



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE AND BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Transgressive Identities and Subjectivities Conference
17-18 June 2025

The Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research and Birmingham City University extend a warm welcome to you at the Transgressive Identities and Subjectivities Conference 2025. We hope you find the conference informative, insightful and enjoyable, and that you also make some positive connections over the duration of the conference. We would very much welcome your feedback after the conference.

Dr Poppy Wilde (Conference Convener) poppy.wilde@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Matt Grimes (Conference Convener) matt.grimes@bcu.ac.uk



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

BCMCR

Birmingham Centre
for Media and
Cultural Research

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE: Day 1 TUESDAY 17TH JUNE

9.00am-9.15am Registration. Foyer/Atrium Parkside Building, City centre campus.

Refreshments served in Room P132 1st Floor Parkside Building

9.15am-9.30am Welcome and opening remarks Room P131, 1st Floor Parkside Building

9.30am-11am **Panel 1: Non-Human and Transgressive Bodies.** Chair: Dr Matt Grimes. Room P131

- Reuben Mount *Furry Ex-Machina 2.0*
- Nathalie Schäfer *The Hybrid Self: Exploring The Intersection of Human and Non-Human Agents in Online Identity Formation*
- Lucas Rinzema *"I Am Vegan, Not Human": Veganism as Subversive Subjectivity*
- Christopher West *Transforming Jericho Roads The Trans Samaritan and the Salvation of the Church*

11am-11.30am Break with refreshments. Room P132

11.30am-1.00pm **Panel 2: Representing "Subversive" Genders.** Chair: Dr Poppy Wilde. Room P131

- Meera Darji *Transindia: The story of India's Hijras and being the transgressive filmmaker (short screening with paper)*
- Hannah Yelin *The identificatory desires of trans and nonbinary youth: "that is similar to how I feel, and who I want to be, and there's actually a name for it"*
- Christine Binnie and Jill Westwood *Menstrual Cooking Blood Magic (screening)*
- Hazel Collie and Gemma Commane *From Subversion to Spectacle: The Limitations of Transgression in RuPaul's Drag Race*

1pm-2pm Lunch. Room P132

2pm-3.30pm **Panel 3: Horror and Monstrosity.** Chair: Dr Nick Webber. Room P131

- Shaun Magher *The Face Remains the Same: Leatherface, Sweet Tooth and Transgressive Mixing Across Film and Videogames*
- Tom Sedgwick *The Man of Anxiety - Yozo Oba as a Transgressive Identity*
- Paula Garcia *Reclaiming Female Identity Through Transformation in Rachel Yoder's 'Nightbitch'*
- Xavier Mendik and Daniel Sheppard *Scum of the Earth: Creating America's Rural Communities of Horror*

3.30pm-4pm Break with refreshments. Room P132

4pm-5.30pm. **Panel 4: Transgressive Game Cultures.** Chair: Meera Darji. Room P131

BCMCR Game Cultures Cluster

- Andrew Bell *Taking/Making Queer Space Through the Traversal of the Monster-Non-Monster Divide*
- Harrison Charles *(Role)Playing Transgressively: Subjective Parameters of Play and Deviance*
- Charlotte Stevens *Transgressive Play in Fictional Chinese VR*
- Nick Webber *"Just roleplaying"? Player discourse and transgressive play in EVE Online*
- Poppy Wilde *Transgressing the humanist self through avatar-gamer relations*

5.30pm Wine Reception. Room P132

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE: Day 2 Wednesday 18TH JUNE

8.30am-8.45am Late Registration Foyer/Atrium Parkside Building, City Centre campus

8.45am-9.00am Refreshments P132 1st Floor Parkside Building

9.00am-10.30am **Panel 5: Class, Culture and Consumerism.** Chair: Dr Matt Grimes. Room P131

- Ondřej Daniel *Beyond the Shadows: Transgression and Identity in Second Wave Black Metal*
- Ada Marlen *The Proletarian Con-Goer: Searching for Anti-Capitalist Expressions with Comic Con Culture*
- Laura Way *Transgressive women making transgressive art? Exploring identities through creative workshops with punk women*
- Roger Martinez *The Changing Place of Normalcy and Transgression in Youth Geographies*

10.30am-11.00am Break with refreshments. Room P132

11.00am-12.30pm **Panel 6: Music, place, and the articulation of transgressive**

identities: Popular Music Listening Session Playlist. Chair: Dr Asya Draganova. Room P131

BCMCR Popular Music Research Cluster

- Asya Draganova - Song: Broadcast – Come On, Let's Go (2000)
- Sarah Thirtle - Song: Black Sabbath – Paranoid (1969)
- Matt Grimes - Song: Napalm Death – Born on Your Knees (1987)
- Benjamin Torrens - Song: Capital Letters – Smoking My Ganja (1979)
- Peter Newton - Song: The Electric Light Orchestra - 10538 Overture (1971)
- Rosemary Williams – Song: The Mourning Suns – I Didn't Think (2020)

12.30pm-1.30pm Lunch. Room P132

1.30pm-3.00pm **Panel 7: Social Media and Online Transgressions.** Chair: Dr Karen Seaward-Patel.

Room P131

- Charlie Roberts *Heterosexual masculinities, transgressive potentialities, and the promotion of OnlyFans group sex content.*
- Arianna Bussoletti *Queering families online: Investigating parenthood and transgression among same-sex parent influencers on Instagram*
- Ella Holi *Your Butt Goes Against Our Community Guidelines*
- Souraj Dutta *New Aesthetics of Dissidence: Instagram and Civil Protest in India*

3.00pm-3.30pm Break with refreshments. Room P132

3.30pm-5.00pm. **Panel 8: Cultural Theory Roundtable.** Chair: Dr Poppy Wilde. Room P131

BCMCR Culture, Activism, and Alternative Politics Cluster

- Dr. Gemma Commane
- Dr. Gary Hazeldine
- Prof. Kirsten Forkert
- Dr. Zaki Nahaboo
- Dr. Licheng Qian

5.00pm-5.30pm CFC: Transgressive Identities and Subjectivities Book and closing remarks.

Room P131.

5.30pm post-conference social at The Woodman pub, opposite Millennium Point.

A huge thank you to all of our presenters and panel chairs over the duration of the conference.

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Panel 1: Non-Human and Transgressive Bodies.

Reuben Mount / Vanguard Husky. Birmingham City University

Furry Ex Machina 2.0: VRChat as a transgressive conduit for exploring representative identities in the furry fandom

We could approach the furry fandom through many lenses of transgression; however, we would argue that one of the most transgressive acts performed by the furry fandom is the creation of the fursona - an anthropomorphic animal character that acts as both a presentation and representation of the individual – due to its allowances to explore and perform identities that lie outside of expected conformity. Fursonas are often created across different furry spaces through interactions with other furies and through personal or commissioned artwork before becoming a reflection of the whole self (Maase, 2015) and are used almost exclusively in interactions in furry spaces.

The furry space we want to discuss is VRChat (VRChat, 2014), a ‘social platform with a focus on hanging out and talking with people from around the world in virtual spaces created by the platforms many users’ (Asshoff, 2022). Due to VRChat containing mostly user-created experiences, it has provided new avenues for the furry fandom to not only enter and explore the fandom itself but also explore themselves and create their own fursonas. Furthermore, the furry fandom has utilised this platform for online furry conventions (fur cons), such as Furity Online Xperience, also known as Furity (WikiFur, 2025), among other communal activities.

This paper will examine VRChat as a specific site of identity generation for the furry fandom, not only as a transgressive means of exploring identity generally, but also as a transgression itself of the previously established “norms” of how fursonas are created in the community. This will outline the “standard pipeline” for the creation of this identity, with consideration of how this act is itself transgressive, before elaborating on how VRChat has altered this pipeline and how this potentially alters the performance of the fursona and affects the creation of these representational identities.

***Reuben Mount** is a furry academic and final year post-graduate researcher in the U.K. studying the furry fandom as a safe space to explore identity and recently co-founded and co-chaired the first international academic conference of furry studies in Rotterdam. He graduated from the University of Brighton with a BA in English Language and English Literature in 2016, then returned to study a MA in Media and Cultural Studies at Birmingham City University in 2020, before beginning his PhD at the same institution studying the furry fandom in 2022. His wider research interests include furry media and video game cultures.*

Nathalie Schäfer. Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

The Hybrid Self: Exploring the Intersection of Human and Non-human Agents in Online Identity Formation

By running a profile on social media platforms like Instagram, we construct, express, and maintain an online identity (Serafinelli 2018) that is always already entangled with the technology that conditions its existence in the first place. Botting adds another dimension to the entangled nature of online identities. It describes, in this case, the operation of fame-enhancing bots on Instagram, which automate engagement and content posting. Due to its aFects and eFects, some Instagrammers perceive it as transgressive play with identities and cheating on the community (Schäfer 2024).

To prevent Instagram from detecting this automation tool, fame-enhancing bots act like human users in their user's name. Acknowledging their hybrid character, botters seem to form transgressive identities. This contribution seeks to explore the transgressive identity of botters and asks how media and the relations between humans and media (technologies) form these hybrid modes of being. The study focuses not only on the impact of media on moving outside of expected conformity but also on transgressing the boundary of a solely human online identity.

The concept of *anthropomediality* examines relations between humans and media, “aim[ing] to rethink the mediatic shaping and reshaping of human knowledge, practice, bodies and ultimately modes of existence” (Voss 2023: 1). It highlights the existence- forming role of media technical environments, which bring forth and interact with specific modes of existence. In this respect, Instagram aForded the creation of an online identity. Its algorithmic ranking and content moderation system, among other things, created the visibility game, which led to the development of botting as a cultural practice.

A media-anthropological approach reveals the complex relations of humans and media that shape transgressive online identities like those of botters, delivering a broader understanding of its cultural, social, and political implications.

Nathalie Schäfer is a doctoral candidate at the DFG Research Training Group Media Anthropology at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, working on her dissertation on *Fame Enhancing Bots*. Her research interests focus on human and automated cultures within digital platforms. She received her B.A. in Art, Music, and Media from the Philipps- Universität Marburg and the Université de Poitiers (2017) and holds an M.A. in European Film and Media Studies and a Master Cinéma et Audiovisuel from the Université Lumière Lyon II, the Bauhaus University Weimar and the Universiteit Utrecht (2019). She is a member of the Association of Internet Researchers and the German Association of Media Studies.

Lucas Rinzema. Independent researcher

"I Am Vegan, Not Human": Veganism as Subversive Subjectivity

The industrial exploitation of farmed animals is already ubiquitous and still rapidly expanding across the planet. The carnist (Joy 2010) epistemologies and subjectivities that undergird such violence often go unquestioned—they hide behind the facades of normality and humanity, remaining nameless in the process. Veganism can, at its best, challenge this orthodoxy by establishing anti-hierarchical subject positions through persistent reiterations of practices ranging from writing to witnessing (Gillespie 2016; Salih 2018) and from protesting to checking ingredient lists. In this talk, I gather various moments in the

enactment of vegan ways of being, from 1940s vegan activists building media ecologies (Cole 2014) to vegan killjoys disturbing dinner tables (Ahmed 2023; Gillespie 2018; Twine 2014) and the entanglements and intersections of veganisms, feminisms and other liberationist practices and positions. In doing so, I read vegan subject positions as “zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability,” to borrow Anna Tsing’s insightful description of marginality (1994, p. 279), and argue that they contest normative humanity (McKay 2018) and its political extension into human supremacy (Crist 2017) and sovereignty (Wadiwel 2015).

Lucas Rinzema is an independent researcher, writer and filmmaker. He recently graduated from the Research MA in Arts, Media and Literary Studies at the University of Groningen, and holds BA degrees in Philosophy and in Arts, Culture and Media from the same university. Current research interests revolve around critical animal studies, ecofeminism, and film and media studies, with a specific focus on the (in)visibilities of violence and farmed animals in contemporary animal industries.

Christopher N. West. University of Aberdeen

Transforming ‘Jericho Roads’: The Trans Samaritan and the Salvation of the Church

It is now commonplace to speak of ‘Good Samaritans’. Conventional readings of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, as found in the Gospel of Luke (10: 25-37), tend to affirm largely white cis-male churchgoers as gracious benefactors – those who apparently have the will and the resources needed to help the person understood to be lying at the side of the Jericho Road. This paper problematises such readings and argues that Christ is properly understood as the Good Samaritan in the parable. Given that Christ’s body is the body of all bodies, his body is also the trans body. The reading now open to us as a result of taking these considerations seriously, this paper argues, would help the Church to discern the particular revelation offered by trans identities: the very salvation of the Church depends on them.

Following the insights provided by Kenyan theologian Esther Mombo, this paper suggests – in closing – how this reading of the parable might help to challenge and transform contemporary ‘Jericho Roads’.

Christopher N. West (he/him) is a PhD candidate in Practical Theology at the University of Aberdeen, where he is researching how the performance of symbolic actions in Anglican liturgy impacts the espoused theologies of largely non-churchgoing participants. He is both an Irish Anglican priest and a critical friend of the Church.

Panel 2: Representing “Subversive” Genders.

Meera Darji. Birmingham City University

Transindia: The story of India’s Hijras and being the transgressive filmmaker (short screening with paper)

I would like to contribute to the conference by sharing/screening excerpts of my work ‘Transindia’ a documentary film alongside a talk/presentation or panel discussion. I will be discussing how the current BCMCR theme of Transgressive Identities and subjectivities applies to my practice. I will be using the case study of my documentary *Transindia: The story of India’s Hijras* to explore the representation of the Hijra community, an identity which is often misunderstood. There will be a conversation around the challenges of subjectivity in the context of cinema vérité techniques and how this impacts the nature of her transgressive films. I will also elaborate on how transgression within the film has impacted wider society globally in a positive light through film festival distribution. Additionally, I will also highlight how there are limitations with this approach as subjectivity is undoubtedly formed through building a rapport in the community, rediscovering the history and the editing selection process which in turn becomes a challenging concept in my practice. I will speak about the direct cinema movement, a technique inspired by Vertov (1920), Wiseman (1967), and Maysles (1920). Adopting methods such as long takes, very small crews, no staging, and avoiding reconstruction, I have uncovered deeper truths through challenging environments and rigorous filming. Herzog (2010) describes this phenomenon as ‘The Absolute, the Sublime, the Truth’, a concept which I continue to experiment with and try to achieve through my work. I will connect these technical elements to how they have helped me shape community narratives and represent transgressive identities.

Meera Darji is an award-winning documentary filmmaker. She is a Lecturer and Practice-based researcher at Birmingham City University. Her independent documentary films have been awarded at international film festivals and recent experimental films have been exhibited at various exhibitions. *Transindia: The story of India’s Hijras* won the Royal Television Society Award for best factual in the Midlands, best short documentary at the Kashish Mumbai LGBT Festival in India and she was also nominated for the Sky Atlantic Grierson Award. Her research focuses on investigating kino eye and cinema vérité techniques to present a more inclusive, and therefore, more ‘authentic’ voice in documentary practice. She experiments with ethno-sensory praxis combined with immersive technologies to tell real stories of marginalised communities in India. Current practice-based output that she is working on is *Majoor 9195*, a portrait on Indian female construction workers in Gujarat, India.

Dr Hannah Yelin, Reader in Media and Culture Oxford Brookes

The identificatory desires of trans and nonbinary youth: “that is similar to how I feel, and who I want to be, and there's actually a name for it”

Laws like those passed in Trump’s first day back in office (Thoreson, 2025) and the indefinite ban removing access to gender affirming healthcare in the UK (Triggle, 2024) seek to erase the existence of trans and

non-binary people and especially young people. Against a backdrop of queerphobia, trans and non-binary public figures in particular function to shape public understanding of trans issues through the proliferation of discourse around them. For trans and non-binary youth, seeing both how trans public figures are treated, and how they respond, shapes their understanding of their own standing in society while also pointing to possibilities for resistance, reassurance and agency. Using data from interviews with 9 trans and nonbinary young people aged 14-23, this paper asks how young trans and non-binary people navigate contemporary celebrity culture and transphobia targeting high profile trans and non-binary figures and how this relates to their own ideas about their opportunities for power and visibility.

Media texts are popularly assumed to have a predominantly affective function for audiences, however studies with audiences reveal that media “can be used to perform and display types of agency” in an “ongoing and reflexive subcultural project of the self” (Hills, 2005: 91). As well as favouring media featuring figures with whom they share identities in terms of gender, age, or race, children and young people undertake acts of “wishful identification”, preferring media centred upon characters they *wish* to be like (Brown and Pardun, 2004). This use of media to identify with ideal selves and subjectivities offers young people the opportunity to imagine themselves with the characteristics they find desirable, irrespective of the constraints of their actual realities (Bessi re et al, 2007: 530). As one 21-year-old trans man I interviewed said of the TV show Heartstopper, “that is similar to how I feel, and who I want to be, and there's actually a name for it”.

Dr Hannah Yelin is a Reader in Gender, Media and Culture at Oxford Brookes University specialising in the politics of visibility. She is the author of *Celebrity Memoir: from Ghostwriting to Gender Politics*, Director of Cultures of Digital Hate, Chair of the Creative Industries Research and Innovation Network, host of the *Celebrity Culture Club*, co-author of *Girls, Leadership and Women in the Public Eye*, and serves on the Editorial Board of *Women's Studies International Forum*.

Christine Binnie & Dr Jill Westwood

Menstrual Cooking Blood Magic

The short film ‘Menstrual Cooking Blood Celebration’ c.1988/2023 by Christine Binnie and Jill Westwood, screened at the BFI as part of the exhibition *Women In Revolt (WIR)* Tate Britain (2024), and *Radical Anthropology Group Lets Bleed, Lunar New Year* (2024), exists in a transgressive zone: the taboo and power of menstrual blood.

This film collaboration was made in the wake of punk and the context of Thatcher’s Britain, when both Christine and Jill were in menstrual synchrony. It features a ritual recipe of their flowing menstrual blood, the making of bread goddesses and a celebratory embodiment of Shelanagig. The soundtrack was created in 2023 for its re-emergence as part of the WIR project and features *Fistfuck* (industrial noise-performance phenomenon of 1980s), Sacred Women’s chants and the voice of Thatcher.

This presentation is part of an ongoing collaborative practice that arose out of friendship and an immersion in the underground night clubs, arts scene, industrial music and sacred women's camps of the late 1980s. Where Christine and Jill drew influences from their different spheres encompassing confrontational performances, menstrual rituals and the industrial music scene in exploring taboos and transgressions concerning feminine sexuality and body image, and contesting gender power dynamics, provoking questions about female bodies, power, freedom and potential.

This rarely seen work aims to bring direct and embodied experiences into the discussion on transgressive identities and subjectivities and the presentation intends to give an opportunity to start to explore the meanings and potential legacies of this work, and to contribute to, and resonate with the conference themes, providing some nuanced insights as well as raising questions about the complexities of creativity within a particular transgressive zone of experience.

Christine Binnie is a craftswoman and performer, exploring magic and meaning within the mundane. Making ordinary pottery, with transgressive stirrings. Since 1981 Binnie has been part of the Neo Naturist performance collective. The Neo Naturists, use their painted naked bodies, to create colourful, meaningful performances which challenge narratives. Recent: RAG Dark Moon Menstrual Huts 2025; Towner Eastbourne; Women in Revolt – BFI/Tate Britain/NGS/Whitworth 2023-25; Lets Bleed 2024; Nude Performance Lecture - Tate Britain Galleries 2024; Radical Landscapes - Tate Liverpool/William Morris Gallery 2022-2024; ReSisters - Barbican 2023; Life, Art and Us, The Binnie Sisters-Towner, Eastbourne 2020; The Neo Naturists-Studio Voltaire 2016.

Dr Jill Westwood is an artist, art psychotherapist and researcher working across a range of practices spanning film, performance and writing. Westwood's "life as art" approach in the 1980s explored sexuality and power, challenging patriarchal codes towards transformative processes. Westwood was in the industrial noise-performance phenomenon - *Fistfuck* (1981-4). Her work is featured in *Women In Revolt*, Tate Britain/BFI/NGS, Whitworth (2023-2025). She has led MA Art Psychotherapy programs at Western Sydney University and Goldsmiths University, London.

Christine and Jill's friendship and collaboration spans 40 years and continues through *Miss Marina Psychopomp*, a shamanic inspired performance collaboration, conceived with an impetus to connect with people for transformative experiences.

Gemma Commane and Hazel Collie. Birmingham City University

From Subversion to Spectacle: The Limitations of Transgression in *RuPaul's Drag Race*

Drag performance has frequently been positioned as a transgressive act (Muñoz 1999; Schacht and Underwood 2004; André and Chang 2006; Bourcier 2006), despite words of caution regarding context (Butler 1993, 2004; Halberstam 1998). Context is particularly significant when considering *RuPaul's Drag Race* (RPDR). The reality game show offers a global platform for drag performers' artistry and personal stories and is celebrated for bringing visibility to drag subculture and LGBTQ lives (Collie and Commane, 2020, Feldman and Hakim, 2020). The show enables the visibility of 'gay culture', acceptance and 'diverse' stories in a global context for queer and non-queer audiences. However, what constitutes 'drag' within the show, who is successful, who is to be celebrated or laughed at is mediated through how popular drag is branded by *RPDR*, with reference to the successful figure of RuPaul herself (see Collie and Commane

2020). The lens of reality competition television arguably develops a reductive representation of drag, prioritising entertainment and marketability over 'authentic' representation (Anderson, 2022) and transgressive political potential (Muñoz 1999), inhibiting wider radical engagement with identity and self-expression. Commodification extends to contestants' identities and subjectivities, particularly in later seasons where queens are expected to hone their individual 'brand' as key to success and longevity (both on and beyond the show). Experiences of marginalisation, as well as style of drag, are packaged for mainstream consumption, creating a monocultural vision of drag. Drawing upon textual analysis, we explore the complex tensions that have emerged as seasons and the franchise have developed. What happens when transgressive identities are packaged in non-transgressive contexts and formats, and distributed through mainstream platforms? We argue that the processes of mainstreaming identities in a commodified package, aligned with the requirements to win a game show (and wider branding demands), limits the transgressive and political potential of drag performance in the mainstream.

Dr Gemma Commene is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication. Broadly the areas of her expertise span the fields of media and cultural studies and gender and sexuality. Her research interests focus on contemporary cultural studies, queer studies, sexual economies and *Intimate Labour*, dangerous femininities, and ethnography. She is one of the founding members of *Bean Flicks* Birmingham's only queer and ethical feminist porn festival. In her first book *'Bad Girls, Dirty Bodies: Sex, Performance and Safe Femininity'* (Bloomsbury 2020), Gemma critically explores the social, sexual and political significance of women who are labelled 'bad', sluts or dirty.

Dr Hazel Collie is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication at Birmingham City University. She has published in journals such as *Screen*, *VIEW*, *Media History* and *Celebrity Studies*. Her research and teaching interests lie in television, popular culture, media audiences, media histories and gender. These encompass representations of gender, ethnicity and social class in, for example, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, generational experience and discourse, oral history work with historical television audiences and memory work in media histories. She is a member of Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR).

Panel 3: Horror and Monstrosity.

Shaun Magher. Birmingham City University

The Face Remains the Same: Leatherface, Sweet Tooth and Transgressive Mixing Across Film and Videogames

The social, historical and industrial constructions of monstrosity have become key objects of discussion for film and videogame scholars alike. Monstrous figures often expose the paradoxes surrounding physicality (Carroll, 1990), whilst their 'degraded' bodies also betray the socio-economic constraints underpinning monstrous marginality (Wood, 1986). Equally, monsters and their intended prey also pose challenging issues of cross-media identification for (cinematic) viewers and (videogame) players (Clover [1990], Švelch [2023]).

This paper investigates transgressive remediations of film and videogame monstrosity through the consideration of two case-studies. The first derives from the horror film franchise *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), focussed on the unstoppable killer Leatherface. The second case-study is adapted from the Sony PlayStation videogame franchise *Twisted Metal* (1995-2023), dominated by the flaming haired maniacal ice-cream van clown, Sweet Tooth. Despite their origins across differing media platforms, this paper charts a series of connections between the two transgressive characters, noting the emergence of interchangeable sets of physiological and personality traits, as well as comparable family conflicts and emergent companion figures that further function to confound the barriers between normality and transgression. Additionally, the role of the mask as a key characteristic of both figures will be assessed as "a symbol of chaos and breakdown of social order, a denial of the "open face" of human exchange" (Sharrett, 1984).

By assessing modes of media switching from film/TV to game (Leatherface) and game to film/TV (Sweet Tooth) the paper will indicate the transgressive potentials these case-studies offer for monstrous adaptations across film and videogame formats (Lukas, 2008). It will also consider the industrial factors behind these transmedia mediations, utilising primary interview data with videogame creators associated with such videogame formats.

Shaun Magher is a Senior Academic within the areas of Film and Animation at Birmingham City University. With a long career, spanning 40 years, working within the Film, TV and Games industries as Animator, Director and Producer. He is founder of the Stoke Your Fires festival of Animation, Director of the Feature documentary *Somewhere in La Mancha*, in collaboration with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, and currently is co-authoring a book with writer, James Clarke, entitled *Finding the Wonder*. This exploration of the art of story within the international screen industries utilises Shaun's extensive industry networks as its key case studies.

Tom Sedgwick. Birmingham City University

The Man of Anxiety - Yozo Oba as a Transgressive Identity

Osamu Dazai is infamous for his pessimistic storytelling, but the transgressive, generation-defining protagonists he created in post-WWII Japan still connect with audiences today. In particular, Yozo Oba, from *No Longer Human* (1948), has received a new wave of attention due to the novel's adaptation into various

cultural products, especially manga. This paper focuses on Junji Ito's horror manga adaptation of *No Longer Human* (2017) as a progression of Dazai's original vision into a pessimistic masterwork. Yozo, in both instances, is extreme in his pessimism and, to the point of self-destruction, is constantly at odds with his friends, family, society, and himself. However, in Ito's adaptation, Yozo's transgressive qualities are heightened, and the original representations of existential dread are now grounded in palpable relatability and, in other instances, raised to disordered psychological phantasmagoria.

The intersection between pessimism and horror is not unprecedented: pessimist philosopher and horror media scholar Eugene Thacker has briefly analysed the works of Dazai and Ito in previous publications and integrated them into a canon of pessimist culture. Despite this, Ito's illustrative progression of *No Longer Human*'s protagonist lacks broader academic attention. Expanding on Thacker's foundational research, I demonstrate that Yozo aligns with my developing theory of the archetypal pessimistic figure, The-Man-of-Anxiety, as first established by Emil Cioran's pessimist meditations in *The Trouble with Being Born* (1973). This paper thus outlines the contemporary relevance of Yozo as an archetypal philosophical identity that transgresses beyond literary limitations and subverts societal expectations through the medium of horror manga. In my conclusion, through applied pessimist theory and close visual-textual analysis of Ito's *No Longer Human*, I argue that there is a noteworthy introspective *simpatico* present between modern pessimist theory, existential literature, and illustrative horror fiction in the manga's representation of Yozo as a transgressive identity.

Tom Sedgwick is a current 2nd year PhD Art and Design student of BCU whose research is centred around the global significance of pessimist theory in contemporary popular culture. Sedgwick's thesis, *Manifest Doomsday - Horror Manga as the Progression of Pessimistic Philosophy and Art*, analyses the theoretical correlations between the progression of Western pessimist theory with contemporary Japanese horror manga and its existence in the commercially successful realm of modern horror media. Outside their current research practice, Sedgwick is also interested in the significance of spiritual/religious dialogues in modern culture and is a dark-surrealist artist.

Paula García-Rodríguez. University of Málaga

Reclaiming Female Identity through Transformation in Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch*

In contemporary literature, it is common for authors to use the fantastic and the monstrous as tools to question established norms, providing space for subjectivities that resist conventional categories. Such narratives offer new ways of thinking about power and agency within a context dominated by social expectations. Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* (2021) subverts this tradition by turning monstrosity into a form of resistance. Through the progressive transformation of her protagonist into a half-woman, half-beast, the novel destabilises traditional motherhood and normative femininity, exploring subjectivities that escape binarism and enforced domestication. More than mere allegory, the metamorphosis in *Nightbitch* is an act of insurgency that defies the structures that limit the female body and identity. Yoder employs a visceral magical realism to reconfigure motherhood not as sacrifice, but as a space of transgression, and the fantastic –a historically male-dominated genre– as a tool to narrate the female condition from a radical perspective. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's *Abject* (1980), Barbara Creed's *Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) or Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Use* (2019), I will explore how the protagonist re-signifies her body and her role as a mother by

inhabiting it in a non-normative way, inscribing the novel in a genealogy of narratives where the monstrous and the fantastic are used as synonymous with transgression.

Paula García-Rodríguez is a first year PhD student in the University of Málaga, and is part of the project *Trans-formations: Queer Practices of Use and Embodiment in post 9/11 Narratives in English*. She holds a Master's degree in Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Studies from the University of Seville and a double degree in English Studies and Hispanic Philology from the University of Huelva. Her interests lie in gender and feminist studies, popular culture, the fantastic, magical realism and speculative fiction.

Xavier Mendik & Daniel Sheppard. Birmingham City University

Scum of the Earth: Creating America's Rural Communities of Horror

Through the multiple and overlapping terms of “hicksplotation,” “hixploitation,” “crackersplotation,” as well as the more general tag of “white trash,” American cinema has developed a set of themes and visual tropes to represent “transgressive” rural communities across a variety of genres and historical periods. Although the longstanding myth of the rural “hick” has inspired a wide variety of cinematic cycles from sentimental dramas and ribald comedies to action film franchises and race conflict narratives, the most prolific era of “white trash” cinema remains the 1970s. Here, readily available stereotypes of transgressive, debased rurality circulated within a wide variety of horror films. As popularised by titles such as John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972), Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), and Meir Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), these narratives popularised the American South as a foreboding terrain whose inhabitants exact retribution for their social and political marginality against a range of unwitting urban outsiders. This paper examines *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as exemplary of the rural South's counter construction in 1970s American horror cinema, demonstrating how the film works through harmful stereotypes to transgress and fundamentally subvert cultural myth. This is achieved through an interrogation of existing academic discourse(s) that surround *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* alongside original interviews conducted with key cast and crew, including actors William Vail and Allen Danziger, cinematographer Daniel Pearl, and sound technicians Ted Nicolaou and Wayne Bell. *Scum of the Earth* is part of a wider practice-based research project, funded by BCMCR, that extends existing scholarship on “white trash” in American genre cinema through a series of interviews with the artists behind these films. The project is scheduled to be realised in a feature length documentary that will be exhibited through international film festival submissions, national film platforms, and potential DVD/Blu-ray distribution.

Xavier Mendik is Professor of Cult Cinema Studies at Birmingham City University, from where he runs the Cine-Excess International Film Festival. He is the author, editor and co-editor of ten volumes on cult and horror film traditions. Some of his publications include *Shocking Cinema of the 70s* (with Julian Petley, 2022), *Bodies of Desire and Bodies in Distress: The Golden Age of Italian Cult Cinema* (2015), *Peep Shows: Cult Film and the Cine-Erotic* (2012) and *The Cult Film Reader* (with Ernest Mathijs, 2008). He has also completed a number of documentaries on cult film, most recently *The Quiet Revolution: State, Society and the Canadian Horror Film* (2020).

Daniel Sheppard is Visiting Lecturer in Film at Birmingham City University, where he recently earned his PhD in Media and Cultural Studies. He is Associate Editor of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Associate Director of Cine-Excess International Film Festival, and Associate Co-ordinator of the Screening Sex research network.

Panel 4: Transgressive Game Cultures

BCMCR Game Cultures Cluster. Birmingham City University

This panel proposal will bring together five game researchers, each demonstrating how their own work explores ideas and themes of transgressive identities and subcultures – either through transgressive relationships, representations, or play practices. Indicative titles and abstracts are included below.

Andrew Bell

Taking/Making Queer Space Through the Traversal of the Monster-Non-Monster Divide

This presentation will explore the queering of (game) systems by exposing their ideologies specifically through the game-monster. The game-monster offers an opportunity to play in counter-hegemonic ways by traversing the monster-non-monster divide. To play as the monster, in the style of that which is ordinarily designed *for* the player rather than for the player to *be*, exposes a greater sense of lack of balance and fairness in the system. I argue that queering the avatar in this way transgresses the sanctity of the system in that it exposes a fuller sense of the system's properties.

Harrison Charles

(Role)Playing Transgressively: Subjective Parameters of Play and Deviance

Transgression has been discussed in games studies in various ways, such as play actions against game intentions (Aarseth, 2007) or conducting “social unacceptable” gameplay interactions (Jørgensen and Karlsen, 2018; Carter, 2022). The player(s) conducting “deviant acts” can take on the role of transgressors in their play but may also encounter representations of transgression (from beyond and within the game space) to play with and “roleplay” as transgressors within the gameplay itself. This presentation explores how it is through these affordances of transgression that the parameters of play for the player fluctuate to suit their own subjective desires and intentions for their “playful actions.”

Charlotte Stevens

Transgressive Play in Fictional Chinese VR

This work draws on a chapter on a cycle of Chinese television dramas centring fictional VR games. These games tend to be produced by non-Chinese corporations; in this, VR gaming can be read a geopolitical metaphor, warning domestic audiences about the dangers of subverting the Great Firewall. The problem is not video games as an industry, but games which cut a player off from their surroundings and makes them vulnerable to foreign influences.

Nick Webber

“Just roleplaying”? Player discourse and transgressive play in *EVE Online*

This presentation discusses the use of roleplaying and storytelling in *EVE Online* to justify styles of play which some *EVE* players see as transgressive (of rules or social norms), focusing on the now-diminished CODE. Alliance. It explores CODE. members’ use of a developed backstory and in-character dialogue to underpin antagonistic and disruptive play, and responses to this from other players. The question of transgression here emerges against the backdrop of *EVE*’s code of conduct, within which “the claim of role-playing is not an acceptable defense for anti-social behavior”.

Poppy Wilde

Transgressing the humanist self through avatar-gamer relations

Humanism, influenced by Enlightenment thinking, lays a heavy focus on ideas of self-control, self-regulation, and self-mastery. In this view, the human is a static, bounded individual, exerting control over non-human things – environments, objects, machines, animals etc. – around it. My work disrupts this supposed stability through the use of critical posthumanism, which offers a view of subjectivity that transgresses such humanist assumptions. Using the avatar-gamer as an example, I show how they are entangled in a rhizomatic relation with mutual reciprocity, agency, and affect.

Andrew Bell is an Midlands4Cities PhD researcher, conducting their doctoral study within the College of English & Media. His project explores queer modes of game design, with a particular focus on the avatar and the opportunities presented by crossing, or eroding, the monster-non-monster divide. Their work engages in game-making as research, utilising practical techniques developed within a commercial game development setting.

Dr Harrison Charles recently completed his doctoral study at Birmingham City University. His project focuses on the genre and sexual play experiences of gay adult videogames and the crossover of pornography into games culture. His research engages with discourses on explicit sexual representation and sexual content in games, (gay) adult videogame history, gay pornography, sexual affect and transgression, and using autoethnographic approaches in conducting research.

Dr E. Charlotte Stevens is Lecturer in Media and Communications at Birmingham City University, where she co-leads the Game Cultures research cluster. She is author of *Fanvids* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), and has also published on videogame fan histories, screen vampires, and Chinese tomb-raiding television dramas.

Dr Nick Webber is Director of the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research at Birmingham City University, UK and co-convenor of the Historical Games Network. His research focuses on (video)games, cultural history and identity, and explores the impact of online games and virtual worlds on public history and our relationship with the past.

Dr Poppy Wilde is a Senior Lecturer in Media at Birmingham City University. She is the author of *Posthuman Gaming: Avatars, Gamers, and Entangled Subjectivities* (Routledge, 2023) and co-editor of *Working Women on Screen: Paid Labour and Fourth Wave Feminism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). Her research explores how posthuman subjectivities are enabled and embodied in a variety of contexts, particularly through gaming and affective and autoethnographic methodologies.

Panel 5: Class, Culture and Consumerism.

Ondřej Daniel. Charles University, Prague, CZ

Beyond the Shadows: Transgression and Identity in Second Wave Black Metal

This presentation examines the Second Wave of Black Metal (2WBM) through the lens of transgressive identities and subjectivities, aligning with the BCMCR conference's focus on how media, culture, and society shape such identities. By mapping the transgressive practices within 2WBM, this study explores the tensions between countercultural resistance, commodification, and ideological radicalism.

2WBM bands often embraced Satan as a figure of absolute evil, differentiating them from later, humanistic interpretations of Satanism (Introvigne, 2017). Case studies, including reactions from religious activists in Czechia and Slovakia, illustrate the dialectical interplay between Black Metal and religious authorities (Vrzal, 2022). Despite its claims of nihilism, parts of the scene gravitate towards radical politics, including National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM). The presentation thus examines NSBM as a form of hyper-transgression that paradoxically adheres to extreme ideological conformity (Olson, 2011; Hillier & Barnes, 2020). 2WBM's raw production, unconventional scales, and extreme vocal techniques exemplify how media and culture enable alternative modes of being and selfhood (Radovanović, 2016). The genre's initial DIY ethos conflicts with its increasing commodification. This segment addresses the limitations of transgression when absorbed into mainstream culture.

By examining these themes, this presentation aligns with the conference's goal of exploring both the potentials and limitations of transgression in shaping identities. In a time when expressions of transgression face increasing resistance, 2WBM serves as a critical case study for understanding the dynamic interplay between selfhood, media, and society.

***Ondřej Daniel** earned his PhD in history with a specialization on post socialism, nationalism, migration, and popular culture. He is working as a historian in the Seminar on General and Comparative History within the Department of World History at Charles University's Faculty of Arts. His work covers different aspects of reception of popular and alternative music. His recent book examines intersections of youth and social class and music in the contemporary Czech history.*

Ada Marlen. University of South Wales

The Proletarian Con-Goer: Searching for Anti-Capitalist Expressions within Comic Con Culture

The term 'Proletarian Shopping' provides insight into young people's experiences in commercialist spaces specifically shopping malls and how those with little purchasing power access and navigate a space that is not built for them (Fiske, 2003: 15-18), by occupying commercial space without intent to buy (Pressdee, 1985: 23). The term has Marxist connotations as inherently working class and anti-capitalist against bourgeois consumption. This defines interactions as resistance. Proletarian Shoppers subvert by refusing

to shop and refusing to leave. "Shopping can never be a radical, subversive act" (Fiske pp27), and so this act of shopping without shopping means access to spaces without reinforcing capitalist logics. Previous analysis in fan studies focus on groupings outside of the convention (Crawford and Hancock, 2018: 301–318) and thus fail to find a connection.

However, using autoethnographic research in my PhD, I analyse forms of proletarian shopping within comic conventions employed by low income groups minimising expense and allowing for fans to consume in these spaces without financing the "logic of endless capital accumulation (2016: 115). They may engage in 'room cramming', sneaking in, or engage in disruptive socials where alcohol and narcotics can be consumed. Notable is the repressive actions by authority figures, like organisers, security and the police to counter this. While supported by members of the fan community for several reasons (Bailey, 2018) little research has been undertaken in this area. My analysis uses the everyday resistance model to describe how these subaltern groups perform minor invisible acts for individual benefit (Scott, 1985: 290/292), allowing for greater critiques of their transgressions in analysis. This paper will further elaborate on the conditions of proletarian con-goers, their attitudes and goals as well as on their transgressive potential and limitations when limited by the authorities in the space.

***Ada Marlen** is a theatre practitioner and PhD research student with the University of South Wales in the Fourth year of their study. Their research explores the commercialisation of play in comic conventions and live action role-play (LARP) spaces as well as the way in which play exhibits resistance. They intend to create LARP projects which encourage fans to examine and discuss their labour and ownership of fan spaces.*

Dr Laura Way. University of Roehampton

Transgressive women making transgressive art? Exploring identities through creative workshops with punk women.

Subcultures can be viewed as potential spaces for women to engage in resistance and/or transgressive practices (Way, 2018; Williams, 2011). Whilst this is typically considered in scholarship on punk through a lens of gender (see, for example, Leblanc, 1999), understanding how this might intersect with age/ageing reveals greater complexities and nuances. This paper presents insights from a creative workshop with punk women which explored identities and gendered ageing, leading to the participants' creation of a visual installation. Methodologically, this approach responds to Back and Puwar's (2012) injunction to make our research 'more artful and crafty', recognising that whilst qualitative research has proved dominant in scholarship concerning ageing and (youth) subcultures, there has been less exploration of the potential of participatory research methods with participants. Picking up Segal's (2013) point that alternative narratives of ageing (which are not readily available) are needed for us to 'age better', this paper explores how the workshop and installation created might offer such alternative narratives; ones which transgress by responding to societal ideas and expectations that the participants perceived as put onto (ageing/older) women.

N.B. Alongside empirical insights from this project, photographs/videos will be shared with the audience as a means of 'viewing' the installation.

Laura Way is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Roehampton, UK. She is a feminist sociologist with research interests that encompass ageing and gender, families and (young) parenthood, marginalised identities/communities, punk pedagogies, and (youth) subcultures. She is a qualified teacher in lifelong learning and an experienced qualitative researcher, particularly in the areas of creative and participatory methods, and collaborative, community-based work. Laura is an editor of *Sociological Research Online* and sits on the editorial board for *Punk & Post-Punk* journal.

Roger Martínez. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Barcelona)

The Changing Place of Normalcy and Transgression in Youth Geographies (2000-2020)

In her 1999 depiction of the bohemianization of mass culture, Elisabeth Wilson highlighted the significant role popular culture played in disseminating (bohemian) transgression. After 25 more years of popular culture history and the profound impact of the Internet and social network sites on the way youth cultures, subcultures and styles are produced and experienced by young people, this paper examines the evolving ways in which normalcy and transgression are experienced in youth geographies. Rather than focusing on spectacular transgressions, the paper explores ordinary young people's cultural production, that is, the way young people in secondary schools they make sense of their social world and the place they occupy in it. The paper examines the changing articulation of 'normalcy' and 'transgression and provocation' in youth stylistic and social differentiations among secondary school pupils in Barcelona in the years 2000, 2010 and 2020. In each of the three consecutive qualitative fieldworks, in three different secondary schools each year, a total amount of 56, 48, and 35 young people were interviewed, either alone or in pairs, and all but 8 of them in their last year of compulsory education (16 years old). The findings reveal that youth geographies have become more diffuse, in part due to 1) the disappearance of term 'normal' from young people's vocabulary (though its meaning persists through other adjectives like 'basic'); 2) the diminishing importance of the classical sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll transgression in the main contemporary geographies mapped out by the main labels 'Caní', 'Otaku', and 'Aesthetics'; and 3) the complex ways in which the always situated character of 'resistance' and 'transgression' is negotiated through adolescence.

Roger Martínez is a Lecturer in the Arts and Humanities Studies at the Open University of Catalonia. He teaches courses in sociology and cultural studies. His research explores the relationship between culture and inequality, focusing on areas such as education, youth cultures, cultural tastes and consumption. Currently, he is investigating how more or less heterogeneous relational infrastructures influence the dispositions and trajectories of young people. He holds degrees in Information Sciences (Journalism) and Political Science and Sociology (Sociology) from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, where he also earned his PhD in Sociology, with part of the fieldwork conducted in Birmingham, UK.

Panel 6: Music, place, and the articulation of transgressive identities: a Listening Session.

BCMCR Popular Music Research Cluster. Birmingham City University

This Listening Session will be based on a playlist curated by members of the BCMCR Popular Music Research cluster to explore transgressive identities in relation to (disruptive) creative practices and innovations in music which connect with the significance of place, particularly Birmingham, as a geographical, symbolic, and social context for music cultures. The playlist will involve a range of styles; for example, it will reflect on Birmingham as the “home of metal” through acts like Black Sabbath, but it will also include content associated with the projects of researchers working in reggae, jazz, punk, and progressive pop and rock.

The Listening Session format has been developed as part of BA(Hons) Music Business’ extracurricular activities over the past six years. It includes listening to music – usually a whole album, but this time we will deviate and embrace the more inclusive playlist model – in a group, in full concentration, with no distractions, followed by discussion of the relationship of the music with the set theme, as well as its cultural, production, and economic values. Including such a session as part of the conference programme will contribute to the diversity of engaging alternative styles of presentation and discussion which the event seeks to encourage.

Within this Listening Session conference event, BCMCR members will be presenting short takes on how their chosen track reflects on the transgressive identities and subjectivities theme and the significance of Birmingham as a heritage and contemporary musical space. Along with the music selected by popular music cluster members, we will also be inviting conference participants to contribute to the playlist with the intention of turning this into one of the conference ‘extras’ – or its thematic soundtrack - with the potential for producing further outputs from it. We will include in the Listening Session and discussion on the day a small number of the wider conference participant playlist contributions on a random basis, in line with the tradition of our long-standing Listening Sessions with students.

Dr Asya Draganova is a Senior Lecturer in Popular Music Culture at Birmingham City University. She is the co-course leader for BA (Hons) Music Business and co-lead for the Popular Music Research Cluster at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research. She is the author of *Popular Music in Contemporary Bulgaria: at the Crossroads* (2019) and the lead editor for *The Canterbury Sound in Popular Music: Scene, Identity and Myth* (2021). Asya’s current research focuses on the changing nature of music scenes and alternative cultural practices. She is involved as an editorial board member in a range of peer-reviewed journals including *DiY*, *Alternative Cultures and Society* and *Riffs*.

Sarah Thirtle (FRSA) joined Birmingham City University as a PhD student in 2024, researching songwriting practice and its relationships and interactivity with Involuntary Musical Imagery – more commonly known as earworms. She has worked in the music and creative industries for over 20 years. As a promoter in the 2000s, she booked hundreds of shows in grassroots music venues in London, helping to kick start the careers of artists such as Keane, The Magic Numbers and Anna Calvi. This led the way to her starting her own live booking agency with a roster of new and established artists from across the UK, Europe and Canada. At this time she also took on management duties for pop artist Bright Light Bright Light, who has since gone on to tour with the likes of Cher, Erasure and Elton John. Over the years Sarah

has been invited to speak at numerous music industry conferences including The Great Escape, Access to Music and Liverpool Sound City. Currently she is splitting her time between her PhD studies, working as Director of Strategic Development for social enterprise Creative United and being a Trustee for the Music Venue Trust.

Dr Matt Grimes is a senior lecturer in music industries and radio at Birmingham City University. His research interests are British anarcho-punk and its ideological significance in the life courses of ageing punks. He has published on the subjects of anarcho-punk, anarcho-punk 'zines, punk pedagogy, popular music and spirituality, music , memory and nostalgia, DIY/Underground music cultures/subcultures, counter-cultural movements, and radio for social change. He is the general secretary of the Punk Scholars Network and Associate Editor for the journal of Punk & Post-Punk. Matt is also a lifelong supporter of Millwall FC.

Benjamin Torrens is a Midlands4Cities-funded doctoral researcher studying history of reggae production cultures in Jamaica and the UK. His research builds on his career as a reggae bass player with over a decade's experience in the scene.

Peter Newton is a current PGR at Birmingham City University looking at the sonic signature of Jeff Lynne and his musical contributions. He graduated from Nottingham Trent University with a 1st Class degree in Music Performance and a master's degree in creative technologies. He also holds a diploma from the London Collage of Music in musical theatre and an ABRSM grade 8 distinction for Alto Saxophone. As a performer, composer and producer, Peter has a deep connection to the music of Lynne, and is enjoying understanding the inner workings of his work on a deeper level and the environment that nurtured his talent.

Rosemary Williams is a mother, singer-songwriter, PhD candidate and Visiting Lecturer at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Her PhD research is practice-based and explores motherhood and songwriting. She writes, performs and records songs as one half of the songwriting duo behind the Birmingham-based country-rock band, The Mourning Suns. And she is in the throes of producing a new solo project.

Panel 7: Social media and online transgression

Charlie Roberts. Newcastle University

Heterosexual masculinities, transgressive potentialities, and the promotion of OnlyFans group sex content.

This paper explores the ways in which promotional trailers for all-male, group sex content on OnlyFans reveal how heterosexual masculinities simultaneously reinforce and transgress normative masculine conduct. Heterosexual masculinity is often framed as compulsory and natural, thus leaving no room for critical interrogation. However, Beasley uses the term 'heterodoxy' as a tool for "thinking differently about [...] hetero-masculinity" (2015, 147) to account for potential transgressions of heterosexual normalcy. Therefore, the all-male, promotional orgy trailer for content on OnlyFans can demonstrate how heterosexual masculinity is not a universal categorisation, but open to points of transgression.

Investigations focused on 40 UK-based content creators who perform hetero-masculinity on OnlyFans for a primarily gay male and queer audience. OnlyFans content creators utilise a vast array of social networking sites, with varying platform affordances, to promote their content. Therefore, this cross-platform study uses social media channels such as X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok as sites for promoting group sex content to explore how hetero-masculine subjectivities are moulded as they become curated in line with shifting platform vernaculars.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the group sex trailer functions at a complex intersection between normative hetero-masculinity and a site of transgressive heterodoxy. Through the eroticisation of all-male spaces in the pornographic trailers, distinctions between professional and amateur pornography are also blurred. Content creators use group sex as a form of homosocial bonding which echoes competitive forms of male communication, alongside collaborative support networks that resist against neoliberal individuality. Ultimately, I argue that these trailers, as a combination of amateurism and performed authenticity, further contribute to the collapsing of pornographic boundaries and expand ways of enacting hetero-masculinity.

***Charlie Roberts** is a Postgraduate Researcher in Media, Culture, Heritage at Newcastle University. His doctoral research, funded by the ESRC NINE DTP 1+3 studentship, explores how hetero-masculine content creators experience forms of labour, desire, and affect through the production of user-generated pornography on OnlyFans. His work provides a novel approach to OnlyFans research by examining how hetero-masculine content creators curate male-male sex acts for a primarily gay male and queer audience, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped digital pornographies. Charlie also works at the intersections of queer theory, digital sexualities and masculinities, neoliberalism, pornography, pleasure, and desire.*

Arianna Bussoletti. Sapienza University of Rome

Queering families online: Investigating parenthood and transgression among same-sex parent influencers on Instagram

In Italy, issues of sexual politics have been at the forefront of contemporary political and societal debates, with the country torn between the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ civil rights and a conservative backlash to

changes in family structures and roles. Traditional media either frame those outside of expected conformity as 'other' through stereotypical representations or impose silence through a lack thereof. In this scenario, digital media can offer an additional environment for expanding the definition of contemporary families and parenthood by affording transgressive subjectivities greater control over their own narratives.

Through digital ethnography of ten accounts of LGBTQ+ Instagram parent influencers, the contribution investigates self-representations of both motherhood and fatherhood and differences and similarities in portraying same-sex parenting, LGBTQ+ family, and in dealing with networked antagonism. Such method emphasizes queer media practices and transgressive identities' agency in defining themselves.

Given the lack of symbolic LGBTQ+ figures and events in Italy, studying LGBTQ+ parent influencers can provide a glimpse into the cultural and social presence of these subjectivities. Preliminary results observe practices, embodiment, and display of transgression in the context of family and parenthood. On the one hand, the study highlights influencers' emphasis on dismantling stereotypes that see queer parenthood as 'other' and selfish; on the other, it observes their effort to engage with questions of politics and advocacy work, due to a perceived duty to educate audiences. The contribution highlights potentials and limitations of transgression. It focuses on how parent-influencers negotiate and mitigate identity-based stigma and bias, embody activist roles for civil rights, and potentially grant Italians access to alternative models of gender and sexuality, offering representations of queer parenthood.

Arianna Bussoletti is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication and social research (Sapienza University of Rome) for the IANUS (Inspiring and Anchoring Trust in Science, Research and Innovation) project, funded by Horizon Europe. She is also an adjunct professor at the Department of Humanities of the University of L'Aquila and at Sapienza University of Rome. Her research explores the interplay between digital media usages and identity practices, with a focus on youth climate activism and the LGBTQ+ community.

Ella Holi. University of Bergen

Your Butt Goes Against Our Community Guidelines

"Instagram said, 'your butt goes against our community guidelines,'" writes a Norwegian fat activist in an Instagram post after a picture of her standing naked in a lake, with her back towards the camera, had been removed. The activist argues that Instagram only allows naked bodies if they are thin and conventionally beautiful, while fat bodies have a different set of rules. In this study, I explore how Nordic fat activists experience and make sense of Instagram's content moderation practices. Content moderation can take many forms from de-platforming, or removing content and users, to limiting the visibility of "problematic" content or users, also referred to as shadow banning (Gillespie, 2022). Studies show that vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as sex workers, women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community (Are, 2024; Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Haimson et al., 2021; Salty, 2021) disproportionately experience content moderation. However, the experiences of fat people, whose marginalization is often not recognized (Payne et al. 2025), have mostly been absent. Recent studies show that fat people are censored based on body size, while also falling victims to harassment that goes unnoticed and

unmoderated by social media platforms (Bishop & Rigakos, 2024; Payne et al., 2025). Through qualitative interviews and an analysis of social media content, I explore how Nordic activists experience various forms of content moderation, such as shadow banning or reporting, on Instagram. Drawing on previous research on social media content moderation, I analyze how they interpret these practices and negotiate the limits imposed on their visibility. By foregrounding the experiences of fat activists, I argue that Instagram's content moderation perpetuates exclusionary body norms, constructing fat bodies as transgressive.

Ella Holi (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the Center for Digital Narrative, a Norwegian Center of Research Excellence, at the University of Bergen. Ella's research focuses on fat social media narratives and their role in resisting and reshaping stigmatizing hegemonic narratives of fatness, with a focus on the Nordic context. She is particularly interested in how fat individuals, such as fat activists, use social media platforms to challenge dominant narratives and create alternative representations of fatness, and the challenges they face in their resistance. Ella's work is situated in the interdisciplinary field of fat studies, which seeks to dismantle societal biases surrounding fat bodies.

Souraj Dutta. Birmingham City University

New Aesthetics of Dissidence: Instagram and Civil Protest in India

On the morning of August 9, 2024, the semi-nude, heavily bruised body of a 31-year-old postgraduate trainee female doctor is found in the seminar room of a reputed medical college in Kolkata, India. It is alleged by her colleagues that she has been brutally raped and murdered. However, the police and the Government conduct a hurried post-mortem and arrange for the last rites within a very short period and carry out construction-related demolition works in the hospital premises, effectively obliterating pertinent evidence to the crime. In the next few days, protests erupt in several spots across the city, and within weeks, throughout the state, followed quickly by many parts of the country. From marches to scuffles with the state police, all aspects of the protests—led largely by doctors—are widely covered in both legacy news outlets and by ordinary citizens on social media. In this paper, I take up the latter of these two - the corpus of user-made protest media circulating on social media platforms in India, with specific focus on Instagram. These protests were also incidentally right on the heels of the student-led mass protests in Bangladesh which saw the ousting of its former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and the citizen-led protest coverage on social media in India borrowed heavily from the visual and sonic characters of the Bangladesh unrest. By looking at the memetic virality of these objects, I attempt to understand two interrelated aspects of protest media in digital social spaces – first, how particular technologies of image capture and dissemination employed in digital social spaces lend a particular aesthetic character to spontaneous (yet premeditated) coverage of civic dissidence and set them in dialogue with one another and second, how these activities interface and negotiate with the platform affordances of social media sites like Instagram.

Souraj Dutta is a postdoctoral fellow at Birmingham City University, working in the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research within Arts, Design and Media. He is currently working on a book project on digital public culture and internet memes in India

Panel 8: Roundtable discussion: Transgressive Identity Politics, Transgressing Identity Politics

BCMCR Culture, Activism, and Alternative Politics Cluster. Birmingham City University

This roundtable examines the current state of identity politics. It also considers how some of the most vocal forms of identity politics relay an essentialising approach to political subjectivity. Left identity politics champion ways of living, aspirations, and bodies that contest dominant expectations of who deserves recognition in public space. However, it can also be easy to assume that those subjected to discrimination automatically hold progressive views. What happens when those cast in a marginalised group depart from commitments to progressive politics: for example, groups such as Gays for Trump, or figures such as Suella Braverman, Kemi Badenoch or Alice Weidel? How might such figures position themselves as both “speaking for” their group and vindicating racism and sexism? In response, some on the left have sought to police what counts as a legitimate political viewpoint of a minoritised subject. Essentialist identity politics is also increasingly used by those on the Right: assertions of traditional gender roles through the ‘manosphere’; anti-trans politics; and claims to defend European civilisation against Muslims. The far right focuses upon ‘commonsense’ identity norms, which they position as under threat from ‘woke culture’. They demand hostility to those who do not identify with such norms.

The roundtable also responds to a situation where claims to transgress the status quo have become central to political life and are frequently made by those with power and privilege, including members of ruling governments. In the face of state-sanctioned efforts to undermine international law, domestic human rights, anti-racism legislation, and corporate EDI initiatives, the Left can be placed in the awkward position of trying to defend an already-compromised liberalism. However, this politics of preservation may not align with the goals and ideals of Left movements and raises questions about whether energies are better spent developing alternatives.

Dr. Gemma Commane is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication at Birmingham City University (BCU). Her research interests focus on contemporary cultural studies, queer studies, sexual economies and Intimate Labour, dangerous femininities, and ethnography.

Dr. Gary Hazeldine is an Associate Professor in Sociology at BCU. His teaching and research interests are in social theory and cultural sociology, and he is currently writing an article on contemporary Fascism.

Prof. Kirsten Forkert is based in the College of Media and English at BCU. She is currently working on a book project revisiting histories of anti-racist activism in the UK, as well as a collaborative project with academics, artists and designers about convivial spaces for difficult conversations about race.

Dr. Zaki Nahaboo is Lecturer in Sociology at BCU. His research interests include legacies of imperial citizenship in former crown colonies, the politics of migration, and postcolonial theory. He is currently writing a series of articles on imperial citizenship in Mauritius and co-authoring a Cultural Studies textbook.

Dr. Licheng Qian is Lecturer in Sociology at BCU. His academic interests lie at the intersection of memory, politics, and culture, including the study of national, transnational, and postcolonial identities. Regionally, his work focuses on the Greater China area, the Chinese diaspora, and transnational comparisons and connections between China and other societies.