the island in the Haro Strait just north of Victoria. The islands' inhabitants were mythologized to a folkloric extent. Seen as an ancient curse, the residents of the lazaretto, or leper colony, were exiled with no possibility of reprieve. The lepers became un-human and therefore were treated as such. The strong anti-Chinese sentiment in British Columbia made it easy to encapsulate the disease as a plague restricted to Chinatown. The deformation of their bodies, due to the ravenous illness, created a visual prompt to further segregate a community that was already demonized and ostracized. By revisiting this atrocious chapter of discrimination in our history, *The Unfortunates* explores the concept of the infected 'other' and its role in socio-spatial segregation in the city.^[7] Tsui's ghastly depictions of the colony offer a critical perspective on the various horrors implicit in the power of racism.

Like epidemic plagues, zombie outbreaks are events in which anxieties associated with social connectivity come to the fore – the more boundaries between the self and other are broken down in pandemic urgency, the more the contagion spreads.^[8] Zombie narratives are obsessed with "the source" of infection. Where did this thing come from? Who or what was the originating beast? What virus could bring a human to this undead state? Alex MacLeod takes on the daunting task of becoming the hated source, digitally. Spreading via Twitter, MacLeod's witty, scientific

commentary will be an irresistible source of infection for others. Social media as a platform is rife with compulsive repetition of information. It produces a generative force, gaining followers and constructing new zombies pushing forth (potentially erroneous and fabricated) information. Digital threads are created to see how far infectious intelligence can travel in our globalized cyberworld. Unreliable online “intelligence” conflates rumour and plague. The rhetoric surrounding infection circulates around contemporary social media according to a model of textual contagion. Follow [@DEAD_etc #RIPetc](#) and infect others in your feed with the toxicity of potentially harmful (pseudo scientific) information.

If the zombie threat of information anxiety was not enough, a new app, LivesOn, has been recently released to allow Twitter users to tweet from the grave. Following one’s algorithms and areas of interest, this application acknowledges that even the undead have vital social lives. *When your heart stops beating, you’ll keep tweeting.*^[10] If one can raise the dead through technological means and social impulses, then what about savouring the last moments of an animal companion with perpetual motion? As if by magic, artist Juan Zamora has breathed life, like a mad scientist, into the waking shadow of a dead pigeon. Caught in a purgatory of half dead-half alive, the gurgling silhouette of the deceased bird struggles to remain conscious. In an almost comical death rattle, the animal moans to stay present as it is trapped – like the zombie – in the liminal space of conscious and unconscious.

In the vitrines, Lena Suksi was commissioned to create the zombified version of the Canadian Federation of Students’ *The Hikes Stop Here* campaign. Guled Arale, VP External of the Scarborough Campus Students’ Union (SCSU) mobilized a group of undead students to stagger towards the gallery reception.

Armed with Suksi’s placards and banners the students organized in protest to their escalating tuition fees. The artist’s work is displayed in the vitrines outside of the gallery walls as a symbol of solidarity with the student federation to decrease the mounting provincial debt.^[11]

To assist in fleshing out the ideas and pointing to the many academic and fictional narratives that comprise the apocalyptic discourse, I am joined by a host of brilliant contributors. Sara Matthews, Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, brings us “What Does A Zombie Want?” In this essay, Matthews suggests that the zombie offers an uncanny politic in its refiguration of the rhetorics of fear that characterize contemporary discourses of political terror.

Originally published in *FUSE* magazine, Natalie Kouri-Towe’s article queers the usual survivalist story.^[12] What will the world look like if the last surviving group does not follow the scripted heteronormative narrative? Kouri-Towe troubles the genre and sets out to disrupt the cinematic story of: “Boy meets girl. Boy kills zombie intruders saving the world from further destruction. Boy and girl repopulate the world with an army of love children. The end.” Instead she posits a new chronicle, one where lesbian renegades and gay rebels roam the post-apocalyptic landscape. Their refusal of reproduction is a real possibility.

Christian Martius also questions the instrumentalization of the body in popular storylines. In focusing on the politics of the undead body in the “normal” body, he critically examines what it means to be sick, well and between. Martius discusses abnormality and body productivity in reference to spectacle and our own impermanence. Our fascination with the zombie is a celebration of its immortality and recognition of ourselves as enslaved to our bodies.^[13]

In the telling of the zombie story, the sci-fi devotee cannot be dismissed. Horror fiction fan and writer Farrukh Rafiq argues for the thrill of escape and dreams of a world where staggering zombies are a welcome diversion from the haunts of reality.

In truly being able to understand the impetus to form human posses of fictional undead creatures in public space, I needed to go to the foundational roots of the spectacle. In conversation with Thea Munster from the infamous Toronto Zombie Walk, I was able to understand the motivation of the thousands of attendees that shuffle annually through the City of Toronto. As the woman behind the massive undead revolt, she is unrelenting in her passion. She fights on behalf of all outcasts for increased visibility and is self-reflexive on the process of raising the dead every October. I would like to extend a big thank you to Thea who was an immense help in my formulating an understanding of the zombie phenomenon and graciously allowed me into her ghoulish group without hesitation.

The exhibition withdraws from the formulaic narrative of global capitalism as the sole reflective surface of the zombie but allows us to see the undead in all of us. The zombie can be a filter through which we embrace, not fear, the precarity of our lives in our flawed systems of operation, through ongoing social discrimination, along political wars, and in our dying bodies.

NOTES

1. "Zombies", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 2003.
2. Simon Orphana, "Spooks of Biopower: The Uncanny Carnavalesque of Zombie Walks", *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, Spring 2011, pg. 154.
3. The title of the exhibition, *You Cannot Kill What is Already Dead*, is taken from a trailer for the film *Return of the Living Dead: Necropolis*, directed by Ellory Elkayem.
4. Motto for AMC's epic series *The Walking Dead*.
5. Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism", *boundary 2*, April 2008, pg. 102.
6. Greater Victoria Public Library: Local History. <<http://gvpl.ca/using-the-library/our-collection/local-history/tales-from-the-vault/the-lepers-of-d-arcy-island>>
7. In conversation with Howie Tsui, 2013.
8. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, "Introduction: Generation Z, the Age of Apocalypse", *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: Thomas McFarland, 2011), pg. 7.
9. Boluk and Lenz, *Ibid*, pg. 3.
10. LivesOn motto. <<http://liveson.org>>
11. For more information on the campaign, visit <http://www.thehikesstophere.ca>.
12. "Queer Apocalypse: Survivalism and queer life at the end", First published in *FUSE Magazine* 36–3, June 2013.
13. Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism", *boundary 2*, April 2008, pg. 88.



WHAT DOES A
ZOMBIE
WANT?

Towards an Aesthetics of Undecidability

BY SARA MATTHEWS

The uncanny, writes Freud, “belongs to all that is terrible – all that arouses dread and creeping horror”.^[1] What creeps up in the name of the uncanny, he suggests, is a sense of the familiar made strange. Zombies, for example, figure the uncanny as a return of the repressed realization that life is always haunted by the spectre of its’ opposite. This return might be experienced as a threat to one’s understanding of oneself as alive and therefore human, an intuition that is both horrifying and compelling. As a representation of that which is dead but also in some sense “living”, the zombie is a borderline creature, an “undecidable” (Derrida)^[2] that tests the boundaries of social order. If the zombie is the inverse of subjectivity then what can it mean to pose the question of what it wants?

Fanon and Freud have taught us that the question of desire is also one of ontology – of the conditions within which it becomes possible to recognize oneself as a desiring subject. What the zombie wants, above all else, is to eat human brains. The zombie’s insatiable desire might be understood as a question of lack – it wants what it does not have, namely, the capacity for thought, the very thing that makes us human. The absence of thought signifies a psychic and physical numbness, a body animated by the unappeasable force of death. In this sense, the zombie is pure drive. But “while it may lack brains”, as St. John suggests, “the zombie is a profound device through which to think”.^[3] What the zombie leads us to consider is the question of what it means to be human when faced with the spectre of aggression, a monster not just *out there*, but also internal to the self.

Aesthetic representations of the zombie – beginning with William Seabrook’s pseudo-ethnographic travelogue through Haiti, *The Magic Island* (1929), up to *World War Z* (2013), the recent cinematic interpretation of Max Brooks’ (2006) horror novel of the same name – are vastly diverse in their response to and symbolization of particular social and political

dilemmas. The zombie of modernity wears its troubles on its sleeve. Via its strange corporeal habits – speech and body dimorphisms, horde mentality, and infectious cravings – the zombie enacts the very social anxieties that it provokes. We see this in two kinds of stories about the zombie: those that allow the viewer (or reader) to experience and explore their Orientalist phantasies via the zombie as representation of a demonized Other^[4]; and those that create an identification with the zombie as a remainder of the effects of global capitalism and terror.^[5] Zombies, for example, are variously made to represent the shell-shocked survivors of post 9-11 America, individualism lost to the fear of communism, the dehumanized products of labor, the deadening effects of consumer culture, the loss of optimism in political accountability, the failure of rationality, bodily and psychical enslavement, the justification for civilizing missions and so on. Such narratives may express, through the figure of the zombie, affects which are difficult to symbolize and therefore monstrous, but do they succeed at bringing them into thought? We might wonder how the zombie, through its radical undecidability, asks us to think against the refusal of the monstrous towards a new possibility of being human – one that can contemplate the drive to aggression as question of ethics rather than a tale of morality.

For Derrida, undecidability references more than just the quality of indeterminacy.^[6] As a structural condition of language and therefore of thought, it is rather the state of being that precedes representation. Undecidability is the potentiality for meaning, the provisional moment before the arrival of language. The practice of deconstruction reveals the structures organizing the determination of meaning and therefore how language orients one’s relationship to the world. This is a question of ontology and, as Derrida suggests, also of politics, because to negotiate undecidability is also to determine oneself as a social

being. Zombies challenge the dualisms that underlie the structures of modernity, forcing us to rethink our trust in the distinction between such categories as friend/enemy, autonomy/dependence, living/dead, and Eros/Thanatos. Nothing demonstrates this more than the now iconic zombie scenario in which an uninfected human must face the horrifying conundrum of a loved one who has been “turned”. As this example illustrates, one’s erotic tie, an expression of humanity, is now in conflict with the aggression that must be inflicted if one is to survive. Who is the ‘real’ monster, the zombie who kills without the capacity for thought, or the human who kills with thoughtful intent? While it may be easier to rationalize the aggressive response when confronted with an inhuman monster, there is an element of uncertainty (is the loved one ‘truly’ gone?) that makes the act difficult to reconcile. This ethical dilemma expresses the challenge of undecidability while laying bare the structures of meaning that orient ones relation to the social and political world.

If aesthetics is a theory of beauty but also, as Freud suggests, a “theory of the qualities of feeling”^[7], then how does aesthetics respond to the challenge of undecidability? Aesthetic objects, I would argue, have the capacity to both contain and symbolize the provisional nature of meaning and of thought. By working at the boundaries of knowability, artists return to us the question of what it is that we think we see as well as how we come to know. In some sense then, what the zombie wants is for us to side with undecidability and in doing so to imagine a new relation to the outside. Art helps us to interpret this dream of what it means to live when life includes the spectre of death.

NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud. “The Uncanny”, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V, 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [trans. Alix Strachey].
2. Jacques Derrida, “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, 1981, Chicago: University of Chicago Press [trans. Barbara Johnson].
3. Graham St. John. “Rave from the Grave: Dark Trance and the Return of the Dead”, p. 24-39 in *Zombies are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*, C.M. Moreman and C. J. Rushton (Eds.). 2011. London: MacFarland, p. 39.
4. *World War Z* (2013), *Flight of the Living Dead* (2007)
5. *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) Zack Snyder’s revisioning of Romero’s 1978 film of the same name, as well as most of the Romero franchise.
6. Jacques Derrida, “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, 1981, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [trans. Barbara Johnson].
7. Sigmund Freud. “The Uncanny”, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V, 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [trans. Alix Strachey].

THE ROAD TRIP

BY FARRUKH RAFIQ

Everyone loves road trips. You start with a companion, gather your basic supplies, and simply start in the general direction of your final destination. Making stops along the way is always great: you may discover a new product you've never tried before, you may want to resupply or upgrade your current supplies, and most importantly, you may make a few friends who would be willing to join you. The zombie apocalypse is the perfect road trip.

Of course there are those that disagree. Many of my contemporaries are concerned with the inevitable lack of electricity, water, food, and with dying in general, but they simply fail to see the greater picture. Humans are social creatures; we thrive in environments that cater to our need to connect with others. It's why social media is as popular as it is, and why we love going to cottages. Quite a few of our Western art history movements started simply with a bunch of good friends hanging out. In a zombie apocalypse, humans have no choice but to connect, and therefore, to thrive. It's good old face-to-face interaction, meeting new people, sharing experiences and ideas. The zombie apocalypse is a back-to-basics type of life. It's pure hunter-gatherer survival. It's a life without societal chains, without a nine-to-five job, without parking tickets.

Sure there's the possibility that you may be overrun by a horde of zombies who may eat you alive, or at the very least, depending on whether or not you escape, infect you. You may also run into your dead family

that may try to eat you, which would of course be emotionally dissimilar compared to the first scenario. But this is exactly why it's important to eat healthy and exercise, so that you have strong stamina for such situations.

Past these hurdles is the good stuff. That long awaited road trip. Here we humans can indulge in our love of consumerism by acquiring products without paying for them, by driving cars and living in houses that we only ever saw from the outside. We can also reflect on how we were all actually metaphorical zombies before the apocalypse, and that we actually take satisfaction in battling ourselves and overcoming our strives. More importantly though, there are some great sites to see in Canada that are more than a few days' drive away, and things would just be easier if I didn't have work on Monday.

It's probably too early to call the zombie apocalypse the zombie utopia; I still have some convincing to do. Honestly though, the situation is only dire for hypochondriacs. Everyone else wins the lottery.

THE NORMAL ZOMBIE



BY CHRISTIAN MARTIUS

George A. Romero's conception of the reanimated corpse with a ravenous hunger for human flesh, first introduced in *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968, has become a zombie template in contemporary popular culture. The voodoo undead or the diseased living have been called zombies, in modern fictional narratives, but Romero's creation, complete with the shuffling gait, the ruined body, the blank expression and the pained moan has endured for nearly half a century. Back in the late 60s the zombie was created as an abnormal bodily spectacle and it is this spectacle you see (more often than not) recurring today in the cinema, on the television and stumbling past you at your local zombie walk.

The zombie is abnormal, first because Romero's zombie does not exist in the normal "real" world and secondly because it is a figure that represents something that transgresses the norm of being either living or dead by being undead (dead but animated). The zombie is a liminal being, a creature that exists on the boundary of life and death by never completely being either dead or alive. Furthermore, the zombie is an abnormal spectacle because the normal body (considering that the common usage of the word "normal" developed during the Industrial Revolution) is often conceived as the human form that is productive, useful, healthy and able in contemporary society. None of these adjectives can be applied to the zombie.

The zombie, then, symbolically represents our own fears of abnormality by existing as a being that carries

the signs of the less productive, useful, healthy and able body all humans normally inherit, given a long enough life span. Therefore, the abnormal spectacle of the undead zombie body (the gait, the moan and the ruin) resonates with what is often conceived of as the so-called abnormal living human body, which is also less productive, useful, healthy and able (that may display a similar gait, moan and ruin). However, what makes Romero's creation so enduring is that the so-called bodily abnormalities that the zombie delivers, the embodied signs typically associated with the approach of death or the effects of damage on the living, are in fact normal, if normal is understood as a usual or common biological or physical occurrence.

So, like the zombie itself we are also liminal beings, halfway between our own animation and extinction, not sick but not completely well, able in some regards and less able in others. Our so-called abnormal bodies are our normal bodies. Therefore, the bodily spectacle of the zombie does not represent bodily abnormalities but instead bodily normalities that we often consider to be abnormal in our contemporary culture. For as long as we consider the normal mortal body to be abnormal because it will eventually become less productive, useful, healthy and able than society requires, then George A. Romero's zombie will continue to live (but also be dead) and the abnormal and normal will continue to haunt each other, much like death haunts the living.



QUEER
APOCALYPSE

Survivalism and Queer Life at the End

BY NATALIE KOURI-TOWE

Queer |kwi(ə)r|

adjective

- Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious.

noun *informal*

- *colloq.* (freq. *derogatory*). A homosexual; *esp.* a male homosexual.

verb *informal*

- To put out of order; to spoil. Also: to spoil the reputation or chances of (a person); to put (a person) out of favour (with another).
- To cause (a person) to feel queer; to disconcert, perturb, unsettle. Now rare. [1]

The apocalypse is coming and queers are going to spoil it. As narratives of impending apocalypse and post-apocalyptic survival permeate our cultural and political landscapes, it becomes increasingly easy to imagine our end. Whether the end of a sustainable environment, the end of culture, or the end of global capitalist economies, the end of life as we know it is both a terrifying possibility and a promising fantasy of a radically different form of life beyond the present.

Mainstream depictions of post-apocalyptic survival largely center on the archetypical figure of the male saviour or hero, and advance a familiar patriarchal instrumentalization of women's bodies as vessels for the survival of the human species. But what alternate stories might we tell about the end, and how might a queer framework reshape our apocalyptic narratives?

The proposal to think queerly about the apocalypse is not an attempt to rescue apocalypse stories from the insidious reproduction of hegemonic relations; rather it is an opportunity to playfully consider what queer approaches to survival at the end might offer to our rethinking of the present. Apocalyptic narratives are appealing because we find it hard to imagine a radically different social and political world without the complete destruction of the institutions and economies that were built and sustained through colonial and imperial violence and exploitation. If we

are already thinking and talking about the apocalypse, then queer thinking about the apocalypse serves an opportunity for rethinking narratives of politics in both the future and the present.

As global structural economic and political asymmetries accelerate, more people live in conditions lacking basic resources like food and water, and increasingly suffer from criminalization and incarceration. It is clear that post-apocalyptic survival is also not simply a fiction but a daily reality for many people. From refugee camps to welfare reforms, survival is more than an exercise in imagining a different world. But, even for those who are not living through conditions of catastrophic loss, thinking about apocalypse is enticing. We take pleasure in imagining how we might prepare or attempt survival in a shifted environment because to imagine how we might live differently is to introduce new realms of possibility for living differently in our present. So how can we reconcile both the demand for attending to the crisis of survival in the present and the fantasy of post-apocalypse? Here queerness might offer us some considerations for rethinking the apocalypse and narratives of survival.

QUEER SURVIVALISM

Survivalism | sə'vaɪvəlɪz(ə)m|

noun

- A policy of trying to ensure one's own survival or that of one's social or national group.
- The practicing of outdoor survival skills. [2]

If survivalism is wrapped up in the preservation of the nation, of race, of gender or of our social order in general, then the first contribution of queerness to the apocalypse is its disruption to the framing of who and what survives, and how. There can be no nation in queer post-apocalyptic survival, because the nation presents a foundational problem to queer survival. The nation, which regulates gender and reproduction,

requires normalized organizations of sexual and family life in order to reproduce or preserve the national population. If we are already at the end, then why not consider survival without the obligation of reproduction and the heteronormative family?

Masculinist narratives of post-apocalyptic survival deploy the male protagonist as the extension of the nation. Here, the male hero stands in the place of the military, the police or the law by providing safety and security to his family and “weak” survivors like children and animals. Queer survivalism, on the other hand, disrupts the normative embodiments of survivalism by redirecting our desires to queer bodies, opening up survival to those outside of the prototypes of fitness and health.

Because post-apocalyptic narratives replicate racist and ableist eugenic tropes of “survival of the fittest,” a queering of survivalism opens up space for thinking about, talking about and planning for more varied and accessible frameworks for doing survival. Conversely, a queering of survival might also open up the option of choosing not to survive, through the refusal of reproduction or the refusal of life itself.

THE QUEER APOCALYPSE

Apocalypse |ə'pækəlɪps|

noun

- More generally: a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, esp. on a global scale; a cataclysm. [3]

If we are going to imagine the destruction of the world as we know it, then why not make these fictions meaningful to the present? Lee Edelman argued that queerness is “the place of the social order’s death drive.” [4] If queerness is a kind of end to the norms and structures of our world, then it makes sense that queerness might say something meaningful about

imagining the end. Narratives of post-apocalyptic survival function primarily as stories of individual survival against a hostile world, and often a hostile other – in the form of dangerous strangers or zombies. These narratives privilege the individual as the basic unit for survival, replicating the neoliberal values of individualism. At best, these narratives expand from the individual survivor when he is joined by his immediate family or builds a new family.

Queer models of kinship offer alternate frameworks for imagining survival beyond the individual, through collectivity and alternative kinships. If we are going to imagine surviving either our present or impending futures, we need collectives to survive. This is old news to people who have long survived through collective struggle and collective support. This is not to simply produce a romantic fantasy of a utopian community, but rather to acknowledge and recognize that strength comes from organizing together. If capitalist, nationalist, patriarchal, heteronormative and neoliberal logics tell us that we’re each responsible for our own lives, then what better queering can we offer than to reimagine stories of how we think about survival, or even refuse to survive?

So what tools do we need for queer survival? First, we need alternative models for building survival strategies. For instance, learning how to repurpose everyday objects, everyday networks and everyday resources. [5] Second, we need to consider models of communalism, and to develop better ways of communicating and working through conflict. Third, we need to strategize collectively, share skills, build skills and foster collaboration. And lastly, we need to mobilize what queers do best—spoiling, twisting and perverting the normative narratives that dominate survivalism and stories of apocalypse.

NOTES

1. OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. 2 May 2013. <<http://www.oed.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/Entry/156238?rskey=BBHmTv&result=5&isAdvanced=false>>
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. p.3.
5. See Atom Cianfarani's survival kits, documented *FUSE Magazine* 36–3, June 2013.

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**TALK THE
ZOMBIE
WALK**

Suzanne Carte
in conversation with
Thea Munster

Raising the dead is a difficult job. In 2003 Thea Munster took on the task of organizing a frightening undead posse to haunt the streets of Toronto and they have been staggering down Yonge Street ever since.

The Toronto Zombie Walk is a community-based organization with a dedicated committee of volunteers. The spectre behind the association is a force. Witty, smart, and savvy Munster has taken on the daunting task of leading the artistic direction and administering the financial (the 2013 walk has been generously supported by the Heart & Stroke Foundation!) and logistical aspects.

It is a year-round commitment ensuring the success of the walk and keeping the zombie alive in the hearts and minds of Torontonians. Creating an inclusive all-welcome event, Munster transforms the streets of Toronto into a scene from *Thriller* with thousands of dead followers. Suzanne Carte had the pleasure (and fright) of catching up with Munster as she invaded Sugar Beach this past July with a band of merry ghouls. Here is what she had to say about why she leads the way and lobbies for the undead to roam the city streets.

Suzanne Carte - Why did you begin the Zombie Walk in Toronto?

Thea Munster - As a film fan I was always inspired by horror movies and monsters. I always love the idea of the monster as outcast, a figure who has done nothing wrong, but is shunned from society. When I saw zombies for the first time I was thrilled; here were monsters that walked together, not as loner outcasts, but a group of individuals who worked together to feed on the flesh of the living. I loved the spirit of them. I wanted to recreate that feeling of rising up from the grave and as a union of outsiders. Unfortunately, none of my friends wanted to dress as a zombie and recreate this with me, so I put up posters everywhere around Toronto and six people came out.

SC - The zombie walk spread almost like a virus or contagion itself! Are you surprised by the growth of 6 people to 10,000 strong? Did you anticipate that thousands of people like you are intrigued by (or feel a kinship to) the zombie outcast?

TM - I am shocked and surprised that it has become so huge. I never would have imagined it. At the most I thought I may have made 20 new friends, but now I have a family of thousands.

SC - The zombie can be the perfect vessel for many different political and social associations, allegories and metaphors. The walk resembles that of a protest in its disruption and formation. Do you see your participation in the zombie walk as a politically-motivated action? If so what do you walk for or walk against?

TM - Of course I have always loved the idea of the consumer as zombie, as in George Romero films, but the first walk was an homage to the traditions of Samhain and Halloween, where the veil between the living and dead becomes thin and the living can witness

these creatures from the underworld. That may sound innocent enough, but in truth I have always liked to shake things up a bit and in the beginning it was not funny or fun to see a group of zombies. It was very scary. People were shutting their blinds and running away, it was something unreal! Whether zombies are used as a satirical tool to critique society or as a way to shock they are something we can't ignore, because they are us.

My ideas on zombies have changed over time. I am more interested in a sense of community within the nameless, speechless group of beings... now I wonder if zombies are our bodies wandering without consciousness, while our minds and our identities live through interfaces and media. I want to create experience, but I can't help but see metaphor within it.

SC - So do you see it now as more of a parade than, say, a protest?

TM - I think the Zombie Walk is different for everyone, depending on how they are participating. It may be a parade for onlookers. But I tend to think that parades conjure up feelings of glee. This is more of a funeral dirge. As for protest, there are those who protest within it...we welcome the political. Then others just enjoy it, and we welcome them too.

SC - I can imagine that over time your thoughts have changed on the walks and what the zombie means to you. The public has expressed a ravenous hunger for zombie-related entertainment, paraphernalia, and experiences. Is any of that due to the recent popularity and proliferation of all things zombie? Are you excited about this renewed interest in the zombification of popular tropes or do you feel exhausted by them?

TM - I am not exhausted by zombies, nor their popularity. But I am frightened of the zombie survivalist

aspect that has popped up. I find it strange that zombies would identify with their hunters, or vice versa. Can you imagine hunters dressing as deer? It's strange to me. I am worried about the survivalist aspect within zombie culture.

SC - Where do you draw inspiration for your ghoulish costumes?

TM - I am inspired by the living. I wonder what they would be like dead, if they could be resurrected.

SC - Lastly, what are your top 5 favourite zombie films?

TM - *Night of the Living Dead, Cemetery Man, Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things, Day of the Dead, and Return of the Living Dead.*



Juan Zamora, *Dead pigeon with its shadow singing*, 2012.



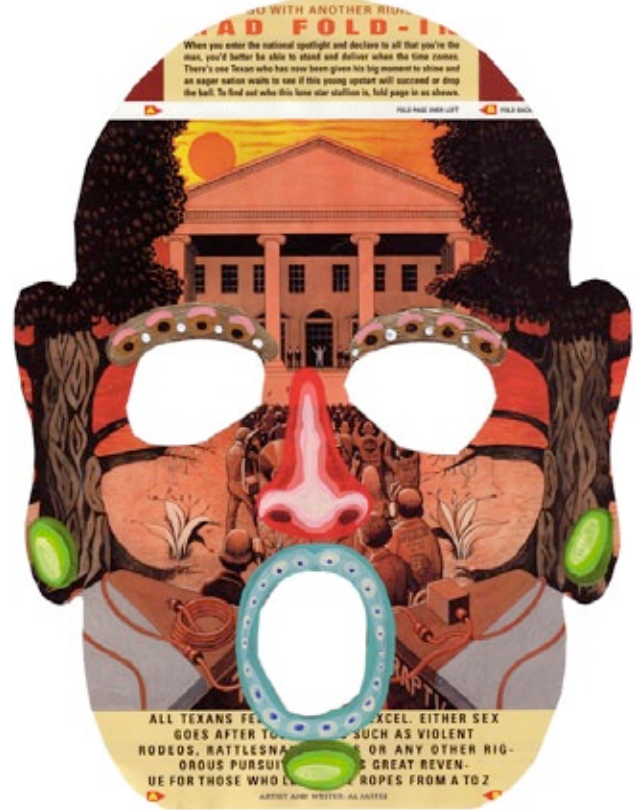


Howie Tsui, details, *The Unfortunates of D'Arcy Island*, 2013





Patrick Lundeen, *Mad Masks*, 2013





Nadia Moss, detail, *Untitled*, 2012-13





Emily Gove, *Girl Gang: Trash*, 2013

Emily Gove, *Girl Gang: Blondie*, 2013



THEE
STOP

The artwork features two rows of text. The top row contains the word 'THEE' in a light green watercolor with a dark green outline. The bottom row contains the word 'STOP' in a reddish-orange watercolor with a dark red outline. The letter 'O' in 'STOP' is replaced by a white female symbol (a circle with a vertical line and a horizontal line at the bottom) inside a red circle. All letters have a dripping paint effect at their base.

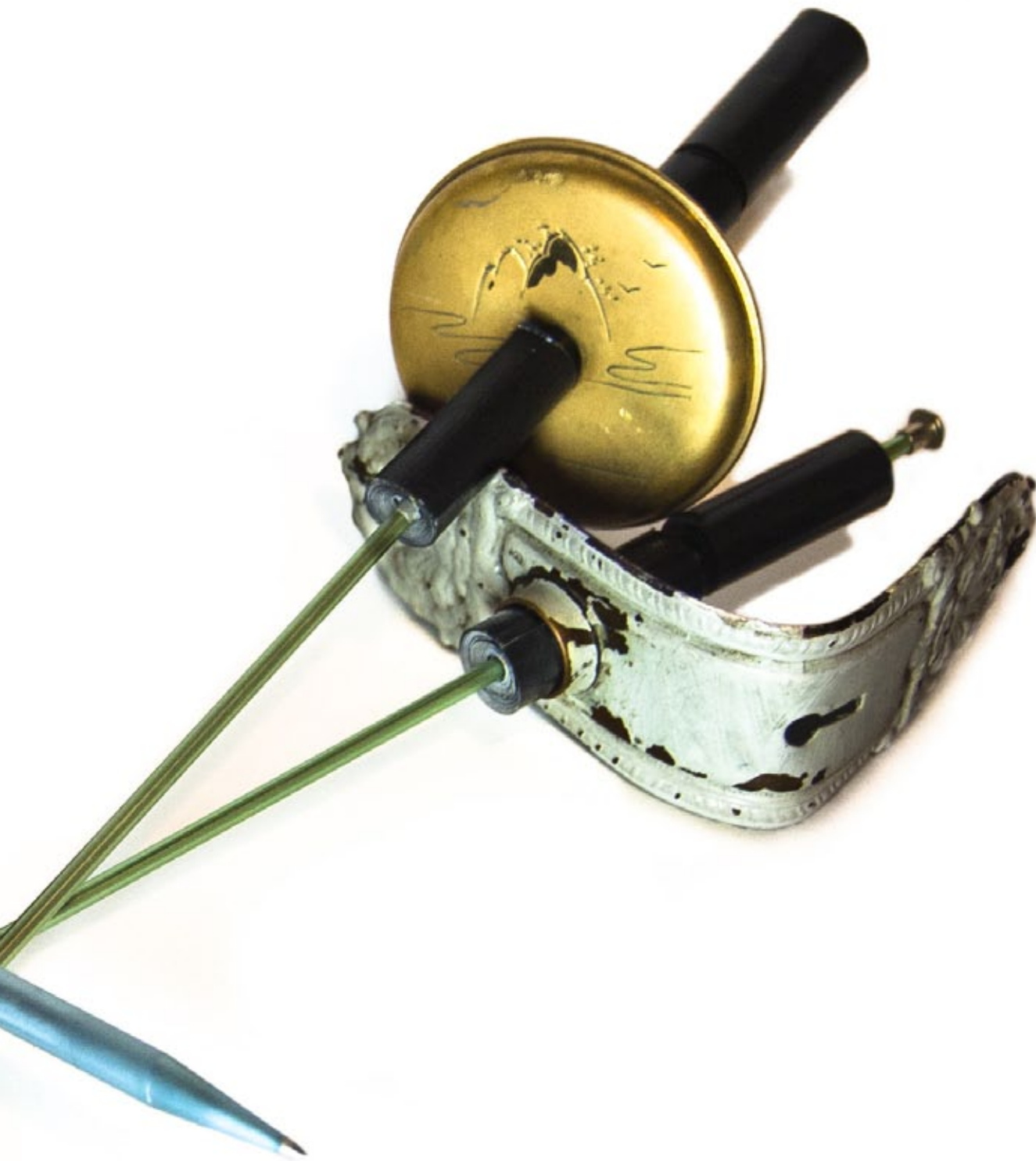
Lena Suksi, *No Relief*, 2013

HILKES

HERE



Atom Cianfarani and Maya Sues, *Survival Object i*, 2013





Atom Cianfarani and Maya Sues, *Survival Object i*, 2013
Atom Cianfarani and Maya Sues, *Survival Object ii*, 2013



LIST OF WORKS

All works courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

Atom Cianfarani and Maya Sues

Survival Object i, 2013

Survival Object ii, 2013

Coloured pencil on paper and found objects

Drawing: 71 x 91 cm, objects: various

Emily Gove

Girl Gang: Blondie, 2013

Girl Gang: Julie, 2013

Girl Gang: Karen, 2013

Girl Gang: Nurse, 2013

Girl Gang: Sarah, 2013

Girl Gang: Trash, 2013

Embroidery on fabric, 20.3 x 20.3 cm

Patrick Lundeen

Works courtesy of the artist and Mike Weiss Gallery, New York

The Ex-Girlfriend, 2013

Acrylic on linen with hair, 185.4 x 124.5 cm

The Lizard Man, 2012

Acrylic on canvas with fringe, 185.4 x 124.5 cm

Mad Mask (Ancient Cultures), 2013

Mad Mask Mad Mask (Crop Duster), 2013

Mad Mask Mad Mask (Dirty Birdy), 2013

Mad Mask (Divine), 2013

Mad Mask (Frog Man), 2013

Mad Mask (Hobbies Galore), 2013

Mad Mask (Jewel Noise), 2013

Mad Mask (Pick Your Punishment), 2013

Mad Mask (The Downstairs Neighbor), 2013

Mad Mask (The Fall of the White House), 2013

Mad Mask (Ticker Tape Parade), 2013

Mad Mask (Sweat'n), 2013

Acrylic on *Mad Magazine* Fold-in, 27.9 x 21.6 cm

Nadia Moss

Untitled, 2013

Acrylic medium, scratched drawing on acetate
Variable size

Mario Schambon

Cara Falsa, 2012/2013

Vinyl on panel with sound, 233 x 183 cm

Black Body, 2013

Cardboard, paper, fluorescent lighting, plastic, found objects, variable size

Y the lites behind are brighter than the face 3, 2012

Collage, tape, pencil, on bristol board, 61 x 45.7 cm

Lena Suksi

No Relief, 2013

Acrylic paint on wall, variable

Howie Tsui

Work courtesy of the artist and LE Gallery, Toronto

The Unfortunates of D'Arcy Island, 2013

Chinese paint pigments and acrylic on mulberry paper mounted onto board, 96.5 x 243.8 cm

Juan Zamora

The dead pigeon with its shadow singing, 2012

Taxidermy pigeon and video projection, variable size

ONLINE PROJECT

Alex McLeod

@DEAD_etc #RIPetc
Twitter project

ARTIST BIOS

ATOM CIANFARANI's practice is founded in a love of garbage and an ecological preservationist ideology. Cianfarani examines urban bioremediation, using the urban waste-scape to generate renewal. Her recent work explores survivalist practices and apocalypse strategies. She has been a leader in sustainable design for the last decade, and co-authored a do-it-yourself guide to green roofing, which she lectures regularly on. Her artwork has been shown at Momenta Gallery Brooklyn, VideoFag, Third Ward Brooklyn, Gowanus Studio Space, The Center for Book Arts NYC, Vent Festival Brooklyn, and The Old School in NYC. She currently works between Toronto and New York.

EMILY GOVE is a Toronto-based artist working in various media including performance, craft, photography and video. Her recent work has included embroidery, makeover stations, and hosting interactive live dating shows and bingo nights. Emily has participated in exhibitions at Gallery TPW, Board of Directors and Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Centre, among others, and has worked as an educator and programmer at Oakville Galleries, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography and the Design Exchange. She holds an MFA from York University (2009) and a BA from the University of Toronto (2006).

PATRICK LUNDEEN was born in Lethbridge, Alberta. He studied at the Alberta College of Art and Design and received his MFA from Concordia University in 2006. Lundeen has had solo exhibitions in New York, Chicago, Montreal, Quebec City, Dundee (Scotland), Stockholm, Calgary and Saskatoon. He has exhibited recently at Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown, PEI and L'écart in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec. Patrick Lundeen's work has been written about in *Flash Art*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *Canadian Art*, *Border Crossings*, *Time Out Chicago*, *Art and Auction*, *The Villager* and *ArtSlant*.

ALEX McLEOD is a Canadian artist who constructs hyperrealistic 3D environments filled with crystalline mountains, fiery lakes, and rotund clouds, all rendered in a sickly sweet and gooey candy-colored palette. Recalling the wide-open vistas of Romantic landscape painting while at the same time staging otherworldly dystopias, McLeod's CGI prints act as hybrid spaces that imply an almost infinite recombination of the past and present, the real and virtual. McLeod's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions internationally, most recently *Field Trip* (Hiyori Art Center, Jyoshibi Art Museum and Enokojima Art Centre, Japan), *Brave New Worlds* (Museum London) and *Curiosity* (MASS MoCA).

NADIA MOSS is a visual artist based in Toronto and Montreal. She has two books of drawings published by Quebec based publisher L'Oie de Cravan and has shown extensively in artist run centres and alternative spaces across Canada and the U.S. She has recently exhibited at Anchor Art Space, Anacortes, Washington; Yukon Art Centre, Whitehorse, Yukon; Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario; and Cinders Gallery, Brooklyn, New York. Moss holds an MFA from York University.

MAYA SUESS makes drawings, installations, videos and performances. Her performative installations use music and playful aesthetics to explore identity, sexuality and practical magic. She has exhibited at the Center for Architecture (New York City); The Western Front (Vancouver); the Vancouver Art Gallery; The Greater Victoria Art Gallery; Kansai Queer Film Festival (Kansai, Japan); Live Biennial of Performance (Vancouver); The Festival of Original Theatre (Toronto); and The London Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, among others. She holds a BFA in Media Arts from Emily Carr Institute, and an MFA in contemporary performance from Simon Fraser University. Born in Western Canada, she currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

MARIO SCHAMBON is a Colombian multimedia artist and musician currently living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Recent projects have included multiple murals with the artist collective Sunday Southern Art Revival for the City of Atlanta, and an installation for DesCours NOLA, hosted by the American Institute of Architects in New Orleans. Schambon has performed and recorded with numerous collaborators, artists such as Damo Suzuki, Sonia Sanchez, Atlas Sound, Mia Doi Todd, the Middlebury College Dance department, Mike Khoury and Dance Elixir. Currently he is a working member of both Helado Negro (the brainchild of multimedia artist and musician Roberto C. Lange) and the acclaimed music/performance group Mijo de la Palma.

LENA SUKSI is a Toronto-based artist who makes sculptures and mixed media artworks. By merging several seemingly incompatible worlds into a new universe, Suksi uses a visual vocabulary that addresses many different social and political issues. The work incorporates time as well as space – a fictional and experiential universe that only emerges bit by bit.

HOWIE TSUI is a Vancouver-based artist. He received his BFA in Painting from the University of Waterloo, Ontario. Recent solo exhibitions include *Friendly Fire* (Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon & Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston) and *Horror Fables* (MAI, Montréal & Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa). His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including shows in Vancouver, San Francisco, Boston, Ottawa, Montréal, Toronto, Portland, Los Angeles, Copenhagen. Tsui received the RBC Emerging Artist Award in 2012 and his work is in the collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul and Ottawa Art Gallery.

JUAN ZAMORA studied art at the CES Felipe II, Madrid; AKI University of Enschede, Netherlands; and the European University of Madrid, where he was a professor of art, design and architecture from 2007-2012. He has completed recent residencies at the Piramidon Contemporary Art Center, Barcelona and ISCP, New York. Recent solo shows include *A vulture watching*, Museum of Modern Art (MAMM), Medellín, Colombia; *Replay*, Moriarty Gallery, Madrid; *Where One Sun*, Domus Artium (DA2), Salamanca; and *Yes I Am*, Gallery Beijing Space, Beijing.

WRITER BIOS

SUZANNE CARTE is an independent curator and critical art writer. Currently, she works as the Assistant Curator at the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU) focusing on an integrative model to utilize public programming as a pedagogical tool within the academic institution. Previously she held positions as outreach programmer for the Blackwood Gallery and the Art Gallery of Mississauga and as professional development and public program coordinator at the Ontario Association of Art Galleries. She is on the Board of Directors of Images Festival. Within Suzanne's independent practice, she has curated exhibitions in public spaces, artist-run centres, commercial and public art galleries including *All Systems Go!*, *Under New Management*, *MOTEL* and *Man's Ruin*. Suzanne recently completed her Masters of Contemporary Art at the Sotheby's Art Institute in New York City. www.suzannecarte.com

NATALIE KOURI-TOWE is a Toronto-based academic and activist who works collaboratively in art-based social and political practices. Her work centres on queerness, social movements and transnational solidarity, with a focus on queer Palestine-solidarity movements. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto.

CHRISTIAN MARTIUS is a writer and a doctoral candidate in the Communication and Culture program at York University. He has previously worked as an arts and culture journalist and has also published fiction. Some of his work can be found at www.christianmartius.com.

SARA MATTHEWS is Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. Her interdisciplinary work brings aesthetic and cultural theory to the study of violence and the dynamics of social conflict. Her current research considers how contemporary Canadian War Artists

are responding to Canada's mission in Afghanistan. In addition to her academic work, Sara curates aesthetic projects that archive visual encounters with legacies of war and social trauma. Her critical writing has appeared in PUBLIC, FUSE Magazine and in exhibition essays for the Art Gallery of Bishops University and YYZ. New work includes "Wanting Images", a series of art blogs for Gallery TPW R&D that explore the relationship between art and pedagogy.

In 2003, bored with spending too much time with the living, **THEA MUNSTER** took her love of the dead to the streets, and started the Toronto Zombie Walk. As the first recorded event of its kind, it has put Toronto on the map for public displays of zombie gruesomeness, and zombie walks have become an international phenomenon. Thea's ability to waken and rile the dead has brought her many honours. She has been recruited by George Romero and TIFF's Midnight Madness to bring zombies for the movie premieres of *Diary of the Dead* and *Survival of the Dead*, as well as filled theatres with zombies for the world premiere of *Fido* and Toronto After Dark's Zombie Appreciation Day. Thea has been a zombie spooksperson on CNN, CBC Radio 1, FOX TV, Global, and City TV, as well as being featured in publications such as *Penny Blood*, *Fangoria*, *Carousel*, *Horror Host Magazine* and many more. She was a zombie extra in *Survival of the Dead*, and is featured in the upcoming documentary *Dead Meat Walking*.

Other than romanticizing road trips, **FARRUKH RAFIQ** also loves to study art history. After attaining his undergraduate degree from the University of Toronto in Mississauga, Farrukh went on to successfully complete his Master of Arts degree in Art History from the University of Toronto. Farrukh has taught at a number of institutions in Mississauga and Oakville, and in Toronto and is currently pursuing his PhD in Art History at Queen's University.

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Erin Peck

Zombie portraits

Cover / inset model: Tara Zachariah

Cover, inset, P.5, 11 & 17

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Makeup Artist: Kristen Demelo

P.21

Photographer: Robert Nixon

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Director/Curator: Ann MacDonald

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Installation: Dax Morrison

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