Queer Celebrity Abstracts

Thursday 6th June

1: Posthumous Celebrity I

Páraic Finnerty (University of Portsmouth): Eve Sedgwick's Dickinson.

Although the American poet Emily Dickinson rejected the celebrity culture of her own lifetime -- choosing not to publish and becoming a recluse for the last 25 years of her life -- she has posthumously become an important literary celebrity. Moreover, Dickinson scholarship has made visible her work’s transgressive representations of gender and sexuality and the queerness of her life and writings. This paper will explore Dickinson’s status as a queer celebrity by considering her function in the works of one of queer theory’s own celebrities, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. It will trace Dickinson's cameo appearances in Sedgwick's writings to glean the specific nature of her fandom and the possibilities offered by Dickinson’s celebrity. Sedgwick's Dickinson emerges as a figure whose eccentric life and unsettling writings are available for dissident admiration, appropriation and identification. But Sedgwick moves beyond the idea of isolated individuals privately and opportunistically responding to a figure such as Dickinson. Her use of Dickinson shows how queer celebrities can create and consolidate communities of admirers and establish lines of communal identification and empowerment.

Lucy Whitehead (Cardiff University): Queer Celebritification: The Posthumous Life of Bruce Chatwin.

In 1999, Nicholas Shakespeare published a biography of the novelist, travel writer and literary celebrity Bruce Chatwin (1940–1989). The biography worked to reconstruct Chatwin as a queer celebrity as well as a literary one, overwriting the heterosexual persona that Chatwin had sought to maintain in his works and public life. In reshaping Chatwin’s celebrity in this way, the biography also worked to prolong and expand it. Robert Clarke has noted that ‘the nature and meaning of [Chatwin’s] celebrity have evolved since 1987 in direct relation to […] the growing interest in Chatwin’s life, especially following the release of Nicholas Shakespeare’s monumental 1999 biography’ (Clarke, 2009). My paper will explore how the case study of this biography might work to complicate, and queer, Sharon Marcus’s claim that it is the three-way ‘drama’ or contest of agency between celebrities, media workers and publics that renders celebrity compelling (Marcus, 2019). I will argue, rather, that what renders the queer celebritification of Chatwin continually compelling – and thus works to prolong and expand his celebrity – is his lack of agency in this process. The near-absence of his personal testimony regarding his own sexuality means that the process of his queer celebritification is endlessly unfinished – and thus endlessly inviting further engagement from both media workers and publics.

At the same time, this archival silence works to delegitimise the testimony of friends and lovers who attempt authoritatively to delineate Chatwin’s queerness. It also arguably works to shape Shakespeare’s own strategy of editorial silence; the biographer presents testimony
but repeatedly refuses to offer his own interpretation. Chatwin’s role in his own queer celebriblication is therefore one of powerful passivity.

My paper will consider the implications of this case study for a broader mapping of the mechanisms and ends of queer celebriblication. I will also consider its implications for the dynamics of the celebriblication of secretive subjects more broadly.

Aaron Day (University of St Andrews): AIDS romans à clés: The Ambivalences of Celebrity, Seropositivity and Scandal in Hervé Guibert's À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie and Saul Bellow's Ravelstein.

Two novels about HIV/AIDS released one decade apart tell two remarkably similar stories about the intersection of private health with public intrigue.

In France in 1990, Hervé Guibert published À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie to critical and commercial success. It was praised for its “breakthrough” portrayals of the epidemic off the heels of a period of dédramatisation and political suppression, but it was also met with deep suspicion and subject to an eventual “trial by media” for its specific portrayal of “Muzil”, a character who many saw bore striking resemblances to the real life philosopher and public intellectual Michel Foucault. While Foucault’s death in 1984 had not been publicly attributed to AIDS, Guibert’s book was one that provided a “meticulous account” of the celebrity’s illness, such that it caused “an unprecedented outrage in the French republic of letters”.

In the United States in 2000, Saul Bellow published Ravelstein, another work focusing on the protracted illness of a public intellectual with AIDS. In this case, the titular “Abe Ravelstein” was sold by Bellow prior to the novel’s release as in fact based in “a kind of biography” on the life of Allan Bloom, a right-wing philosopher and classicist who died in 1992. Controversially, Bellow promoted the novel through the press by claiming that it “revealed for the first time that Bloom was a homosexual” and exposed that “Bloom had died of AIDS”. This latter claim was one he later back-pedalled from after gathering protest and criticism of the work for the author’s “outing” of his close friend and colleague, eventually editing the work to remove references to HIV or AIDS altogether.

For this paper, I will explore the implications and ambivalences of the writing of the person with AIDS, with particular focuses on novelistic realism, press culture, and the public disclosure of queer life in an age of celebrity.

2. Travels, Journeys, Trajectories

Anna Charczun (Brunel University London): Lesbian migrant Writing: From Lesbian Nation to Queer Diaspora.

The paper examines selected texts of Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo, whose diasporic experiences allowed them to discuss lesbian desire from a non-stigmatised point of view. It also portrays how writing from white, western countries towards the end of the twentieth century, such as England or Ireland themselves, privileged the Irish lesbian narrative to represent a more globalised approach towards lesbian desire. In the 1980s, lesbian fiction emphasises the conflicting disparities of age, race, ethnicity, class, or social status and
position, whereas in the late 1990s and the early 2000s the narrative touches upon subjects of nationality, transculturality or gender performativity troubling the lesbian community. Firstly, the paper will illustrate how distance from Ireland allowed authors to discuss issues affecting and disturbing the Lesbian Nation and lesbian community of the 1980s, and secondly, it will discuss how queer diaspora and hybridity shaped lesbian diasporic writing in non-western societies at the turn of the century.

The juxtaposition of Lesbian Nation and queer diaspora proves to be an important aspect in the analysis of the development of Irish lesbian fiction, since their collocation obliterates the prevalence of gay white men in the queer diasporic discourse, as well as emphasises the presence of women within queer diasporic communities. My aim is to portray the shift away from representations of the Lesbian Nation towards the inclusivity of queer diaspora, which emphasises the need for the inclusion of non-white lesbians in the tradition of Irish queer writing.

Beniamin Kłaniecki (Adam Mickiewicz University): The Myth-Making Art of Failure: Bruce Chatwin as a Queer Celebrity.

The aim of the present paper is to examine the practice of Bruce Chatwin’s self-creation as a (queer) literary celebrity, which unfolds at the point of intersection between his biography and writing. Famed for his story-telling gift, which revealed itself in his first best-selling work, In Patagonia (1977), Chatwin emerged as a controversial, widely read and closely followed figure of the British literary scene. Over the following decade, he went on to publish five more books before he died in 1989, of an HIV/AIDS-related disease. I propose to consider Chatwin’s self-fashioning as a raconteur and his persistent blending of fact and fiction, in and outside writing, to be acts of his own myth-making. Yet, what renders his attempts queer, as I intend to argue, is his reliance on failure. To this end, I propose to read Chatwin’s travelogues, In Patagonia and The Songlines (1987), from the perspective of Halberstam’s seminal theory, which holds that failure and queer are mutually dependent categories. As regards Chatwin – the projected authorial/narrative figure bridging the gap between reality and fiction – his failure to conform to the norms in the narratives under examination plays out in three crucial aspects: adherence to the generic limitations of the travelogue, disavowal of homoeroticism and respect for postcolonial sensitivity. With a view to contextualising the nature of those norms and Chatwin’s transgression thereof, I turn to postcolonial and queer studies in search of appropriate methodological tools. In so doing, I aim to demonstrate that the sense of failure which underlies Chatwin’s travel narratives in their refusal to comply with the form as well as his own reluctance to publicly recognise his queer sexuality can be seen as an integral part of feeding the fantasy of Chatwin’s sexual (dis)identification, generating queerness, and consequently, maintaining his celebrity status.

Tsung-Han Tsai (Independent Scholar): ‘If career it can be called’: Forster’s Resistance to Wildean Fame.

This paper assesses E. M. Forster’s perception of Oscar Wilde’s fame at the start of the twentieth century. As many scholars have shown at some length, Forster’s work, especially the posthumously published Maurice, sets itself at a deliberate cultural distance from the
circle associated with Wilde and the belief in l’art pour l’art. Yet, as this paper will suggest, no matter how much Forster sought to repudiate Wilde, Wilde remained an abiding reference-point in many of his writings.

Focusing on ‘The Story of a Panic’ (written in 1902, first published in Independent Review in 1904), one of Forster’s earliest publications, this paper examines how Wilde’s notoriety as a writer, an aesthete, and a convicted celebrity weighed heavily upon Forster’s intellectual, sexual, and creative existence at the very start of his own writing career. Through a discussion of the story’s representations of media publicity, Greek mythology, and masculinity, the paper places the story contextually in literary history and considers Forster’s reflection on the influence of Wilde. It uncovers the story’s many allusions to Wilde and his work, exploring how they acknowledge as well as parody the widely publicized rise and fall of Wilde’s career. In so doing, the paper challenges previous readings of ‘The Story of a Panic’ as purely satirizing social norms of English middle-classes at the time. Instead, what will emerge from this discussion is Forster’s negotiation of his cultural inheritance as a queer artist writing within the repercussions of the celebrity of Wilde. This early engagement with Wilde’s fame prompts us to reconsider how Forster conducted his own career and managed his public persona: Forster’s celebrity status, especially after the WWII, was underpinned by a strategy of avoiding the visibility Wilde had cultivated in the previous century.

3. Outlaws


The first documentaries about homosexuality on British television were broadcast in 1964 and 1965 as part of ITV’s This Week strand, presented by Bryan Magee. At the time This Week was the tenth most popular programme on television, with an average audience of 6m viewers, while Coronation Street was most watched, with an average of between 8 and 9m. The programmes were followed in 1967 by a pair of BBC Man Alive documentaries Consenting Adults: The Men and The Women on 7 and 14 June, just a month before the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 brought in partial decriminalisation. These four documentaries, the first factual representations of queerness on British telly, give us an extraordinary insight into attitudes of the time. Many of the interviewees identities are concealed by dark shadows, and the medical experts authoritatively construct homosexuality as an illness and a social problem. The courageous LGBTQ people that appeared on screen, even in silhouette, were of course immediately identified by their friends, families, colleagues anyway, becoming queer celebrities overnight. Using textual analysis of both the documentaries and the newspaper reviews, as well as a newly filmed interview by Daisy with one of the participants 55 years on, this research by practice opens up a difficult kind of queer fame: that of outlaws beamed into the sixties living room.

Guy Davidson (University of Wollongong, Australia): Gore Vidal, Myra Breckinridge, and Scandalous Celebrity.
"Everything you’ve heard about MYRA BRECKINRIDGE is true! … The book that has become the year’s #1 topic of conversation." Thus did Bantam Books in part advertise Gore Vidal’s best-selling 1968 satirical novel, which, with its no-holds-barred assault on orthodox sexuality and gender, has been seen by many as a harbinger of the radical gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Presenting Myra’s scandalous concerns as the subject of gossip and rumor, the Bantam campaign appeals to the operations of celebrity in order to sell the book, conflating it with its protagonist and transforming Myra into a virtual scandalous celebrity. Vidal’s outrageous gender-bending heroine’s accession to celebrity status was facilitated by her distinctive narratorial voice—often invoked by Vidal in interviews, allowing him the pleasure of scandalizing pronouncements under cover of plausible deniability—and enhanced by her embodiment in a giant statue of a prancing showgirl that featured on the cover of the novel’s original edition and that was toured around America by Bantam on a float emblazoned with the slogan “Here Comes Myra Breckinridge!” In this paper I read Myra’s virtual celebrity as displacing or blurring Vidal’s actual celebrity, thus helping to deflect rumors about his potentially scandalous private life that might have been given impetus by such an audacious book. Yet the deflection was only partially successful; many reviews of the novel were heavily innuendo-laden, indicating just how paper-thin the open secret of Vidal’s sexuality had become by the late 1960s. I argue here that Myra and the media and critical response to it register the seismic cultural shift that would see the dispensation of the open secret displaced by the liberationist emphasis on gay visibility—a shift that Vidal, with his notorious rejection of sexual identity categories, both officially refused and helped to advance.

Maria Brock (Cardiff University): Camp and Queer Aesthetics in Mainstream Post-Soviet Pop.

Russian popular music and entertainment, dating back to the Soviet Union, is dominated by popular figures that embrace aesthetics of high drama, flamboyance or camp, in a manner that may read as queer to certain audiences, while simultaneously enabling the disavowal of any non-normative content or intention, and remaining firmly in the mainstream. This presentation will focus on the work of several Russian pop or estrada singers, providing an analysis of reoccurring images, voices, tropes in recent music videos by some of Soviet and contemporary Russia's biggest stars (such as Phillip Kirkorov’s ‘Tsvet nastroeniya sinii’ / 'Mood Colour, Blue' and his collaboration with Nikolay Baskov in ‘Ibiza’), as well as productions going back almost 20 years (for example Valery Leontiev's 'Nochnoy Zvonok' / 'Night Call’). We aim to show how such visually ambiguous, excessive representations in Russian popular music challenge, subvert and attenuate mainstream media discourse.

Our work on the performative tropes of estrada forms part of a larger, AHRC-funded project studying media representations of non-heteronormative sexualities in Russia (https://www.quiet-revolution.org/) over the last 20 years. During this time, a major political turning point in Russia was the introduction of the federal law ‘For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values’ in June 2013 (often referred to as ‘gay propaganda law’), which had been preceded by several regional permutations, forming part of a larger trend towards conservative, authoritarian nationalism. This presentation aims to analyse the interaction between official discourses and
aesthetic conventions, and how the way that queerness is coded responds to shifting sociopolitical and legal landscapes.

4. Queer Scandals

Anita Brady (Victoria University of Wellington): We Need to Talk About Neil (When We Talk About Kevin): Celebrity, Scandal and Outness.

As performers such as Neil Patrick Harris or Ellen DeGeneres might attest, the declarative act of a celebrity ‘coming out’ has most often induced celebration amongst LGBTQIA+ media commentators. Even celebrities forced out under the hostile lens of media scandal, such as George Michael, can nonetheless expect to find respite in the queer press. Actor Kevin Spacey’s 2017 Twitter declaration that he was “living life as a gay man”, however, was widely condemned by queer commentators who under other circumstances might have reacted with glee. Spacey’s mistake was to come out while issuing an apology (of sorts) for an alleged sexual advance toward then 14-year old actor, Anthony Rapp. LGBTQIA+ commentators accused Spacey of attempting to deflect attention away from the allegations, and of reinforcing well-worn homophobic associations of gay men with paedophilia. Subsequent accusations of sexual assault and predatory behaviour by Spacey, and his brief re-emergence in December 2018 seemed only to underline his status as celebrity gay pariah. This paper examines the complicated and, at times, contradictory queer politics of Kevin Spacey’s coming out and its aftermath. While it is allegations of assault and harassment that have destroyed Spacey’s career, what this paper explores is what the response to the circumstances of Spacey’s disclosure might tell us about the structure, politics and discursive work of the closet from which he emerged. It draws on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s sustained analysis of the politics of outness in Epistemology of the Closet, and the queer theories informed by that text, to consider Spacey alongside more positively received celebrity self-outings. It then examines what the response to Spacey’s failure to follow the ‘correct’ coming out script tells us about how “outness” – in both its condemned and its celebrated celebrity forms – reproduces queerness itself as scandal.

Mara Gold (St Hilda’s College Oxford). Sapphic Scandal: Lesbianism on Trial in Interwar Britain and New Zealand.

Despite lesbianism not technically being illegal during the early 20th century, many high-profile queer women were shamed and punished publically, particularly with the growing appetite for scandal in the media. Although lesbianism often faced indirect charges, such as those against The Well of Loneliness for obscenity, many queer women found accidental infamy in the courts when their orientation and/or occupation was used to discredit them. To illustrate this type of queer celebrity, I focus on Maud Allan and Freda Stark, two lesbian dancers from who had both already found fame through their popular trailblazing (and risqué) performances only to find themselves the targets of public defamation in the courts. In 1919 Britain Maud Allan attempted to sue for libel after she had been attacked in the media, namely in an article entitled ‘The Cult of the Clitoris’, for being a German homosexual conspirator along with her lover Lady Asquith. Not only did she lose but the case was turned against her for obscenity based on her sexuality, family history and dance style. In
1935 New Zealand Freda Stark was a key witness in the trial of her girlfriend’s murder, but predictably the defence and the media tried to discredit her because of their relationship and nude performances. Using both media and archival sources, this paper examines how lesbianism was sensationalised and received by the general public as well as in the queer community. Both occurring less than a decade either side of Radclyffe Hall’s trial, I also track the change in public attitudes before and after this more famous trial. Additionally, with both dancers following a trend amongst queer women to take inspiration from Ancient Greece, I highlight how this affinity both provided freedom and invited censure in a time when it was often seen as deviant or rebellious.

Ruth Deller (Sheffield Hallam University): Queering Christianity? Gay Religious Celebrity in Britain.

This paper looks at the image of two prominent queer Christian celebrities in the UK, exploring both the way they each incorporate their faith and sexuality into their celebrity, and the way they have been received in wider media.

When Christian singer Vicky Beeching came out as gay in 2015, it made headlines around the world. Beeching has subsequently taken the role of mainstream celebrity Christian and campaigner, speaking out against LGBTQ+ discrimination in the church, writing for magazines and newspapers and releasing a memoir, Undivided (2018), complete with celebrity endorsements from Clare Balding and Peter Tatchell.

The Rev Richard Coles is a former pop star turned broadcaster and CofE priest. As a ‘celebrity vicar’, Coles is a frequent media presence – most visibly by taking part in Strictly Come Dancing (2017). Openly gay, Coles’ sexuality has always been a core part of his image, but in other respects he is presented as curiously traditional – preaching in an old stone church building in clerical robes to a congregation of lovely old ladies who make him tea and cake.

This paper argues that, despite their potentially radical status as gay Christians, Beeching and Coles represent a seemingly ‘safe’ version of both queer identity and religion that is comfortably white, middle-class, Anglicised, de-sexualised and traditional in its view of relationships (Coles is in a civil partnership with a fellow vicar, which is claimed to be non-sexual, and Beeching has often spoken of wanting a ‘life partner’). As such, they reflect wider media representations of sexuality and religion that allow ‘Middle England’ to see itself as progressive whilst allowing for only minimal disruption to the ‘norm’ (see Beckford 2014, Berube 2001, Davies 2012, Deller 2012/2015, Dreisinger 2010, Guest et al 2012; Knott et al 2013; Krämer2016, Ma’ayan 2010).

Sarah Grange (University of Brighton): Improvising Moll: Unruly Dialogues with the Wild Queer Past.

My research takes as a starting point the improvised performance of cross-dressed Mary Frith on the stage of the Fortune Theatre in 1611, as prologue to The Roaring Girl, a play fictionalising her life. Frith’s performance, and the known, unknown and fictitious details of
her in/famous life before and after provide a unique fulcrum from which to launch an investigation into improvisatory performance practice as a tool for queer historiography.

Queer lives, as discussed by Halberstam in their recent work on wildness, are often lived as wild and unruly, leaving little conventional evidence behind them. To attempt to know a past queer life requires alternative approaches, else we risk civilising that which refuses civilisation. This study explores the potential for improvisation to open up conversations between the queer Early Modern and now. Improvisatory performance practices have “capacity to trouble the assumptions (and the expectations of fixity) fostered by the dominant systems of knowledge production” (Caines & Hebel, 2015). Improvisatory performance “becomes multi-semantic and dialogic” (Frost & Yarrow, 2015). I suggest that improvisatory performance-as-research methodologies may enable us to meet and engage with the queer dead in a more ethical way, without civilising them and fixing down the “facts” of their unruly lives.

On March 30 2019 I will be staging the first exploration of this practice-based research at Shakespeare’s Globe with a drag king and impro cabaret event in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. I am therefore proposing either a practice-based workshop, or paper to present the outcome of this performance. I am also open to joining any panel discussions on past queer celebrity/notoriety/infamy, wildness, or performance/practice-based researches, and any other links you can see in the proposal.

5. Ways of seeing / being seen

Tessa Reed (King’s College London): Kiersey Clemons and the Representation of Queer, Black Girlhood in American Cinema.

This paper focuses on Kiersey Clemons and the representation of a queer, black girlhood that is often either marginalized or denied in American cinema. On the one hand, Clemons’ on-screen appearances in film and television series such as Dope (2015), Easy (2017-Present), and Hearts Beat Loud (2018) make visible her identity to mainstream audiences. On the other hand, her stardom is particularly present off-screen in the gay press and niche cultural publications such as Out, Essence, Vibe, and Madame Noire as opposed to more conventional adolescent publications such as Teen Vogue or Seventeen. The consideration of these alternative publications as girls’ media centres Clemons star text while presenting an alternative type of girlhood at odds with the mainstream representations of a white, heteronormative experience. Compared with other girl stars of the twenty-first century, who perpetuate these white and heteronormative exclusionary notions of girlhood, Clemons provides an explicit disavowal of these values and in doing so confronts stereotypes associated with race, gender, and sexuality.

This paper explores how Clemons’ alternative girlhood challenges normative ideas about adolescent sexuality, sexual agency, and empowerment. As such, it deconstructs and, in the process, (re)defines the narrow definition of conventional girlhood and female adolescent sexuality through star studies. The presence of alternative girl stars insists upon a broadening of the definition of girlhood that pushes boundaries of what it means to be a girl in contemporary America.
Maria Adell Carmona (Pompeu Fabra University): That Woman: Sara Montiel, From Sex Symbol to Queer Icon.

When El último cuplé (The Last Torch Song, Juan de Orduña) was released in 1957, Sara Montiel was a little-known Spanish actress who appeared in Mexican and Hollywood movies. The success of this musical melodrama was huge and absolutely unexpected: Montiel became a transnational star and, according to Terenci Moix, the first erotic myth of Spanish cinema under a regime, the Franco regime, highly repressive in relation to the desire of the women. Indeed, Montiel's performance as the cupletista (singer and performer) María Luján has been described as "devastatingly sexy" by Eva Woods Peiró, while Chris Perriam says that "Montiel's aural glamor of the old-fashioned form of the cuplé was accompanied by glittering dresses (...) And gleaming, flatteringly-lit flesh at shoulders, bust and legs, all of which sexualise this film in no uncertain manner ". Montiel as a "disruptive physical presence" in the cinema of the Franco regime, as a carrier of an evident eroticism that breaks with its repressive morality, has been studied on several occasions; talking about Concha Piquer, one of the real performers on which the character of María Luján is based, Silvia Bermúdez affirms that her performance offers the "possibility of a space for cultural difference in the Spain of the 1940's (...) which could reconfigure desire". The erotic, excessive and artificial performance of Sara Montiel in The Last Torch Song and in the films that followed it (fourteen, between 1958 and 1973, the year in which she retired from cinema) allows to speak, in a more evident way, of that reconfiguration of desire. A desire that not only has women as protagonists but, above all, the gay subculture, severely repressed and silenced during the Franco regime; an audience that, as Richard Dyer affirms, is capable of appropriating the image of the star for its own purposes. The mannerisms of Sara Montiel (called Sara-isms), increasingly excessive and self-conscious as her film career progressed, became a secret code, a way of recognizing what Mira calls "camp homosexuality (that) took refuge and expressed itself in the world of entertainment. " It is not, then, strange that Pedro Almodóvar, born in 1949, has confessed his "obsession" with Montiel, which led him to think of different roles for her. The homage of Almodóvar to Montiel arrived, finally, in two key scenes of La mala educación (2004): in one of them, two boys (the two main characters) are in a cinema watching Esa mujer (That woman, Mario Camus, 1969) one of the last films (and one of the most self-conscious and parodic) of the star; in another, one of the boys, already an adult (Gael García Bernal), becomes the diva, singing on a stage, cross-dressed, one of Montiel's most popular songs. This paper wants to explore Sara Montiel as a queer icon, as a popular figure which, through the camp appropriation carried out by the gay subculture, allows that reconfiguration of desire and the recognition of the alterity and the otherness which characterizes the queer. I will focus especially on the last stage of her filmography, especially in That Woman, a film written by the homosexual Spanish writer - and future queer celebrity himself - Antonio Gala; a deeply self-conscious film, written in an ironic key and that gives rise to the camp recognition among the gay audience.

Rosa Campbell (University of St Andrews): Homebody: Queered Domesticity and Public Intimacy in the Poetry of Eileen Myles.
Eileen Myles opens their first collection, The Irony of the Leash (1978) with ‘Homebody,’ which begins, simply, ‘Oh, Hello. C’mon in.’ With this entreaty, Myles establishes a career founded on radical openness and access to the minutiae of domestic space. Their familiar vernacular and insistent centering of their own queerness generates a sense of intimacy between poet and reader that disrupts the received notion of the public poet in the “masculine” public sphere. Instead, much of Myles’ poetry functions as a record of its own production within the poet’s home; inviting the reader into the kitchen, the bathroom, the bed. In a 2006 conversation with Dennis Cooper, Myles recalls that an aspect of the Downtown scene that drew them there in 1979 was ‘just the permission to be local, as if one were famous.’ For Myles, it would seem that fame, particularly as a poet, has less to do with constructing a public persona that is separate from the intimacies of private space, than with the ‘permission’ to transgress that division — to display and explore the quotidian details of one’s own life as if everyone else will care. Significantly, Myles’ work resists the concomitant femininities of domesticity by continuously asserting a poetic self that is queer and comfortably masculine-while-female. This paper will examine this intersection of fame, intimacy, and queer identity through close readings of Myles’ poems, with particular reference to representations of the physical – the gendered body in space, the sensual aspects of the home – as well as the role of the poet in disrupting the received dichotomies of public/private, masculine/feminine. It will argue that Myles’ poetry reframes and complicates the notion of a feminized private sphere by presenting interior spaces in which queer bodies, kinship structures and relationships are recorded and celebrated, and into which the reader is always invited.

Yen-Jen Chen (National Taiwan University): Queer Celebrities of YouTuber Industries: The Entanglement of Dominant Culture of Asia and Gay Communities in Taiwan.

YouTube has fashioned an emerging occupation of YouTuber that usually refers to internet celebrity who shares original videos online for profits. In this postcapitalist era of social media, in order to be media celebrities, Taiwan-based queers have tactically woven issues of gender/sexuality and human rights into their entertaining videos, producing a unique digital subculture that transforms virtual into a battlefield to problematize heterosexual and progressivist dominance. In this sense, this project investigates queer YouTubers in Taiwan who appropriate traditional culture, social issue, and even the East Asian pop culture through various approaches including drag, farce, talk show, body arts, and live broadcast. This project argues that queer celebrities in social media who manipulate the positive and negative sides of queerness by exploiting the influence of dominant culture of Asia, which exposes the entanglement of pop culture and gay communities. Being an internet celebrity, queer YouTubers head actively towards gender equality, affecting not only Taiwan but also the East Asia. Meanwhile, when queer celebrities output subculture which is in the danger of (re)constructing another scenario of hegemony of gay mainstream.
6. Popular Culture


The celebrated memoirs of Nadezhda Durova, a female cavalry officer who, disguised as a man, served in the Russian Army during the Napoleonic wars, have been popular with the Russian readers since the moment of their publication in 1836. Published in a leading literary journal at the time, The Notes of the Cavalry Maiden propelled Durova made her a veritable celebrity and a welcome guest in the St Petersburg literary salons. Later on, in the twentieth century, with the inclusion of her work into the school curriculum, the image of a brave female officer was used by the Soviet authorities to promote values of patriotism and service to the homeland. The 1962 Soviet musical Hussar Ballad, transformed the narrative of Durova’s military adventures into a love story and glossed over any controversial issues of gender normativity raised in Durova’s original text. Thanks to the lasting popularity of the film, Durova remains a familiar and curiously de-queer character to the contemporary Russian audiences and is well-known to historians of nineteenth-century Russian culture since two English translations of The Notes were published in 1988. Despite the text’s availability and recent interest in queer history in Russia, the most intriguing aspect of Durova’s queer celebrity – her everlasting presence in the twentieth and twenty-first century Russian popular culture and even the school curriculum remains, with very few exceptions, largely unexplored.

This paper will discuss the most recent instances of revising Durova’s autobiographical narrative in Russia, including the re-publication of her texts, museum exhibitions and commemorative events (dedication of new monuments, etc.). Combining an analysis of recent local history publications produced by Durova’s two literary museums, with an exploration of commercial use of Durova’s image by the Russian tourist and food industry, this paper will approach the problem of the reception Durova’s legacy from the point of view of queer theory and celebrity studies.

Joanna McIntyre (University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia): ‘I don’t want to tick a box and say I’m transgender’: Nadia Almada, Transgender Celebrity, and Transnormativity.

At the forefront of ever-increasing media engagement with transgender subjectivities are transgender celebrities. US transgender celebrities such as Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox have come to exemplify this type of celebrity, bringing visibility to the marginalisation of transgender people while functioning as a dynamic facet of mainstream celebrity culture. Nevertheless, this paper identifies an important prototype of contemporary transgender celebrities: UK reality TV star Nadia Almada. This paper contemplates Almada’s legacy in the ways in which she, as a vanguard, influenced the construction and reception of transgender celebrities in the Global West.
When Almada won Big Brother UK in 2004 it marked a turning point in transgender celebritification. Almada was the most prominent trans person in the UK for several years. However, when she participated in the UK’s Ultimate Big Brother in 2010 her popularity suddenly plummeted; she became the target of transphobic derision and subsequently faded into obscurity. Exploring the distinctive nature and potential fragility of transgender celebrity, this paper analyses the rise and fall of Almada’s celebrity as it played out in mainstream media. I examine the socio-cultural mechanisms via which Almada became a beloved transgender celebrity and rapidly lost that celebrity, particularly through the lens of transnormativity and its relationship with queerness. Transnormativity is a structural ideology entwined with neoliberalism that enables only particular transgender subjectivities to be deemed culturally intelligible and ‘authentic’ while consequently subjugating others. A number of scholars have identified transnormativity’s relatively recent manifestation as well as its problematics (Johnson 2016; Vipond 2015; Mosquera Ramallo 2015; LeBlanc 2010). This paper applies transnormativity retrospectively in the analysis of Almada’s celebrity career to examine the ways she adhered to as well as resisted the strictures of the then nascent transnormative celebrity model to present a queer mode of transgender celebrity subjectivity.

**Clare Southerton (Aarhus University) & Hannah McCann (University of Melbourne): Queer Reading the Boyband: Rethinking Desire in the One Direction Fandom.**

The actualisation of queer desire – whether a celebrity or a character is identified as queer – has become a key point of contestation in popular culture, and accusations of ‘queerbaiting’ have been levelled at producers profiting from queer culture without delivering representation. Simultaneously, the rise of real-person shipping (RPS), involving imagining relationships between celebrities (particularly queer pairings), decenters the importance of actualised representation, emphasising subtext over text in celebrity narratives. This paper explores the RPS of former One Direction boyband members, Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson (referred to by the portmanteau ‘Larry Stylinson’). The Larry RPS fandom, also known as ‘Larries’, maintain the relationship between Harry and Louis is real and seek to uncover proof through analysis of images, video and song lyrics associated with the celebrities. This paper draws on a digital ethnography with the Larry fandom conducted on Twitter in 2018 and argues that the fandom’s digital practices involve queer reading strategies to disrupt heterosexual narratives and create space for queer desire. While Larries are invested in the ‘reality’ of the ship, their fan practices are primarily oriented towards challenging the dominance of heteronormativity in celebrity culture. Larries do not simply seek representations of queer desire but rather, through shipping Larry, create a community online that celebrates queer sexuality and forces queer narratives into otherwise straight readings of celebrity. Our findings challenge popular depictions of fangirls as ‘boy-crazy’ in any simple heteronormative way. Far from understanding fangirls as a single monolithic group primarily motivated by heterosexual longing, this paper argues that Larries encourage us to rethink gender, desire, and the queer potential of fan practices.

**Emily Roach (University of York): Boybands and the Pink Pound: From ‘90s Homoerotics to One Direction and Homosocial Desire**
Expanding on my peer reviewed article published in the Journal of Fandom Studies in 2018 on Queerbaiting, Real Person Fiction and the Homoerotics of the Boyband, I explore the homoerotic marketing strategies employed by the biggest boybands of the '90s, explaining how styling and video aesthetics were specifically designed to appeal to the gay male gaze, whilst simultaneously allowing room for heterosexual teen desire. I explain how One Direction consciously subverted those tropes through their playful intimacy which enhanced their queer appeal. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notions of homosocial desire I explain how One Direction moved away from the hypermasculine, homoerotic imagery favoured by the boybands that preceded them, whilst paying affectionate homage to those groups. I argue that One Direction's success was in large part due to the emergence of their huge transformative fandom as the mainstreaming and accessibility of online space and the boom of platforms like Wattpad and Tumblr coincided with One Direction's rise to fame. Within that context the 'spectre of the closet', a legacy of '90s boybands, haunts queer readings of One Direction within transformative fandom and the legacy of the '90s continues to inform the way these celebrities are read by fans today. I conclude by touching briefly on the solo career of Harry Styles and with reference to iconic solo artists that have been important to LGBT communities, I distinguish between performative allyship and pop music's affirmational potential for queer fans. I suggest that One Direction and Harry Styles invite us not only to rethink not only the way boybands are styled and marketed, but to consider the limitations of any marketing strategy that assumes a boyband fanbase is comprised primarily of gay men and straight teenage girls.

7. Posthumous Celebrity II

Anastasia Howe Bukowski (University of Southern California): Reimagining Leslie Cheung through Hanyuan Bookstore: The Posthumous Personalities of the Queer Hong Kong Celebrity.

In the sixteen years following his suicide, the Hong Kong singer and actor Leslie Cheung has developed and maintained a posthumous influence over his dynamic fan communities. Cohering a rich and active community, fans create, collect, consume, and share Cheung-related media online and in self-authored publications, especially on his birthday and the anniversary of his death.

Cheung’s posthumous influence owes not only to his talents, but critically to his self-identified bisexuality. For fans, a photo of him holding hands with his lover Daffy Tong in full view of journalists is celebrated as a canonical example of true love. Both at the time and in the present, the mainstream landscape of Hong Kong media and politics remains a difficult environment for local LGBTQ communities. However, as a broadly celebrated cultural figure, Cheung has served as a window for Chinese people to understand queerness and his popular status has been cited as a vehicle catalyzing the gradual advancement of LGBTQ rights in Hong Kong.

This paper focuses on the recently-closed Hanyuan Bookstore in Shanghai, where Cheung is known to have worked and relaxed. The bookstore has become a shrine for Cheung’s fans, who visit to sit on his preferred couch and leave hand-written letters in memory of the star. Through auto-ethnographic analysis of Hanyuan and a content analysis of these letters, we
seek to disentangle Cheung’s posthumous personality constructed by his fans and how his “absent presence” influences public impressions of LGBTQ figures in contemporary China. Utilizing theories of queer phenomenology, temporality, and orientation articulated by Sarah Ahmed and Elizabeth Freeman we argue that the temporospatial environment of Hanyuan Bookstore offered a unique setting linking past and future and bringing into contact public persona and private predilection, offering an insistently queer site of pilgrimage complicating the ultra-modern material conditions of the built environment of contemporary Shanghai.


In 1998 Berlant and Warner raised a very important question regarding public space and sexuality, arguing that in order to allow for queer subjects to express themselves, we should be arguing beyond safe spaces for queer sex, but to explore more radical approaches questioning the heteronormative matrix’s hegemony in the public realm. 20 years later, in September 2018, the murder, killing or death (depends on the media outlet one follows) of Zak Kostopoulos or Zackie Oh, a queer activist and drag performer in Athens, becomes the top story in Greece. Kostopoulos was a microcelebrity among the LGBT community, but the public nature of his death turned him into a celebrity and at the same time subverted the everyday heterosexual hegemony. The paper aims to discuss the importance of Kostopoulos, as a queer citizen in public and the way social media and news outlet turned him into a symbol for the LGBT community. Kostopoulos’ diva citizenship was a challenge for everyday heteronormativity and one cannot overlook this when looking at the reaction of the media, which created an amalgam of subalterness in a way to justify a violent and brutal death, caused by ‘well-respected businessmen’ and the police. The paper argues that regardless of the actual intentions behind the killing, the main reason of Kostopoulos, as demonstrated by the reaction in the media, the death, and the subsequent celebrity was his direct stance as a queer body in public space.

Jack Doyle (University of Oxford): Killer Queen: Reassessing Freddie Mercury as Uneasy Gay Icon.

This paper critically assesses Freddie Mercury’s history and present as a gay icon. It contrasts his icon status during his lifetime as a camp performer palatable to straight British rock culture with his complicated, on-going cultural rehabilitation as a queer icon in the nearly thirty years since his death.

Drawing from oral histories, memoirs, and LGBTQ media overlapping with Queen’s years in the spotlight, it first establishes Mercury’s relative lack of specifically gay celebrity during the 1970s and ‘80s. It puts forward the category of ‘semi-closeted’ gay male celebrity, arguing that Mercury and contemporaries like Elton John and George Michael have a specific historical place as camp British performers with majority-straight fan bases and fraught coming-out moments. Mercury is a particularly striking window into this phenomenon, as a non-white immigrant whose fame relied heavily on his careful management of his HIV status, Britishness, and racial and sexual presentation.
The paper contrasts the historical reality of Mercury’s celebrity status, including his own largely private relationship to his sexuality, with his public re-configuration as a current queer icon. It focuses primarily on Mercury’s role in young LGBTQ people’s lives today, identifying him as a ‘post-closet’ gay icon and a vehicle for inter-familial/generational conversations about queerness. This paper turns to recent sociological work on queer online communities, intimacies, and affect to examine Mercury’s current role in under-40 LGBTQ circles, drawing from the reception of recent biopic Bohemian Rhapsody and other representations of Mercury to interrogate how a historical gay person’s gender and sexuality interact with posthumously-curated icon status.

This interdisciplinary paper asks wider questions about status and the closet, the politics of posthumous representation, and the impact of the AIDS crisis on present-day LGBTQ culture. It ultimately argues for the prevailing influence of racism, serophobia, and homophobia on Mercury and many of his generation’s legacies.

8. Origins and Icons

Marie Josephine Bennett (University of Winchester): Cabaret, Liza Minnelli, and Queer Iconicity.

Liza Minnelli was best known in her younger years as being the daughter of film director Vincente Minnelli and film musical star Judy Garland. Her close connection to her mother was established via both her appearances on The Judy Garland Show in 1963, and at two London Palladium concerts that her mother headlined in November 1964. Indeed, her first time on screen was playing Garland’s daughter at the end of In the Good Old Summertime (Robert Z. Leonard; 1949) when not yet three years old. At the time of her death in June 1969, Garland ‘had become a major gay diva and icon’ (Knapp, 2006: 134). In this paper, I argue that Cabaret (Bob Fosse; 1972) is a film that offers queer readings via the presence and performance of Liza Minnelli in the role of Sally. As I suggest, this is partly because of references to queer icon Marlene Dietrich and the concept of the independent New Woman prominent in Weimar Berlin. But, I suggest, it is particularly because of the gay iconicity of Judy Garland who, I argue, is a lingering, haunting, presence when Minnelli is on screen. To a large extent, Minnelli’s performance as Sally embodies a number of the mannerisms and characteristics typical of Garland; it is therefore possible to read Minnelli as a superimposed version of her mother as palimpsest. Thereby, Minnelli can be designated a queer icon in her own right, enhancing the reading of Cabaret as a queer text.

Emily Sutton (University of California, Berkeley): Unsexing the Queer: Quentin Crisp and British National Culture.

The effeminate, camp yet oddly non-sexual gay male occupies a distinct, and distinctly British, celebrity niche. Rather than existing at the margins, men such as Quentin Crisp, John Inman, Kenneth Williams and Charles Hawtry, or, more recently, Graham Norton and Alan Carr, are situated at the very centre of British popular culture. Yet this “type”, as it were, has received little scholarly attention. An earlier gay liberatory perspective treated these figures as embarrassing stereotypes suffering from a particularly acute form of internalised
homophobia, while, despite its preoccupation with shame, contemporary queer scholarship has largely passed them by. In this paper, I will take Crisp as a charged locus point for what I call “embarrassed attachment,” and, through a reading of his memoir The Naked Civil Servant, consider both the function of the queer celebrity type that he represents and the ambivalence of his status as a queer icon. Figures such as Crisp are sometimes warmly received in heterosexual culture because they are perceived as non-sexual, but this does not quite account for their embrace by the British public. Rather, I will argue that Crisp typifies the queer “little Englander”, always already affiliated with dominant national culture even as he ostentatiously disregards it. Crisp represented, particularly in his advanced age, a kind of belatedness in his affiliation to an older model of the gay man as cultural adjunct to the ruling class. Crisp’s public embrace of squalor, and his self-styling as a “stately homo,” exposed the slipperiness between that form of effeminacy which is camp, and that which is merely posh; and that form of sexual identity which is merely manner, and that which is material. That capacity to occupy the centre while wilfully disregarding it, that facilitated Crisp’s absorption in a British popular culture that, one would expect, would be repelled by such a seemingly dissident figure.

**Rose Collis (Independent Scholar): A fine ‘romance’: Nancy Spain and Gilbert Harding, the Original British Queer Celebrities.**

Some sixty years ago, Nancy Spain and Gilbert Harding were the two most famous personalities on British television and radio. Harding was a guilt-ridden and unhappy gay man who loathed his fame as the most-watched man on British television, with his ill-natured appearances on the hit panel show, What’s My Line? and, weeks before his untimely death, his infamous interview on Face to Face. Dubbed ‘The Rudest Man on Television’, Harding’s friend Brian Masters, said he was ‘the one person whom everybody in the country knew… truly the first ever Television Personality, a man celebrated for being himself.’

By contrast, his great friend Nancy Spain was at ease with both her sexuality and her celebrity status as a ‘personality’ journalist, author and regular contributor to Woman’s Hour and top-rated radio show, My Word! Her columns, articles and books were liberally sprinkled with anecdotes about her celebrity friends (and, in some cases, clandestine lovers), including Noel Coward, Marlene Dietrich and Lena Horne.

However, the irony was that although known for their unflinching outspokenness in public, both harboured secrets that could have destroyed their careers overnight: respectively, his sexuality; and that she was actually the mother of the boy passed off as the youngest son of her partner, Joan Werner Laurie, founding editor of She magazine.

And then, in 1954, while in the middle of the Atlantic on a banana boat bound for Jamaica, they found themselves bombarded with telegrams from reporters, as the Fleet Street rumour-mill had it the ‘trouser-wearing character’ and the ‘irascible bachelor’ would be entering into distinctly unholy matrimony. In an era before celebrity magazines and tabloids relentlessly pursued famous and infamous couples, the two friends found themselves having to tread a careful line between truth and deceit — lest the ‘steady ship’ in which their reputations sailed capsized and sank with all hands….