

## Chapter 6

# From Prom Queen to Zombie Barbie: A Tutorial in Make Up, Gender and Living Death

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*...The zombie ...seems to have evolved into an abject symbol that forces the survivors in post-apocalyptic narratives to confront their own internalized notions of definitions and borders and to realize those notions are as fragile as living tissue and can and will be eventually consumed*

(Strong 2013, p. 4).

This chapter is preoccupied with a set of questions circulating around zombies, femininity and public pedagogy. What can the zombie offer women? How can we read acts of making up as zombies by (predominantly young) women? What meanings arise from zombie enactments that seem to tear down traditional performances of femininity? In relation to the hugely popular YouTube zombie make up tutorials, what is the ‘pedagogy’ at play, i.e. what is being taught/learnt through zombifying a female archetype? And can these tutorials say something to nascent theorisations about ‘public pedagogy’?

Public pedagogy is commonly understood as relating to educational processes that operate outside the spaces of formal, institution-based education. It relates to intentioned and/or serendipitous moments of teaching/learning, including mechanisms and interactions that facilitate individual or societal learning. The outcomes of such occasions may or may not fall into neat political patterns of ‘critical/emanipatory’ or ‘conservative’ education but tend to be more amorphous, making them harder to read. A related challenge is the under-theorisation and overuse of the term ‘public pedagogy’ which points to dominant or traditional understandings of pedagogies, especially those that have developed in institutional contexts of education (typically school based education), overdetermining our ability to ‘see’ how these public pedagogies might work in practice. The worry is that pre-established notions of pedagogy rooted in “existing cultural models and vocabulary of teaching, learning, and curriculum” (Burdick and Sandlin 2010, p. 339) can confine or obscure

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understandings of what may otherwise be on offer. Hence the drive to develop a robust, theoretically informed understanding of public pedagogy is also partly a move to challenge and re-think foundational understandings of more traditional, institution based pedagogy.

Burdick and Sandlin's (2013) review of attempts to develop the idea of public pedagogy points to three strands: humanist, relational and posthumanist understandings. The first strand relates to the most dominant and visible of current understandings of pedagogy, i.e. of educational processes of *transfer* or transmission of 'established learnings and meanings' that rely on the assumption of rational, humanist subjects. The second deals with forms that show a high degree of intentionality by the creator/educator but one where *relational* meanings depend on affect and embodied interactions, and thus one where educational outcomes may be unpredictable. The third strand focuses on *monstrous* or radical encounters that 'rupture certainties' of identity, language, image and even the self of Western theory and practice.

Central to this last strand is the emphasis by authors (Wallin 2008, 2010, 2012; Lewis and Kahn 2010) on the ethics and possibilities of a pedagogy that does not favour the dominance of the 'human' over all else. Elements of popular culture that involve anomalous beings like zombies, faeries, or ghosts in uncanny encounters are therefore useful to these conceptualizations. This seems to have fostered notions of a pedagogy where the traditional laws of "recognition, identification, and belonging (to a particular class, race, gender, species)" (Lewis and Kahn 2010, p. 10) are suspended, in effect disassembling existing conceptualizations and upsetting favoured subject roles for humans. This, the authors contend, ought to allow new ways of imagining an inclusive democratic life and a freedom for all categories or positions. Another equally promising effect is the move away from the already known – the familiar and representable – to the more vulnerable position of seeking and maintaining the form and nature of the unrepresentable (Wallin 2012). Staying with the familiar "representational logic" can restrict new thought possibilities, new 'theorizations of difference', and constrain 'newness' from entering the world. Thus the possibilities of a posthumanist perspective on public pedagogy allow a broader democratic and ethical space where the boundaries between human, animal and material are less precious. This chapter attempts to follow such impulses to make sense of a popular 'zombie make-up tutorial' offered on YouTube.

## Being a Zombie

Zombie enactments are a popular feature of contemporary culture. Traditional Halloween based zombie characterizations, urban zombie walks, political protest marches featuring zombies, zombie cosplay involving favourite film or television zombie characters, zombie themed adventure games that create a survival quest set in abandoned buildings – are some of the avenues through which one can express one's inner zombie. This rise of the zombie motif in popular culture and particularly

in public enactments has been considered in some depth by a range of writers (Strong 2013; do Vale 2010). One compelling explanation is that zombies seem to be the perfect narrative device through which social anxieties can be expressed (Dendle 2007; Stratton 2011; Keebaugh 2013). The value of the zombie in critiquing the present (including oneself and the structures within which one is embedded) and offering radical perspectives on the future adds to its popularity, particularly in protest movements. Time and again, the regenerative potential of this ‘malleable’ (Pulliam 2007) living dead figure – whether as narrative, metaphor or as theatre – is offered as a key explanation for its popularity.

Of course, zombie enactments themselves are subject to the capitalist commodification they may be protesting against. And, most often the consequences of public zombie enactments or indeed the intentions of the zombie-actors are multiple, nebulous, and full of promise that may or may not come to fruition. The flexibility of the zombie motif combined with the diversity in intentionality and outcomes of enactments makes zombie themed events hard to categorise or predict. For instance, while urban zombie walks are said to offer “a harmless release of oppositional energies, it *might* also lead to the production of new structures of value and feeling that could manifest in unexpected and politically regenerative ways” (Orpana 2011, p. 171–172, emphasis added). It seems that further analysis of these politically ambiguous forms of resistance alongside the evident pleasure in playing the zombie is required to make better sense of public zombie enactments. Nevertheless, the persistent allure of this symbol and the ‘affectionate identification’ (do Vale 2010) of so many with it deserve attention in terms of the ‘education’ that such enactments also signal. The pedagogy of such enactments though, will be hard to grasp if approached from traditional understandings of teaching and learning encounters that are predicated on rationalist objectives, outcomes and evaluations.

Perhaps these enactments are at their destabilizing best when they echo a post-humanist pedagogical sensibility, i.e. when they channel their indiscernibility to question taken for granted boundaries and generate spaces/moments that reveal the intersections and interdependencies between previously distinct category constructions. Schneider (2012) supplies a good example when she juxtaposes the zombie protesters of the Occupy Wall Street movement enacting ‘dead inside’ banker-capitalists alongside Ibsen’s play *John Gabriel Borkman* in which the protagonist is a dead (unscrupulous) banker being played live on stage. She questions what is going on when ‘live’ protests are played by the living dead, and ‘dead labor’ plays live on stage? This breakdown of seemingly distinct living and dead categories exemplifies the potential and power of zombie enactments.

Particularly striking amongst the range of enactments are those women who perform the zombie in ways that despoil traditional notions of femininity and humanity. But is the ‘Female Zombie’ something of an oxymoron? Do zombies (in as far as one can generalize about them) “do” gender? Do they possess gendered bodies that can perform femininities and masculinities in recognizable ways? Can they continue to exhibit gendered behaviour from the pre-apocalypse? It seems as if most zombie fiction and film (with the exception of newer romantic novels and movies like *Warm Bodies*) exploit the notion that “[d]iscrete genders are part of what

‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture” (Butler 1990, p. 190). Therefore authors and filmmakers tend to emphasise the zombie’s trickster-like traits by queering the sexed and gendered pre apocalypse body, usually in contrast to the survivors, whose seemingly stable sex and gender boundaries are crashing around them (Murray 2013). It has been noted that in the “world of the post-apocalyptic narrative, women are freer to act tough and be independent because it is evident that the world has been turned topsy-turvy” (Inness 1999, p. 123). Definitions, categories and expectations of human personhood are upset in the zombie even though zombie fiction has been found to both suggest alternative constructions of gender and sexuality, as well as reinscribe traditional patriarchal and heteronormative binaries (Murray 2013).

But what of women in ‘real’ life who choose to enact the zombie from an unambiguously feminine role? Or to pose the question in another way, what is going on when women choose to ‘zombify’ archetypal femininity? What sorts of identities are being chosen for zombification by different women and what is the effect? Zombification in these instances invariably involves despoiling an archetype of classic or hyper femininity. The process of zombification seems to invoke the feminine archetype to perfection before tearing it down. These archetypes are predominantly the beauty queen/prom queen, the cheerleader, the bride, the housewife, the (nubile) school girl, the (sexy) nurse, and variations of the Barbie personas which offers several permutations like the Prom Queen Barbie or Nurse Barbie for zombification. The costume choice for female zombies around Halloween predominantly revolve around these archetypes (see amazon.com for zombie costumes for women).<sup>1</sup> The popularity of female archetypes for zombification suggests a degree of consciousness and an agency in choice, and highlight the context of a culture of hyper femininity. What these sorts of enactments – the despoiling of the hyperfeminine – signify, are a potentially rich source of theorization for educators.

## **YouTube Make Up Tutorials**

Set within the same range of cultural and aesthetic expression are the zombie make up tutorials on YouTube. They raise questions about the meanings of the double labour of these tutorials – the labour of ‘doing makeup’ to transform the archetypal hyper feminine into the grotesque zombie as well as the labour of ‘tutoring’. What is the tutoring about? Is it simply what meets the eye – a lesson in make up skills, or something more? What are the possible ‘lessons’ of tutorials that go to great lengths to build up manifestations of hyper femininity and then trash and de-humanize it?

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<sup>1</sup>It would be interesting to examine if the choice of character for male zombies (usually a policeman, office worker, convict, priest or rock star) also speaks about masculinities in comparable ways.

The Prom Queen Barbie Zombie makeup tutorial by Michelle Phan makes an intriguing case through which these questions can be explored. Phan is a 27 year old American internet sensation, a makeup artist with close to 7 million subscribers on YouTube. Her slick make up videos, each feature a mini story, for example her anti-Valentine's day 'being a heartbreaker' make up tutorial for single women, a range of Halloween looks, the Gothic Lolita look, anime looks, bad girl looks, Tim Burton looks, celebrity looks (Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift), and most popular of all, the Barbie transformation tutorial. They all feature Phan applying make up to herself with detailed, step-by-step instructions, explaining the rationale behind certain techniques or colours, the right make up products, and a running commentary on how the look can be achieved or modified to suit personal facial characteristics, all delivered in her girl-next-door voice over. This is almost always accompanied by cleverly chosen sound tracks that reinforce each video's unique message and 'feel'.

Elsewhere, Phan's assertion that "*Makeup IS art—the only difference is it's on a moving canvas that constantly changes throughout the day,*" (<http://michellephan.com/about-me/>) and her background in the art of portrait painting help understand how these particular skills may have been acquired. Here is a master technician, skilled at both metamorphosis through make up, as well as mass communication. Her entrepreneurial skills are evident in her numerous sponsorship deals from cosmetics brands, make up lines (IQUU and em Cosmetics), personal website, a popular blog spot, her YouTube multichannel network, cleverly named FAWN (For All Women Network) and spots in big brand commercials. Most of her YouTube work seems to arise in response to her largely female fans' questions. She has said, "*Without my followers, I would be working in a void – like a teacher in an empty classroom. Their enthusiasm gives me the motivation and inspiration to educate and share every day.*" (<http://michellephan.com/about-me/>). It seems that her skills, reach and huge audience (she is believed to be the second most subscribed female Youtuber) make her a Youtube 'tutor' par excellence.

Discussions about the status and function of YouTube and particularly beauty bloggers on YouTube tend to focus on their non-critical relationship to the capitalistic framework with in which they are embedded, and to which they owe their success. Chang (2014) analyses the presence of Asian American female beauty bloggers like Phan and the ways the sphere constructs specific racial and gender performances for the beauty community that seeks to contain radical difference. It is true that the how-to videos largely promote and privilege "specific body types, consumeristic behaviors, and gender and racial performances" (2014, p. 7). Other educationalists have critiqued the mixed nature of YouTube outputs that can position them "either a reservoir of genuine enlightenment, or another playpen in the capitalist fun house" (Kellner and Kim 2010, p. 30). Notwithstanding the larger capitalist, conservative framework of YouTube, it seems that the Zombie Barbie make up tutorial produces meanings and emotions that escape these confines to speak in a critical voice to young women growing up in a culture of hyperfemininity.

## Making Up as Prom Queen Barbie

The particular tutorial under consideration is Phan's Halloween special from 2012, 'The Prom Queen Barbie' tutorial, a popular video watched over 13 million times by October 2014 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHkJpjjPIvM>). This was not her first attempt at tutoring viewers in achieving a Barbie Doll look. Interestingly, her earlier offering in 2009 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4-GRH2nDvw>) was also a Halloween tutorial even if there was no zombie transformation of Barbie at the end. Her comment that Barbie's look *IS* 'creepy', creepy enough to satisfy Halloween standards of monstrosity are telling and are echoed 3 years later in the 2012 tutorial. The video lasts just under 11 min and takes the viewer through detailed attention to eye, skin, and hair make up, finishing with accessories. I describe key elements of the tutorial below, paying attention to the variety of products required, the skill/knowledge required to use them to create the desired look, the knowing soundtrack and the ironic sound bites from Phan herself, before considering the nature of the 'zombie pedagogy' embedded in the tutorial.

The video begins with a face shot of the perfectly made-up, pouting, Prom Queen Barbie doing a robotic dolly wave to viewers, to the sound track of 'Prima Donna'. In the next few seconds, the zombie version of the barely recognizable Prom Queen Barbie fills the screen to a horror sound track. This cuts back to Prom Queen Barbie with Phan's voice-over claiming, "*I don't know which one's scarier. Regardless, I'm going to show you how to recreate both looks*". Phan's witty sound bites throughout the video tutorial openly refer to the 'scariness' and excessive femininity that a true Barbie look imparts, even while she labours to meticulously recreate it.

Step 1 requires hair restrainers that keep hair out of the face with Phan's early warning, "*because we're gonna be beatin' your mug*". The focus moves to the eyes, starting with a white cream base to create the perfectly blank canvas for Barbie's complex eye make up. White powder is used to set the cream so that it does not smudge. Then the layers of colours are applied – first 'hot pink' eye shadow, then 'true blue' colour is spread with mathematical precision to the 'outer third' of the eyes. Then the instruction to use a window-wiper motion to "blend away" the edges of the colour bands. Phan then advises viewers to "*just keep applying the colours – until you feel like a drag queen. Just kidding*". Pink is added to the centre of the eyelids, to make eyes look more "animated". The video then demonstrates the cues that particular colours offer: "*when you are going for a Barbie look, you can never go wrong with white, hot pink and blue. It's a fool-proof colour combination for that Barbie look*". While white liner at the water line helps create "*wide, dolly-looking eyes*", matt black liquid liner is applied to the outer edges of the eyes. Key tips in creating the Barbie look are offered throughout, as in the injunction to avoid thick lines which might cover up the pink.

After black pencil liner is used to give the appearance of fuller lashes, an eye lash curler is deployed to '*Barbie them up*'. Generous coats of volumising mascara are applied to the lashes before the application of "*the most ridiculous looking flirty fake lashes you can find. The more ridiculous-looking, the better. And if you really*

want the full Barbie effect, show your bottom lashes some love and add your push-up bra for the lashes here.” At this point in the video, the eyes are finally made up to Barbie standards. And even though slickly edited, the video is just into the first two and a half minutes.

Throughout, the video is accompanied by a sound track that fades to accommodate Phan’s voice over and then rises to fill in the silences. The snatches of the song (by Marina and the Diamonds) emphasise Prom Queen Barbie’s Prima Donna “attitude” and her identity as a voracious consumer/possessor of material, emotions and energy, readily acknowledging the by now well established link between Barbie, ‘the bitch who has it all’, and insatiable consumption (Steinberg 2011).

...I get what I want cause I ask for it,  
Not that I am really deserving of it...  
I know I’ve got a big ego,  
I really don’t know why it’s such a big deal, though...  
...I can’t help that I need it all  
The Prima Donna life, the rise and fall  
You say that I’m kinda difficult  
But it’s always someone else’s fault  
Got you wrapped around my finger, babe  
You can count on me to misbehave...

The allure of the resistant, misbehaving female subject with an attendant sense of power is evident. Barbie’s appetite for capitalist consumption is signaled in this instance as part of a persona that knowingly misbehaves from a position of power, something that doll play may not always signal. All together, the mood evoked is upbeat, akin to that of a pre-party preparation in a young woman’s bedroom, capturing the excitement, anticipation and exhilaration of an imminent (girl’s) night out.

From the eyes, the tutorial moves on to making up the “*perfect plastic-looking skin – which means you have to conceal dark circles, blemishes, broken vessels, red nose, wrinkles. If it’s not on Barbie’s face, erase it.*” There is no effort to conceal the hard work that must go into achieving the slow and painstaking erasure of any human-ness to complete the plastic doll look. After concealing, there’s contouring, to create the illusion of a different facial skeletal shape, getting as close as possible to Caucasian Barbie’s profile. Phan’s tutorial instructs users to choose a colour that is a few shades lighter than their skin colour to highlight the high points of their face – the bridge of the nose and cheek bones. More blending ensues before the use of powder on a brush to set the make-up so it does not smudge. The key tip here is to keep “*your face as matt as possible*”.

Then the attention moves on to Barbie’s hair. Phan covers her own jet black hair with a hair net and then places a “*plastic fantastic platinum blonde*” wig over it with the advise that “*If you want to look more like a doll, try and find a wig with bangs*”. Then what appears to be the first product placement of the video is introduced – “*Coastal Sense’s Blush Palette’s pinkest pink is the blush to add to your cheeks. The cheeks must look like they are blushing*”. Permanently. Then comes another layer of contouring: “*Using a colour that is 3 shades darker than your skin colour, add dimension to your face*”. By now, it is inescapable that what is



being accomplished is a truly startling transformation that can render any kind of human face, non-human.

Then another product placement for lip gloss is followed by the instruction “*and of course, this has to be pink*”. Application of this is “*to make sure that your lips are perfectly sculpted in. If you have full lips like myself, try and size them down a bit as this will make your eyes appear larger and more Barbie like*”. Then the contact lenses in blue are inserted, followed by the instruction to “bling it up with fake diamonds and jewels”. Two more touches complete the bonafide Prom Queen Barbie look – the placement of the victorious Prom Queen’s tiara and finally, ‘nose enhancers’. Phan claims that nose enhancers are an old fashioned trick – once inserted into nostrils they are supposed to push out her Asian nose, bringing her that bit closer to the goal of Barbie’s perfect profile.

This exhaustively detailed, witty and ironic tutorial lays bare the amount of labour required to achieve ‘Look 1’ – the Barbie look. What Phan also demonstrates is the effort that needs to sustain the doing of gender, in this case, that of hyper feminine Barbie. The question of what is being demonstrated in the doing of such unreal, excessive femininity is worthy of further exploration. The impeccable doll that is Barbie is such a hard look to attain that there is something eerie even uncanny, in its layered perfection. Its glamorous, apparently shallow and gloriously unrestrained, over-the-top doll-ness invokes camp. Lord’s (1994) analysis of Barbie hits the mark: “Barbie... may be, for some gay arbiters, the apotheosis of female beauty. The doll is built like a transvestite” (p.213). When Phan talks of applying colours on to the face ‘until you look like a drag queen’, she is picking up on the same theme. The efforts to display femininity – like the ‘push up bra’ effect for the lower lids, the wide dolly looking eyes, plastic skin, permanent blush, plastic fantastic platinum blonde wig with bangs, all combine to push the ‘feminine’ to such extremes that they become caricatures that must float away from any ‘real’ or ‘original’. And it seems that this departure from the mundane or real, is precisely what may be alluring about over-the-top doll play. It needs to be performed, and performed outrageously, in an alien manner, rather than appear as a facsimile of something already in existence.

This thesis that the otherworldliness of Barbie in particular and dolls in general ‘possess an allure’ (Kotani and LaMarre 2007, p. 56) is also exemplified by Phan’s choice of soundtrack, Prima Donna, which paints a portrait of an unapologetic ‘bad girl’. Kotani and LaMarre are on to something when they say that “there is a “certain something” of femininity that can be a source of satisfaction, if only in the form of game, as play” (p 56.). They go on to analyse the use of shojo (Japanese ‘girl’ cosplay) as a form of “regeneration” for girls in a culture excessively determined by patriarchy. Taking the rest of Phan’s statements about make up and its place in the world (<http://michellephan.com/about-me/>) into consideration, it seems that making up oneself into different personas is not only a route to frivolous fun and games – while it is essential that there is plenty of that – but also to an experimentation with self-presentation, and other worldly positionings, and different personas. This is at some distance to a critical reading of such play as ultimately subservient to patriarchal, capitalist culture.



## Decomposing Barbie

Phan's video though, does not end with the monstrous plastic fantastic Barbie but goes on to pile further layers of excess by shifting viewers from Barbie's otherworldly femininity to the excess of an otherworldly destruction of femininity through the creation of Zombie Barbie. If Barbie cosplay could be argued to be symptomatic of some sort of regeneration (trite or otherwise) in a culture linked to patriarchy, what might Zombie Barbie offer?

First a description of how 'Look 2', the Zombie Barbie look is created. Part 2 of the tutorial begins with shots of Zombie Barbie to an eerie sound track. In the same upbeat, cheery tones used for part 1, Phan continues, advising viewers that "*If you want to look like the perfect Zombie Barbie, then liquid latex, tissue paper and fake blood will be your best friends*". The tutorial then instructs viewers on how to prepare the tissue paper, peeling off its separate layers down to the thinnest possible layer; how to make sure the paper is ripped into long strips with rough and jagged edges "*because this is going to help simulate ripped flesh*"; how to use a sponge and liquid latex to create a "*make believe wound area*", on which very quickly, the first layer of tissue paper is applied; then dabbed down with the sponge and more liquid latex. The tutorial continues with instructions on how to apply repeatedly, 3–4 layers of tissue paper.

Phan then proceeds to make up another wound on her neck, and after waiting for the liquid latex to dry, instructs viewers on how to paint foundation liquid over it to make it blend with the skin: "*Don't apply too much otherwise it will look a little too fake*". By now, to the learner/viewer who is up close in the minutiae of zombie make up, notions of what is or isn't real or fake are pretty hard to distinguish, and Phan's reassuring advice is to, "*just add a little foundation colour so it's not too white looking. But don't worry because we are going to cover it up with blood anyways*".

While waiting for everything to dry, the paradoxical process of "*decomposing yourself with make up*" begins. Darkening and blackening the eyes contribute the first "creepy factor". Phan then proceeds to cut open the by now dry latex layers while warning viewers to "*Be VERY, very careful. Use tweezers instead of scissors for this if you are really afraid of cutting yourself*". She wields the scissors expertly though, to cut open the layers claiming, "*Perfect. Now I have ripped flesh!*" Then comes the addition of "*gore*" to this layer by adding a mix of non-Barbie colours: brown, red, black and purple: "*Wherever the wound is deepest, should have the darkest colours*".

Then Phan makes an insightful comment into the business of using make up to achieve contrasting looks: "*All right guys, this is one of the few make up tutorials where I'm telling you it's okay to make yourself look ugly. Since Barbie is perfect looking, it's hil-ar-i-ous to make it look like she is rotting away. And, if you're bad at make up, no worries. Zombie make up is very forgiving. This is the only time I'm advocating that it's okay to have raccoon eyes.*" Here she exposes the allure of playing Zombie Barbie, which is to turn the horrific plastic fantastic-ness of hyper-feminine Barbie into a different kind of horror. The 'hilarity' stems from poking fun

at the fake woman that is Barbie, an ideal that can be quite literally made-up and undone by any woman with make up skills learnt from the tutorial. In the doing of this, Barbie with her fake smooth skin and non-human hues of pinks and blues and perma-blushes seems to turn ‘more human’ with decomposing tissue and dripping blood. Hyper-femininity offers little in the zombie apocalypse with its crumbling social norms, but there is certainly something that demonstrates a closeness to a generic human-kind that perfect Barbie could not offer. The zombie straddling life and death seems to breathe both life and death into the plastic non-human that is Barbie. In doing so, grotesquely gendered Barbie also gives way to a genderless specimen. She turns into ‘It’ – an object creature, neither human nor plastic, neither man nor woman and neither dead nor alive. The zombification process appears to query the boundaries and foundational categories of life itself.

Achieving look two is as laborious a process as achieving look one but it feels qualitatively different and even, ‘liberatory’. The exhilaration, the pleasure and politics of de-spoiling femininity seem to reach a crescendo in a frenetic finish to the tutorial:

Keep adding on the black and brown to the blood to make it look like it’s oxidized, disgusting and old. You want to make more wounds by tearing your latex flesh. ...And it’s even more fun when you’re adding the good stuff to the wound area. Remember guys, use a combination of black, brown, red and purple. And if you want to look even more disgusting, add green. Alright, if you really wanna look like you are dead, add dead white contacts. Wow. I look like a hot mess. ... If you want to take it up a notch, start painting veins on your neck. The veinier, the better. ...This is the BEST part – adding gore and blood. This right here is thick blood and I’m adding it to my wounds. Notice how it sticks on better? Like it has bits of muscle and adipose tissue sticking out? Eeewww... Honestly, it looks like barbecue sauce. The juicier you make your wounds, the better. If you happen to have left over juicy blood, add this to your hair. And for the finishing touch, drum roll, drum roll, mmm... blood.... A glass a day, keeps the doctor away (pretends to drink a bottle labelled ‘vampire blood’). ...Add this fake red blood on top of your wounds. Don’t be shy with this stuff guys, because you get to do this once a year. And don’t feel bad if you think this looks ugly. People will remember you over all the girls dressed in skimpy Halloween costumes. Why? Because you’re gonna scare the crap out of them.

The faster pace and repeated references to veins, adipose tissue, muscle, blood, torn skin, not to mention the pretend act of drinking blood, all combine to give the feeling of a tutorial that has slipped out of control and a world slightly out of kilter. But there is also reference to the ultimate objective of dressing up as Zombie Barbie for Halloween, i.e. Phan emphasizes that the aim is to be explicitly ‘memorable’, to outdo the mundane-feminine ‘skimpy’ Halloween costume that could be far easier to accomplish. So the labour of making oneself as Barbie or decomposing into the zombie version has a tangible outcome, which is also a way of standing out against the backdrop of a restrictive hyper-feminine culture. In fact, we are reminded that the labour entailed by Zombie Barbie cannot simply end with the Halloween outing, as Phan finally adds, “*Good luck showering because your bathtub is gonna look like a crime scene*”.

The despoiling of the feminine achieved through zombie make up seems to echo the exhilaration of ‘trash the dress’ (TTD) events at which brides (sometimes with their grooms) spoil the perfection of their pristine wedding clothes and capture it

through video and photography sessions that are seen as the alternative to their more traditional wedding day performance. Here, the aim is for photographers to document married women in the post-wedding TTD session, wearing their once white, now decrepit wedding dress and placed in incongruous spaces like swampy fields, muddy rivers, or decaying, gothic buildings. These sessions position themselves as the alternative, even the antidote to traditional notions of wedding culture and normative behavior by bride and groom, who are required to be photographed in demure, pristine and predictable postures. In overturning the norms of looking and being looked at, TTD events, like zombie transformations, contrast the traditional expectations of women.

Analysing the TTD photographs, Michele White notes how,

Disgusting fluids and filthy bodies, which women incorporate by presenting as zombies or moving through mud, may encourage viewers to look briefly, but they are difficult to gaze at. These images shift viewers from looking to a kind of tactile feeling, including imagining how emotionally painful it is to get dresses dirty; thinking about open and broken bodies; and remembering the sticky, erotic, and disturbing aspects of being wet and filthy (2011, p. 645).

White observes that these more “dissonant” wedding images “begin to undermine cultural assertions of dyadic gender, heteronormativity, whiteness, cleanliness, and bodily coherence” (ibid). At the same time, White (2012) also notes that photographers still manage and promote the ‘oppositional functions’ of TTD events to preserve their creative and cultural cache. As with make-up tutorials on YouTube, these femininity deforming events nevertheless offer women a space of resistance to the dominant patriarchal-capitalist background in which they function.

## A Zombie Pedagogy

Mieke Bal’s book *Double Exposures* (1996) begins with an explanation of the classical Greek word “*apo-deik-numai*” – untranslatable into English, and best understood as meaning exposition, exposé and exposure *as well as* the ways in which they are connected. Bal explains the connections thus:

...Something is made public in exposition, and that event involves bringing out into the public domain the deepest held views and beliefs of a subject. Exposition is always also an argument. Therefore, in publicizing these views the subject objectifies, exposes himself as much as the object; this makes the exposition an exposure of the self. Such exposure is an act of producing meaning, a performance. (Bal 1996, p. 2)

This triumvirate of exposition, exposé and exposure offers a way of understanding how the Prom Queen Zombie Barbie YouTube tutorial may be understood as a monstrous public pedagogy.

This tutorial then can be read as not just about teaching/learning about applying make up for Halloween night. The act of applying makeup becomes a tool for making up different selves. The demonstration of this is an exposition, an argument,

and, a very visible exposure of multiple, even incoherent wishes and desires. Several views, beliefs and emotions form part of this exposition, interrupting and contradicting each other. The irony of the ‘Barbie is creepy’ message overlaid on a laborious attempt at recreating oneself as Barbie is unmistakable and makes it harder to offer a definitive verdict on either the tutor’s or viewers’ intentions or politics. As feminist scholars have pointed out, irony is a “versatile device which allows a speaker to articulate certain views whilst disclaiming responsibility for, or ownership of, them” (Benwell 2007, p. 540). It renders actions/words slippery and thus does not automatically signal anything specific. However, while the tutorial involves a plethora of cosmetic products usually known for embedding users in the hyper-feminine, consumerist culture, the demonstration does so in ways and forms that mock this very culture.

Because the tutorial is replete with contradictions and ironies, it is impossible to assign a single or predominant value to the tutor’s intentions or identify an audience’s learning with any certainty. The organization of traditional pedagogy would find such messiness, unknowability and incoherence impossible to accommodate, even irresponsible. But as this exposition suggests, this undecidability need not be a loss to participants in this pedagogical space. As Moraru notes about the zombie, “...the thing’s thingness itself, its muteness or incoherent mumbling, pinpoints with unmatched eloquence the incoherence of our wishes and justifications” (2012, p. 121).

Thus the act of transforming oneself into the monstrous is also an act of exposing oneself. Both for the tutor and the women who chose to be zombies (if only for a night) the combination of cosplay and make up helps imagine and enact alternative selves that transcend binaries of male-female, human-doll, zombie-non-zombie. The meaning of such play is multiple and ultimately “emphasizes that the self not only narrates fiction but is partly fictional as well. It is through interaction with stories that we can imagine and perform ourselves” (Lamerichs 2011). This notion that the fractured fictional may yet help salvage the ‘actual’ may be a strange one but by querying the insistence on coherent, unified selves, and the attendant demand for clarity of message as the route to illumination in pedagogical encounters, the zombie Barbie tutorial points to the possibilities of the eloquence of mumbling incoherence.

While YouTube tutorials may appear to be politically ambiguous (both conservative and radical at the same time) and pedagogically contradictory (caught in the cycle of consumption while making a point against it) when viewed from the standpoint of traditional, institutionalised notions of pedagogy, they nevertheless offer an exposé of hyper-feminine culture. This exposé is also an exposition of the resistance that doll play in the form of excessive, plastic fantastic Barbie offers. Zombie Barbie adds another layer of resistance by breathing ‘life’ into Prom Queen Barbie with its emphasis on rotting flesh, blood, adipose tissue and veins. In doing so, this zombie pedagogy also reveals the inevitable intersections between human and non-human, dead and living, woman and doll, self and other.

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