

Institution:	University of Northumbria at Newcastle
Unit of Assessment:	36A - Communication, Cultural and Media Studies
Title of case study: Developing the Educational Profile of Genre Film Festivals	
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The Case Study illustrates how research into cult, fantasy and horror films has been used to engage organisers of film festivals – most notably the ‘Abertoir’ festival based in Wales and the ‘Offscreen’ festival in Brussels – contributing to enhanced educational content which provided new audience experiences at both festivals. The primary activity was the incorporation of the presentation of research findings to audiences within festival programmes. The impact derives from the resulting changes in the way that the festivals were organised, programmed and contextualized for audiences and consequent changes in the profile of the festivals concerned. The main benefit relates primarily to the organizers; in particular, the enhancement of the educational content of the Abertoir Festival has enabled it to bid for additional funding from the Film Agency for Wales during the census period.</p>	
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This case study’s underpinning research has historicised and contextualized cult and fantasy genres in terms of production, reception and the discursive surround associated with these genres. It has also explored the nature of cult fan cultures and the institutions and practices that support these. The emphasis has been mainly on European (including British) and American material. Research findings relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the significance of location and site-specific definitions of generic identity and value, focusing in particular on cult festivals and on regional, national and international funding institutions; • the discursive construction of generic identity and value within fan communities and in fan-generated publications; and • the extent to which cult discourses relocate historical material within contemporary models of cult history (and what is lost in that process, not least notions of national specificity). <p>Of particular significance to this case study is Hutchings’s research on the history and economics of European horror cinema (which is a key theme in the festivals) and the relation of this to cult constructions of value and meaning, and Sexton’s research into cult cinemas, which has addressed the formation of cult in relation to particular localities and institutions, not least film festivals. The research has been ongoing, but there are significant outputs in the current REF period and in the period of employment at Northumbria of all members of staff involved – see below for details.</p> <p>The leads for this case study are Hutchings, Sexton (who arrived at Northumbria in February 2010), and Early Career Researcher Hunter (who arrived in September 2010), all of whom have worked with the organisers of the week-long Abertoir festival in Wales, with Hunter and Sexton also engaging with the Offscreen Festival in Brussels. Hutchings is the most widely-published in this area, including numerous outputs on horror and science fiction since 1993, all during the period of his employment at Northumbria, and has also written for more populist outlets directed at cult fan audiences. Sexton is a leading researcher on cult cinema, editing the book series <i>Cultographies</i> (Wallflower/Columbia University Press) and during the period of his employment at Northumbria completing a co-authored book on <i>Cult Cinema</i> which developed a historical and critical understanding of its subject in a manner applicable to cult festivals. In particular, this work has focused on the importance of festivals and audiences to the development of cult categories. Hunter, as an Early Career Researcher, has less published material, although since September 2010 he has completed three outputs dealing with European cult and horror cinema, with a particular emphasis on production context.</p> <p>While the impact activity is related to specific outputs, the impact is underpinned by recognition of expertise deriving from a larger body of research, especially in the case of Hutchings.</p>	

3. References to the research

The following outputs (copies available on request) underpinned the impact activity at both the Abertoir and the Offscreen festivals; details about the relation of specific outputs to aspects of each festival are set out in the following section.

Hutchings, Peter, 'We're the Martians now: British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s' in Ian Hunter (ed.), *British Science Fiction Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1999.

<http://routledge.customgateway.com/routledge-communication-and-media-studies/film-studies/we-re-the-martians-now-british-sf-invasion-fantasies-of-the-1950s-and-1960s.html>

Hutchings, Peter, 'The Argento Effect' in Julian Stringer et al (eds.), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

<http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?product=9780719066313>

Sexton, Jamie and Ernest Mathijs, *Cult Cinema*, Wiley Blackwell, 2011.

<http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405173734.html>

Hunter, Russ and Ernest Mathijs, 'The European Marketing and Reception of Belgian Horror Cinema' in Brick, Emily, David Huxley and Patricia Allmer (eds), *European Nightmares: Horror Cinema in Europe Since 1945*, London-New York: Wallflower Press/Columbia University Press, 2012. (Output in edited book which also includes the chapter below, listed in REF2.)

Hutchings, Peter 'Resident Evil: The Limits of European Horror' in Brick, Emily, David Huxley and Patricia Allmer (eds), *European Nightmares: Horror Cinema in Europe Since 1945*, London-New York: Wallflower Press/Columbia University Press, 2012. (Output listed in REF2.)

Hunter, Russ, 'Eco Zombies: The Italian Horror Film and Political Ecology' in *The Italianist*, 33.2, 2013. (Note that this article was completed in time for the presentation of some of its findings at Abertoir 2012.) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/0261434013Z.00000000048>

Sexton's editorship of the *Cultographies* series of research monographs – which has been ongoing through the REF period - is a leading asset of publications in this field of study.

4. Details of the impact

The main focus for this case study is the Abertoir Festival based in Aberystwyth, Wales, an annual festival that commenced in 2007. It is an increasingly significant cult and fantasy festival on the international circuit and is currently the only festival of its kind in Wales and one of only three UK festivals (along with Leeds and Frightfest) to be members of the European Fantastic Film Festivals Federation. There has also been impact in relation to the annual Offscreen Festival based in Brussels, a similarly themed cult and fantasy festival that commenced in 2008. European cult film festivals of this kind tend to operate in a similar manner, offering screening of new films and revivals alongside opportunities for fans to meet directors and actors associated with this area of culture. The appearance of academics in these festivals is not unheard of and occasionally separate symposia or conferences will be run alongside the festivals proper (with the London-based Cine-Excess, in which all the researchers associated with this case study are involved, a key example). However, the integration of research-based input from a group of researchers into the main festival programme, such as was the case especially with Abertoir in 2012 but also at Offscreen in 2012, is unusual and innovative.

In both cases, the aim of the engagement between Northumbria researchers and festival organisers has been to enhance the educational context of the festivals. This has been most evident for Abertoir, where the organisers have bid for additional funding as a result of input from Northumbria staff based on their research. The most obvious product of the developing relationship with Offscreen during the census period has been an AHRC-funded international research network (awarded in December 2012), which includes Offscreen as a participant and which has fostered research-led engagement led by PI Sexton along with Hunter and Hutchings with non-academic users of research, including festival programmers and other producers and distributors of cult material.

Staff involved in the case study were initially approached by the festival directors of Abertoir and

Impact case study (REF3b)

Offscreen respectively. A series of meetings and communications commenced early in 2012 and built on pre-existing informal contacts. As a result of these, Hunter, Hutchings and Sexton were all involved in providing research-derived material for the week-long Abertoir event that took place in November 2012; this included written material for festival brochures, public lectures and presentations to the festival audiences. This material connected directly with published research outputs thus:

- Hunter: hour-long public lecture 'The Horrible History of Italian horror' and brochure entry 'Italian Horror Cinema' – which placed Italian horror in a broader European context and which in this drew upon research into Italian and Belgian horror in Hunter 2012 and 2013.
- Hutchings: 20-minute introduction to British Science Fiction and short brochure entry on Italian horror. The first drew upon Hutchings' 1999 research into the British SF invasion film, and especially his work there on the historical context of the Quatermass stories. The second drew on the exploration of Italianate cinematic excess in Hutchings 2003 and 2012.
- Sexton: 20-minute introductory talk on 3D cult movies and brochure entry on 'Rocky Horror Picture Show' - all drawing directly upon explorations of cult cultures in Sexton 2011.

The 2012 festival had its highest ever attendance figures, with 3,300 admissions. As a result of Northumbria-led input, the festival organisers were able to report to the principal funder a significant enhancement in the educational content of the festival in comparison with previous years: *"This year, we made a strong push to provide a much wider educational aspect than in previous years and teamed up with the University of Northumbria in a series of activities and elements that have taken our engagement with education to new levels"* (Source: Evaluation Report for Film Agency of Wales). Consequently they were able to bid for additional funding from the Film Agency for Wales for the 2013 festival.

Input into Offscreen included a presentation by Sexton on cult cinema and a presentation by Hunter on Italian cult cinema. Both of these served to demonstrate to festival funding agencies an educational profile for the event, and supported the festival director's aspiration that Offscreen be "more than just a festival". Key to this relationship has been Sexton's Cult Cinema network. The Offscreen Director confirms that the contribution of Sexton and Hunter has enhanced: *"the internationalisation of the festival and the reinforcement of its educational part. Collaborating with your Cult Network has also helped in profiling the festival even more deliberately and consciously into the cult territory and brought the ambition of mixing an academic with a festival approach and audience a step closer."* (Email, 24 September 2013).

Impact activity for both festivals will continue to evolve after the census period, with staff invited to contribute to Abertoir in 2013 and Offscreen in 2014.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (copies available on request)

Supporting letter from Abertoir Festival Director.

Email correspondence with Director of Offscreen.

Evaluation report for Abertoir Festival for Film Agency of Wales

Festival brochures and associated marketing material (confirming participation in both festivals).

Successful AHRC network bid which includes Offscreen as a key participant (AH/K005111/1 – Global Cult Cinema in the Age of Convergence).