

QUEER FEARS

A ONE DAY SYMPOSIUM ON NEW QUEER HORROR FILM AND TELEVISION

FRIDAY, 28TH JUNE 2019, UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE



University of
Hertfordshire **UH**

BAFTSS

THE ODYSSEY
CINEMA ST ALBANS

This symposium/project is part of the ongoing work of the Media Research Group (Humanities) at the University of Hertfordshire.

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

9am Registration (Cinema Foyer, coffee and tea provided)

10am Conference Opening Address and Welcome (Cinema Auditorium downstairs)

10.15-11.45pm Panel 1: In and Out of the Closet - (Chair: Darren Elliott-Smith, University of Herts)

Chris Lloyd (University of Hertfordshire) - *American Horror Story* - Queer Fears in the USA.

Tim Stafford (Independent Scholar) - All's Queer in Love and War-lock: The Problematic Queer Space in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina The Teenage Witch*.

Ben Wheeler (University of Hertfordshire) - Losing Boys, Falling Down, Gaining Nipples: The Queer Fears of Joel Schumacher.

11.45-12.00pm Coffee Break

12.00-1.30pm Panel 2: Queer Performative Horror - (Chair: Laura Mee, University of Hertfordshire)

Valeria Lindvall (University of Gothenburg, Sweden) - *Dragula* and Queer Performance.

Daniel Sheppard (University of East Anglia) - *The Babadook* and New Realisations of the Monster Queer.

Lexi Turner (Cornell University) - The Dance of An Other - Queer Dance as Ritual in *Suspiria* and *Climax*.

1.30-2.15pm Lunch and Refreshments (Cinema Foyer Downstairs)

2.15 - 3.45pm Panel 3: Consuming Queerness and Other Gross Tales... (Chair: Christopher Lloyd, University of Hertfordshire)

Robyn Ollett (University of Teeside) - What do you eat? Queering the Cannibal in Ducourneau's *RAW*.

Eddie Falvey (University of Exeter) - Conspicuous Corporeality - Monstrousness as Queer in Ducourneau's *RAW*.

Laura Mee (University of Hertfordshire) - Sick Girls, Bloodhound Bitches, Feral Females and Weirdos: Queer Women in the films of Lucky McKee

3.45 – 4.00pm Coffee Break

4.00 - 5.30pm Panel 4: Frightfully Problematic Queerness (Chair: Agustin Rico-Albero, University of Hertfordshire)

Siobhan O'Reilly (University of Hertfordshire) - Queer Horror and Transphobia.

Christopher Clark (University of East Anglia) - Exploring the Abyss: The Child-figure and monstrous sexuality in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*.

Sam Tabet (University of Strathclyde) - Homonormative destruction: Anxiety, Pleasure and the Failure of Same-Sex marriage in Queer Slasher: *What Keeps You Alive (2018)*.

5.30 - 6.15pm Keynote Address - Dr Darren Elliott-Smith (University of Herts) - 'Unbury Your Gays': Queer Zombies, Mental Illness and Assimilation Anxieties in Contemporary Film and TV.

6.15pm Wine Reception (Cinema Foyer Downstairs)

7.30 - 9pm Film Screening - A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge (Jack Sholder, 1985) with introduction.

TRAVEL, ACCOMMODATION, REGISTRATION:

Getting to the Venue: The Odyssey Cinema is kindly hosting the Queer Fears Symposium, to get here:

RAIL: From London St Pancras trains leave regularly to St Albans City (in the direction of Bedford) - from there the cinema is a 10 minute walk.

CAR: address and parking information below:

VENUE: The Odyssey, 166 London Road, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 1PQ

PARKING:

The Maltings

London Road Car park

St Albans City train station car park

HOTELS NEARBY:

Clarion Collection Hotel St. Albans City Centre, 27 Holywell Hill, St Albans AL1 1HG • 01727 848849: <https://www.stalbanshotel.co.uk/>

Premier Inn St Albans City Centre, 1 Adelaide Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5BH: <https://www.premierinn.com/gb/en/hotels/england/hertfordshire/st-albans/st-albans-city-centre>

REGISTRATION: Day tickets include symposium and screening £20 full price, £15 concessions, UH Staff and Students FREE. Lunch, wine reception and refreshments provided.

Registration takes place from 1st May on the UH Store site:
<https://store.herts.ac.uk/conferences-and-events/events>

ABSTRACTS

American Horror Story: Queer Fears in the United States

Dr. Christopher Lloyd (University of Hertfordshire)

Across eight seasons, Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk's *American Horror Story* has (re)ignited classic horror tropes and plumbed the depths of quintessential American fears. In this paper, I want to take a long view on the series, asking questions about the show's depictions of queer horror. From *Murder House* (2011) to *Apocalypse* (2018), *AHS* has toyed with both homonormativity and antinormativity, demonstrating a queerness at once radical and conservative. Yet, I want to suggest that there are determinately queer fears at work in the show: horror as queer, queerness as horrific, queer escape from heteronormativity, and so on. The structural premise of the anthology format—a mode that *AHS*, in effect, created and normalized in US television—is itself, I want to suggest, a kind of queer move. By continually resetting itself (and its queer fears) the series returns and repeats, circles and layers: all motifs central to psychoanalytic conceptions of the gothic/horror genres. It is the rebirth of actors as different characters, and the recycling of old (American) fears in new contexts, that seems most queer about the show. Focusing on a few key examples from across the seasons, I will suggest that in its monstrous resurrections, *AHS*'s queer horror can never be escaped.

Bio: Dr Christopher Lloyd is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Hertfordshire. He is the author of two books from Palgrave Macmillan, *Corporeal Legacies in the US South* (2018), *Rooting Memory, Rooting Place* (2015), and numerous special issues, journal articles and book chapters on race and memory in contemporary US culture. He is Reviews Editor for the *European Journal of American Culture* and founder of the Southern Studies in the UK Network.

All's Queer in Love and Warlock: Ambrose and the Problematic Queer Space in The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina

Dr. Tim Stafford (Independent Scholar)

Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018), which is at once an adaptation of the Archie comic book series and a rewriting of the ABC/WB series *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* (1996-2003), features several characters who can be read as literally and/or figuratively queer. The domestic situation of the protagonist offers a queer alternative to the heteronormative family: Sabrina is raised by her two aunts, Zelda and Hilda, who are both heterosexual yet share a bedroom and adopt traditionally male and female parenting roles. In doing so, the series appears to proffer a queer utopia compared to the traditional patriarchal model of family based on genealogy, the Spellman house instead standing as 'a biologically sterile but ... narratively productive queer space' (Charteris, 2017). Yet this model is problematic, as evidenced by the discord in the house and Aunt Zelda's repressed guilt over her failure and her later punishment by the patriarchal Faustus Blackwood.

The series's most prominent queer character is Ambrose Spellman (Chance Perdomo), a pansexual warlock and Sabrina's cousin. Ambrose is initially cursed to remain in the family home as punishment for religious crimes, an interdict which causes him frustration and complicates his relationship with fellow warlock Luke Chalfant. Ambrose's attempts to work around this curse can be read as symbolising the queer desire to be seen, liberated and accepted in the outside world without being policed. Exploring the context of the queer domestic space, this paper will analyse Ambrose's complex relationship with home and the outside, related to the theory of, among others, Charteris (2017) and Palmer (2012).

Bio: Dr Tim Stafford lectures in Literature, Film and Education. His specialist research areas are masculinities, visual literacy and comic books and their film adaptations. His PhD focused on the superhero film adaptations of the Marvel and DC Cinematic Universes. His book, *Teaching Visual Literacy in the Primary Classroom*, was published by David Fulton/Routledge in 2010.

Losing Boys, Falling Down, Gaining Nipples: The Queer Fears of Joel Schumacher

Ben Wheeler (University of Hertfordshire)

Despite being a film that 'works the homosexual vampire theme in a very self-aware, postmodern way' (Benshoff 1997, 252) Joel Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* (1987) is problematic in a number of ways. Through the narrative and mise-en-scene queerness is playfully foregrounded in terms of both look and behaviour and yet, as Benshoff goes on to say, the film suggests 'eradication is both possible and desirable' (1997, 252). Schumacher would later direct *Falling Down* (1993), described by Carol Clover as a movie that features 'a

white man flailing self-righteously in a sea of people who are either not white or not male or neither and who are messing up his game.' (1993, 145) The film again centres on the potential eradication or at least of "standing up" to this perceived threat to heteronormativity.

Two years later Schumacher would be at the centre of a media-storm for the now legendary inclusion of nipples on the batsuit in *Batman Forever* (1995). In 2017, in an interview with *Vice* the issue was still being discussed. He said, "I just know that I'll always go down over the nipples on Batman starting with *Batman Forever*. Such a sophisticated world we live in where two pieces of rubber the size of erasers on old pencils, those little nubs, can be an issue. It's going to be on my tombstone, I know it." This paper discusses these Schumacher films and reads them as the product of the queer fears of the openly gay director himself.

Bio: Ben Wheeler is a Visiting Lecturer in Film at the University of Hertfordshire and an Academic Sessional Lecturer for HIC (Hertfordshire International College), he completed his MA in Film at the University of Nottingham.

Filth is (still) my politics! Camping waste as a reparative practice in *Dragula* - search for the world's first drag supermonster.

Valeria Villegas Lindvall (University of Gothenburg, Sweden)

Drag. Filth. Horror. Glamour. The "gospel" that, in combination with the new-found faith in the artificiality of drag heralded by performers from Sharon Needles to the Tranimal collective, has been championed throughout the two seasons of the alternative The Boulet Brothers' web drag competition *Dragula*. This paper follows up on my assessment for CATHCon 2018 at DeMontfort University, where I explored the first season's political possibilities in its handling of abjection (Kristeva 1982) and filth (Douglas 1984) to facilitate transgression as a way to both upset and reflect on a certain order (Jenks 2003). Now I turn to specific instances in which waste, filth and abjection are centered for their visual representation as inseparable from drag performance. Inspired by the notion that camp can be read as a reparative gesture (Sedgwick 2003), this paper aims to explore the possibility of camp as a practice that, beyond parodic sensibilities, can highlight waste in its materiality (Schaffer 2015) and in so doing, can reframe abjection and trash (both literally and figuratively) as a means of producing knowledge (Sedgwick in Shaffer 2015) far away from the frivolity that the term evokes. I am interested in elaborating on the ways in which *Dragula* does not only turn its gaze back to the monster's capability of thriving in its inbetweenness, but also underscores filth in a decisive move to re-signify and rewrite its

significance to uplift other ways of being and knowing by making the most out of the affordances of horror and sci-fi drag.

Bio: Valeria Villegas Lindvall is a doctoral student in Film Studies at University of Gothenburg, Sweden, where she is currently conducting research about Latin American horror film, with a special focus on the representation of the female figure. She is also part of the editorial board for MAI: Feminism and Visual Culture, journal founded by Dr. Anna Backman Rogers and Dr. Anna Misiak. She holds a degree of Master of Arts in Cinema Studies from Stockholm University and has also worked in several publications, most prominently, at Rolling Stone Mexico.

Theory in the Flesh: *The Babadook* and New Realisations of the Monster Queer

Daniel Sheppard (University of East Anglia)

In the horror genre, monstrosity has traditionally been read in allegorical terms, offering an Otherness with which queer audiences can identify (Wood, 1986; Halberstam, 1995; Benshoff, 1997). Where recent criticism demonstrates the limits of this approach, suggesting that focus is instead made on New Queer Horror (King, 2010; Benshoff, 2012; Elliott-Smith, 2016), this paper suggests how mainstream LGBTQ+ audiences are actively indifferent to the predominantly subcultural nature of New Queer Horror and its gay white masculinist bias. Although contemporary scholarship and its appraisal of New Queer Horror is needed, this paper scrutinises its disavowal of traditional approaches to queer monstrosity by examining how the Babadook became championed as an unlikely LGBTQ+ icon in 2016, drawing on the emancipatory theorisations of Robin Wood, Jack Halberstam and Harry Benshoff. As queer audiences identify with the Babadook in ways that are being critically disavowed, performing his monstrous drag in LGBTQ+ spaces, the Babadook's monstrosity creates a spatial and temporal site of cultural resistance for the performing artist and those who spectate. Applying Wood, Halberstam and Benshoff's theorisations to Alexander Doty's notion of 'theory-in-the-flesh' (1993) – where persons perform a queerness which is 'in-your-face' and politically radical – the paper argues that, as drag performers literalise the Babadook as the monster queer, so too do they literalise the disruption to hegemony that the monster queer presents.

Bio: Daniel Sheppard recently completed MA Film Studies at the University of East Anglia, funded in part by UEA's Difference Postgraduate Scholarship. He has written for Horror Homeroom and Screening Sex, presented at various international conferences, and is

currently preparing an essay for *Resist: Protest Media and Popular Culture in the Brexit-Trump Era* (Rowman & Littlefield).

The dance of an other: queer dance as ritual in *Suspiria* (2018) and *Climax* (2018)

Lexi Turner (Cornell University)

Two of the most striking horror films of 2018 share a unique fixation with modern dance as the predominant mode of communication between disparate groups of ethnicities, sexualities, genders and bodies. However, one cannot ascribe to this medium a utopian connectivity associated. In *Climax*, the dance party is an homage to *The Masque of the Red Death*: in equal measures a site of terror as it is hedonism - an undoing of all four raver principles of Peace, Love, Unity and Respect - but this abandon, rather than necessarily any sublimative phenomenon, appears instead violently to reterritorialize the subjects with new lines of striation.

Suspiria's distinction from the Argento original is perhaps most evidently represented by the massive increase in emphasis on dance, not as a cover for witchcraft, but as its very practice and expression, in and of itself. Central to this concept is the notion of “flexion,” whereby the body becomes the discursive locus. The instructive context for the body’s awakening as flexive medium within this academy / coven highlights the restrictive parameters of discursivity: there are prerequisite degrees of alignment and synchronicity on the part of the subject to enter into discourses, and there are methods of excision from the space, also. The scene in which Susie’s movements in dance rehearsal have a remote, “voodoo doll”-reminiscent effect on Olga’s body, each graceful movement of Susie’s resulting in grotesque disfiguration of Olga’s, reveals the effects of flexion without synchronicity, embodying tensions between the body and the organism in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s statements regarding the fractured yet extant cohabitation between the striated and the smooth. In this paper, I seek to explore in both of these contemporary examples of queer dance horror pressing investigations into the potentials and perils of establishing queer space, and the ritualistic aspect of devised movement production and adaptation that blurs lines between medium and mode, presenting the body as palimpsest.

Bio: Lexi Turner is a writer, musician and “goth philosopher” with an MA in Contemporary Art Theory from Goldsmiths, University of London and a BA in Film Studies from King's College London. She has given lectures at conferences all over the UK on topics ranging from rhizomatic analysis of the addict as non-human body, Dionysian recurrence in

modernist ballet, and most recently “putrefaction and preservation in black metal xenochronic temporality” at the University of Ljubljana. Her master's thesis analysed noise music and sadomasochism as investigation of the body as the locus of power relations. Lexi is currently awaiting the results of her PhD applications to communications, art history and media departments across Canada and the United States.

‘What do you eat?’: Queering the Cannibal in Julia Ducournau’s *Raw* (2016)

Robyn Ollett (Teesside University)

Raw is a French horror film about rites of passage, initiations and ritual hazing; moments which characterise the journey of protagonist Justine (Garance Marillier) from child to adult, girl to woman, vegetarian to cannibal, all the while studying to be a vet. The carnality of Julia Ducournau’s debut feature film interweaves Gothic themes of dehumanisation and cannibalism with themes of sexual awakening and queer female subjectivity. This paper examines the various narratives and contexts within which *Raw* can be placed, offering a differentiated reading of its use of genre and affect and of its complicated representation of gender, sexuality and race. This paper will discuss de Sade, New French Extremity, queer spectatorship and cannibal criticism in working to elucidate upon the discontinuities between French and Anglo-American culture with regards to representations of queer female subjectivity.

Bio: Robyn is in the final year of her NECAH-funded PhD study based at Teesside University under the supervision of Dr. Rachel Carroll (Teesside), Prof. Ruth Robbins (Leeds Beckett), and Dr. Sarah Ilott (MMU). Her thesis interrogates the relationship between queerness and the Gothic mode in contemporary fiction and film identified by the author as New Queer Gothic, paying specific attention to representations of female queerness. Robyn’s research interests lie in Queer Studies, Gothic Studies, Feminism, Cultural theory, Film and Contemporary Literature.

Conspicuous Corporeality: Monstrosity as Queerness in *Raw* (2016)

Dr Eddie Falvey, University of Exeter/Plymouth College of Art

Historically, the body has been utilised by horror filmmakers in diverse ways. The body has been apparatus for trauma, torture, mutilation, and death; a site of possession; a source of sexual threat, violence, and exploitation; a platform for monstrosity and difference; a target for disease and disintegration, not to mention in many other ways besides. That the genre has regularly used the body as the site of its horrors speaks to its value as a recurring subject in the study of identity politics. Paying particular attention to Julia Ducournau's 2016 horror film *Raw*, this paper will consider how conspicuous corporeality in contemporary body horror offers a new platform for exploring queer identity frameworks. Ducournau's film explores in fascinating ways how self-governing subcultures condition behaviour. The unstable and markedly queer spaces of the focal fraternity provide a wealth of social and sexual possibilities for protagonist Justine that correlates with the radical changes occurring within her. Indeed, a hermeneutic understanding of *Raw*'s socio-spatial development of an eccentric subcultural fraternity reveals the pointed ways in which Ducournau's film offers cultural criticism at both micro and macro levels. As clearly politicised and culturally coded signifiers, bodies determined by difference provide more than just the site of horror, they offer evidence of the ever-shifting way in which the body, and those represented by such bodies, figure discursively.

Bio: Eddie completed his AHRC-funded PhD project on the early films of New York at University of Exeter. Since finishing his PhD, Eddie has been a lecturer in contextual studies at Plymouth College of Art, specialising in animation. He is the author of an upcoming volume *Re-Animator*, co-editor of a forthcoming edited collection on contemporary horror, and has forthcoming chapters and articles on adaptation in the films of Spike Jonze, queer fandoms, and adult animation. He is currently working on developing his thesis into a monograph.

Sick girls, bloodhound bitches, feral females and weirdos: Queer women in the films of Lucky McKee

Dr. Laura Mee (University of Hertfordshire)

This paper brings together analyses of four films directed by Lucky McKee—*May* (2002), *Sick Girl* (2006), *The Woman* (2011), and *All Cheerleaders Die* (2013)—to trace connections between their queer female characters. His films have often divided critics; he has been celebrated as a purveyor of female-focused indie horror, but has also been subject to

accusations of misogyny through representation of gendered violence, and has been criticised elsewhere for creating 'faux-feminist' characters which embody bisexual and lesbian stereotypes to monstrous effect.

While acknowledging the potential for this confusion (as a result of a thoughtful approach to sexuality which is nonetheless often represented in the brash caricatures of McKee's aesthetic), I argue that McKee employs female sexuality, and notably female bi- and homosexuality, as part of a radical approach to interrogating patriarchal heteronormativity and its inherent violence. Queer characters directly confront a violent, controlling father in *The Woman*, reject homophobia and matriarchal norms in *Sick Girl*, and seek revenge against a misogynistic high school football team in *Cheerleaders*, while May addresses both the Othering of queerness and the delegitimisation or erasure of bisexual identity. McKee's films, rather than demonising queer female identity for the sake of monstrosity, instead demonstrate the complex thematic significance of queerness in contemporary indie horror.

Bio: Dr. Laura Mee is a Senior Lecturer in Film and Television at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. Her research focuses on horror, adaptation, and seriality. She is the author of *Reanimated: The Contemporary American Horror Film Remake* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2019) and *Devil's Advocates: The Shining* (Auteur, 2017). She has published in journals and collections on topics including rape-revenge remakes, the critical reception of horror remakes, *Room 237* and cinephilia, Stanley Kubrick and genre, *American Psycho* and gender, and James Wan's horror franchises.

Queer Horror and Transphobia

Siobhan Scarlett O'Reilly (University of Hertfordshire)

This paper will argue that although much progression has taken place in society for LGBTQ+ people, there is still a societal moral panic towards, transgender and gender fluid people. The continued use of ambiguity of gender in horror films when portraying the villain or the supernatural presence is a trope which is still often used in cinema. For a character to defeat an evil presence of fluid gender, they often experience gender fluidity throughout the film also. Most horror stories featuring a more obvious trans character have stoked the fear of the transfeminine in particular: Buffalo Bill preys on young girls to steal their skin, and Norman Bates embodies his mother when he kills. In the reality of societal politics, trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) can create the image of the regressive, predatory phallus to ban transfeminine people from women's bathrooms, prisons or medical facilities.

The reason these films reflect a society with an underbelly of transphobia is because they elicit fear and disgust, not only from the characters' acts of violence, but from their gender identities. The message is very clearly sent that these characters are awful, not only because of their criminal acts, but because they do not conform to gender roles. In more recent films, fear of the transmasculine is also being portrayed. This could be seen as reflective of parents who fear their trans children will no longer be able to give birth or who will reject conceiving a child in their assigned female gender body.

Bio: Siobhan is currently a master's degree Student at The University of Hertfordshire studying Global Film and Television. She has studied a Post Graduate Certificate in Screenwriting at Met Film School and an undergraduate degree in Philosophy at The University of Reading. Her areas of interest in Philosophy are Ontology, particularly the branch of Hauntology in relation to the notion of what is considered 'uncanny' or eerie in media, Philosophy of Film and Metaphysics. She has a particular interest in cult 'trash' and Horror films and their portrayal of transgender characters. She also enjoys writing comedy TV screenplays and short films.

Exploring the Abyss: The Child-figure and monstrous sexuality in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013)

Dr. Christopher Clark (University of East Anglia)

From its opening moments of monochromatic imagery juxtaposed with sparse photography, Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013) places the viewer into negative space. My paper claims that the genre-shifting film plays on notions of conventional artistry to subvert audience expectations, establishing a queer identity that resides in the monstrous. The restrained visuality throughout the movie sets it apart from the normative fantasy of Hollywood science fiction and the explicit violence of horror, establishing an ironically queer aesthetic through the deployment of what I call an "anti-camp" opposing Sontag's definition of an emphatic and depolitical visual realm.

The narrative positions the film's protagonist, a woman stalking lonely men, into an aslant perspective that Glazer's movie shares. Exploring both excavated affect and an off-centre viewpoint, the film surveys outsidership and the persistent threat of abyss. Both intersect through The Woman, who I argue stands for an exemplary, and monstrous, instance of Bond Stockton's queer child. Further, the stripped eroticism of the movie's "sex" scenes disrupts the normally charged arena of male/female intimacy, revealing a consumption tied to queer

disavowal, tied to the film's horrific (and visual) core. Therefore, *The Woman* also demonstrates a turn toward Lee Edelman's concept of the sinthomosexual, who refuses the future because of its sexuality. What the ultimately narrative attempts, though, is an exploration toward the social and the consequences of that journey. The question of what constitutes the sinthomosexual—and its attendant binaries—thus begin to destabilize, becoming their own form of indeterminate abyss.

Bio: Dr Christopher W. Clark is a Visiting Lecturer in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Hertfordshire and an Associate Tutor in American Studies at the University of East Anglia. Their research considers how queerness is depicted across literature and visual cultures to provide a counternarrative to concepts of transcultural memory, nationalism, and citizenry. Previously, they have published articles on the writing of Jesmyn Ward (*Mississippi Quarterly*) and the photography of Nina Berman and Jonathan Hyman (*Journal of American Studies*, forthcoming) as well as having reviewed several monographs. They are currently editing a special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality*, titled 'Queer Subjectivities and the Contemporary United States', and feature as part of an edited collection on *Queer Horror* with University of Wales Press, both due out in 2019.

Homonormative destruction: How does the failure of same-sex marriage in the slasher film *What Keeps You Alive* (2018) project anxiety and pleasure for the queer spectator?

Sam Tabet (University of Strathclyde)

Halfway through Donald Trump's first term, and three years after marriage equality in the US, the slasher film *What Keeps You Alive* (2018) was released. The film features a psychopathic lesbian's attempt to kill her wife for legal benefits on their first wedding anniversary. Harkening to the 'lethal lesbian' of the mid-1990's, I will situate the explicit lesbian villain on screen in the Western political context of mainstream gay rights and queer organizing, as well as the emergence of new queer horror. Through textual analysis and spectatorship theory, I will analyze what the queer spectator's identification with the protagonist reflects about power, pleasure, and anxiety. There have been critiques of marriage equality discourse among queer-minded and conservative pundits alike, albeit for vastly different reasons. The film's treatment of same-sex marriage could be seen as supporting the right-wing narrative that LGBTQ people will destroy the institution of marriage itself, projecting anxieties of right-wing policies that aim to keep queer people marginalized and lacking legal benefits in the age of Trump. However, given the critique that

the gay rights movement has strategically positioned white middle-class cisgender gays and lesbians as safe additions to society's institutions, the destruction of the homonormative idea of marriage could be pleasurable within queer spectatorship. I aim to uncover the film's contested meaning and identificatory possibilities through textual analysis of three key scenes in the film's diegesis that reflect particularly salient points of tension within this political framing.

Bio: Sam Tabet is a PhD candidate at the University of Strathclyde examining post-2016 lesbian horror film. Most notably Sam produced the Peabody Award-Winning and Emmy-nominated *Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four* (Tribeca, 2016), a true crime feature documentary about four Latina lesbians who were wrongfully convicted of gang-raping two little girls during the 'Satanic panic' era of the 1980's and 90's in Texas. The film played a crucial role in exonerating the San Antonio Four. Sam worked on numerous documentary films including *Love The Sinner* (Tribeca 2017) and *Call Me Kuchu* (Teddy Award, Berlinale 2012). Sam served as a screener and juror for Chicken & Egg Pictures and Tribeca Film Institute, NewFest, and InsideOut. Sam has spoken about queer visibility on panels at SXSW, IFW, and Athena Film Festival. Sam co-founded the Queer Producers Collective and was listed as one of ten "up-and-coming queer filmmakers already changing the world" (Queerty, 2018).

KEYNOTE

'Unbury Your Gays': Queer Zombies, Assimilation Anxieties and Mental Illness

Dr. Darren Elliott-Smith (University of Hertfordshire)

This keynote extends on my previous publications on Queer Zombies (*Queer Horror Film and Television: Sexuality and Masculinity at the Margins* (IB Tauris, 2016); *Screening the Undead* (IB Tauris, 2014); *Zombies and Sexuality* (MacFarland, 2014) where I argue that recent incarnations of the queer undead (alongside other monsters) have represented sub-cultural anxieties within the gay male community that have risen as a result of cultural acceptance and normative assimilation. Jeffrey Sconce (2013) states that, in a 'post-Uncanny' age, the zombie is perhaps the most obvious among Western culture's dead metaphors and undead allegories. I argue that the queer zombie is a visibly 'out', yet sympathetic, monster who has difference performed or writ out upon his skin and flesh which works, paradoxically, both to marginalise and to assimilate them into the horde. This presentation will consider Bruce LaBruce's foray into queer zombie art-pornography (*Otto; or Up With Dead People* (2008) and *LA Zombie* (2010)) which references a fashionable trend in 'zombie drag' within popular culture. LaBruce's films feature central protagonist zombies who, by their own admission, suffer from 'an identity crisis'. LaBruce satirises the homogenous, promiscuous, 'dead' clubbing culture within gay male community (populated with 'fake zombies') as our undead anti-heroes fail to conform to stereotype.

More seriously, these films and more recent depictions of the queer undead focus on the mental health implications of isolation and alienation both from within and without certain queer sub-cultures and communities. The presentation will consider the recent Irish zombie-drama *The Cured* (Freyne, 2018) and the cult BBC Three serial drama *In the Flesh* (2013-2015) both of which configure a post-zombie world in which the undead have been rehabilitated and relocated back into their domestic community alongside their 'living' friends and families. In particular the BBC drama follows Kieren Walker (Luke Newberry) as a young bisexual man whom, having committed suicide, rises from the dead only to be rehabilitated as a 'partially deceased syndrome' sufferer by the government and confined/closeted back home with his family. Like LaBruce's works, *In the Flesh* also reimagines zombie-ism (queerness) as a disorder that can be treated and 'fixed' with medication. I want to suggest that these performative queer zombie texts work to depict queer masculinity as particularly fragile and susceptible to mental anguish. Keiren, the eponymous *Otto* (Jey Crisfar) and *LA Zombie's* unnamed alien revenant and Senan in *The Cured* (all of whom have (un)successfully attempted suicide) all suffer a very real emotional turmoil that resounds strongly within the gay community. The performative elements of these undead queer figures present themselves in the corporeal reality of their experience from panic attacks,

'passing', group therapy and the marginalisation of the zombie/queer community. These humorous, yet elegiac texts suggest that death does not provide an easy way out from cultural persecution and mental distress, as Otto himself asks: 'how do you kill yourself when you're already dead?'

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