



REVIEWS

Zombie Subjectivity: New Scenario

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by Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou

In a heated debate over the issue of Coney Islands sideshows, Dick D. Zigun—the unofficial mayor of C.I., as he branded himself—laconically responded to his opponent’s proposition to leave the visitors standing: “Post-modern people prefer to sit”[1].



(<http://www.miart.it/>)

Hope, the latest curatorial endeavor of New Scenario (Paul Barsch and Tilman Hornig), just added to this statement the digital ubiquity that was lacking this now-defunct industry. As with almost all of the duo's creations, the scenario enjoys the benefits of its simple premises: staged at Technical University Dresden, the visitor point-and-clicks their way through a Romerian Zombie bacchanal. The exhibition is a panoptic B-movie, where every pixel is meticulously arranged into a tableau vivant, including all the protagonists of the university.

Zombies have had an unimaginable academic and critical trajectory. From its classic cinematic one-directional and sea-level behavioral psychology his attraction grew to the Mount Olympus of critical tools. At such highs, only world-encompassing concepts are able to breathe the rarefied air. Its gymnastic skills are unparalleled and can be bought in any size or color. Zombie subjectivity, zombie capitalism, zombie formalism, zombie labor, zombie data, zombie anthropology, zombie porn, etc... Its conceptual volatility is heroic like a 24h spa-chain for depleted concepts. He became the brand on which we hang all our fears, a genius marketing palliative.

From the horror of virality to the anxiety of connection, Zombie has become the nightmare of the globalization-phobic. Gothic allegories have always been hot, haven't they? Remember the Vampire in queer studies? While a thousand zombies were spreading in the carefully cleaned alley of Hamburg during the G20 to denounce the neo-capitalist order, around half of them were posing in Dresden for the sake of a digital diorama populated by fourteen artists. From the lecture hall where it seems to have reached its visceral climax, the epidemic has spread rapidly through most of the university's departments. Mass hysteria has rapidly won over the already fragile scholar of modern rationality. Apparently unperturbed by the spectacle of this disarray, a teacher points to Daniel Keller's diagram, which details the creation of a *Meme Warfare Center* in response to the contamination of the internet by the alt-right, via the meme icon Kek. Instead of facing viral strategy with ballistic activism, the alt-woke manifesto echoed by Keller advocates for the launch of a post-ironic meme warfare that would appropriate the alt-right meme war tactics within the left accelerationist strategies. Fighting a pandemic with a counter-pandemic. In this warfare, every "citizen" is also a "user". The reciprocity is not automatic. Most of the "users" are politically flat. In Gregor Rozanski's video *IS IT ART OR IS IT JUST (experience of the product)* (2017), they FaceTime from a Japanese neo-bistro, take a selfie to share their intrepid EasyJet lifestyle, or simply learn from a very early age how to manoeuvre in this space of intense collision. But experience has never been so material-consuming. Technological adrenaline produces an overwhelming sum of garbage. From time to time, we have an ecological gasp that evaporates rapidly after a second fix. Shall we punctuate Earth with Joachim Coucke's totemic sculptures? These colonnades of black and white plastic-coated wire are digital follies, the fake ruins of the 2.5 quintillion bytes of data generated daily.

Has the virus been developed inside the lab of the university? That's perhaps what we are supposed to think with the irreconcilable protuberance (*I can't even reply you*) (2017) or the chimeric skeleton in the age of Soylent (*I'm just trying to be pretty*) (2017) of Monia Ben Hamouda. Genetically modified objects of Meret Oppenheim for the former and fragment of a

cryptozoological creature (a cockatrice?) fetishized by T. J. Barnum for the later, they are potentially the source of contamination of this University. Part cinema props, part incongruous biotech *cadavre exquis*, they are maybe the Patient Zero of the pandemic: a rhizomic red pill leading to Pegida; a Deleuzian reticular disease; a Guattarian paradigm shift; or the same excrescence that motivates the collective hysteria and the martial law in *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1976), the bipolar movies which irrigated all Cronenberg's filmography.

In a matter of obsessional behavior, school and university have always been a fertile ground. During 2006 in Portugal, three hundred students pretended to be infected by viral strawberries after watching and mimicking a popular teen show called *Morangos com Açúcar*. In 2010 in the *Nation of Brunei, the abode of peace*, dozens of kids were mysteriously infected by a fit of histrionics and claimed to be possessed by Jinn spirits. Or more modestly in Leroy, New York in 2011, a few kids started to convulse and show Tourette-like symptoms. The most popular and recent example of mass hysteria was probably the clown sightings of 2015-2016 contaminating North America and Western Europe, which generated multiple pranks YouTube videos.

Taking places in a dodgy bathroom of the university entirely repainted by the menstruation of Carrietta White (Stephen King's *Carrie*, 1974), artist Bayley Scieszca hides behind a trashy clown mask that Lisa Frank's mass-produced rainbow stickers in the 1990s would not have denied. The emanation of horrorcore, Scieszca is a bizarre Juggalo (or Juggalette) figure, a product of the band's Insane Clown Posse—a Detroit based hip-hop band mixing horror masks, *Wrestlemania*, and liters of chemical soda—who converge one time a year at the *Gathering of the Juggalos*.

Clowns and art have always had a difficult relationship: The cheapest artwork in *The Sims* was *Tragic clown*. If popular in the nineteenth century (Renoir) and early twentieth century (Picasso and Picabia among other clown-adjacents), Stephen King (again!) spells the end of the magnanimous clowns and their gaudy supporters (maybe the film *Patch Adams*—1998 is not innocent, either). They are at least since Bruce Nauman (*Clown Torture*, 1987) the most recent recipients of a long agony started with the Italian opera (*Pagliacci*, 1892) and culminating in Jigsaw attraction for Universal Studio.

Between forced laughter and voluntary death, the Bakhtinian theatre of Jon Rafman, *Dream Journal (Hope)* (2017), explores the edges of the digital junkspace, where lost contents, obsolete codes, and anonym avatars coagulate into dream sequences. In his 3D animated video, Rafman narrates the peregrination of the Camgirl reincarnation of Ann Lee in the underworld. Killed on the battlefield, her soul wanders through the corridor of a university campus whose high Victorian gothic architecture is invaded by tropical plants. As in *The Divine Comedy*, the more she walks, the hotter it gets. On her way, she meets an android masturbating on a Thomas Bayrl mechanism, Masc for Masc furry fandom playing American football and flirting gregariously, vore-oriented Satanists organizing healing ceremonies... She wakes up several times during her travels, only to realize that she is doomed to live in this Penrose triangle chain of 4chan fantasies. This Rabelaisian odyssey finds its conclusion when she follows a group of avatars into the mouth of a giant monkey, in which they all burn.

In one of the horror scenes of the exhibition, the rector of the university is caught holding a rope in order to hang himself. Death is the most obvious way to absorb the trauma of a zombie attack. Most of the time, suicide does not have to function in order to work. Failing to prevent the zombie

mutation, it will at least result in his relief. At his feet, a student writes on a blood pool HOPE in capital letters, while from an office desk, an Otto Dix drawing of a mutilated face of an army veteran witnesses the liberating ceremonial.

Dada were pioneers in introducing the horrific within the exhibition format, the most notable example being *Dada-Vorfrühling* (Dada Early Spring), an exhibition organized by Max Ernst and Johannes Theodor Baargeld inside the men's toilet of a Cologne Tavern in April 1920. For the opening, visitors were greeted by a little girl dressed in a communion outfit, chanting obscene poetry. Some of the contributions inside featured violent iconography, while the others encouraged the viewer to destroy the artworks on display. Particularly disturbing, Baargeld's participation, entitled *Fluidoskeprik der Rotzwitha von gandersheim*, consisted of an aquarium filled with fake blood in which an alarm clock, human hair, and a replica of a human hand were floating on the surface. Neither an error nor a curse, for sure it was the exquisite bloody taste of eternity.

[1] Martin, Douglas, *Amazing! Incredible! Siamese Sideshows!; (Well, 2 Masters Of the Freak Show On a Single Street)*, *New York Times*, 1996

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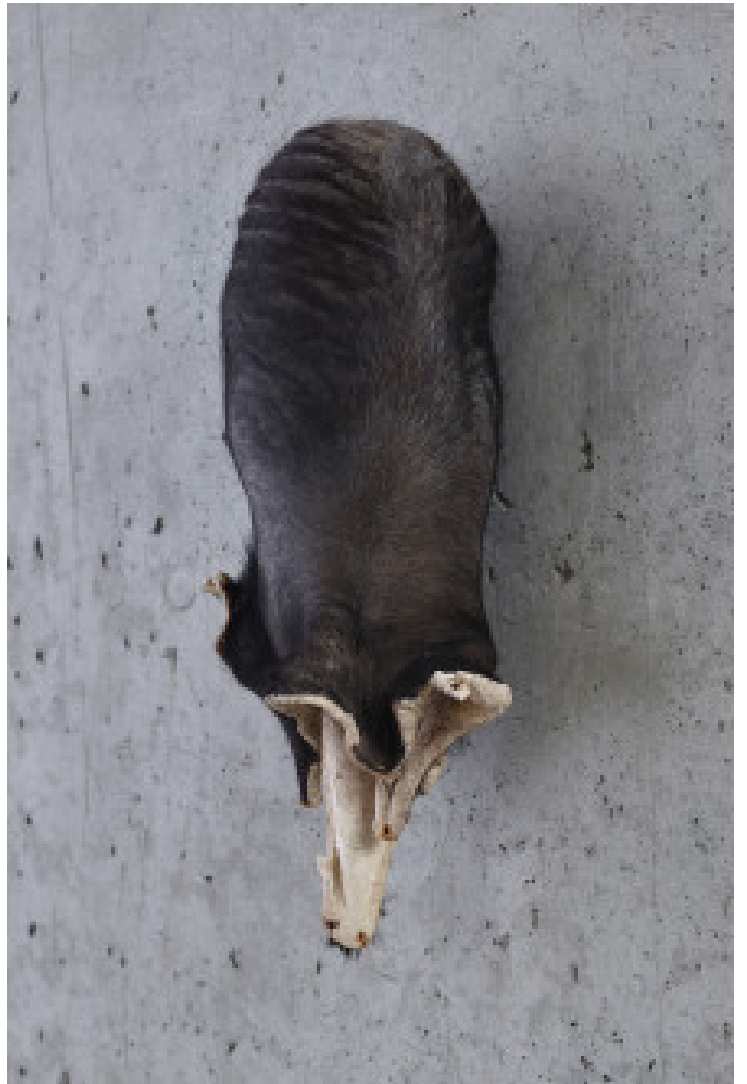
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