

A person who functions normally in a sick society is himself sick

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According to Michel Foucault, whose theories about power and sexuality greatly inspired the development of queer theory, the political potential of homosexuality derives from the lack of norms, conventions, and prescriptions historically attached to it. Homosexuality as a way of life promotes the radical reinterpretation of the dominant culture. It introduces love where it is not supposed to be and allows for experiencing pleasure in its most unexpected combinations.

Therefore, as of the early eighties, concerning the prospects of the gay movement, the French philosopher proposes a radical politics, one that is not moving in the direction of assimilation, but towards more spontaneous types of relationship such as friendship.¹ Friendship is far more elastic and formless than what is possible within the legal framework of marriage and it provides a greater potential for intimacy, free of prescribed roles, expectations, and prejudices. No wonder that an “outlaw” way of life, following the logic of friendship, appears to be dangerous and disturbing for the heteronormative status quo. Mainly because it poses a threat to the hegemony of society’s most cherished institution, the nuclear family, which is also the key to the future of our society.

The ambiguity of the gay lifestyle, that is, queerness being both revolutionary and, due to its subversive power, “dreaded” for the conservative majority, can be easily grasped in the light of American horror films of the eighties. Queer undertones, a connection between a monstrous self and homoerotic desire have always been a part of the horror genre from its outset in the 18th century.² However, in the conservative political climate that characterized the United States back then, horror easily became a tool of homophobic rhetoric and the Christian right in the demonization of the queer community. Hollywood monster movies often depicted homosexuality as a dangerous, contagious disease transmitted via its open display.³ On the one hand, the horror genre is a tool for mirroring societal anxieties, on the other, it can also be the means of creating and perpetuating what

¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Friendship as a Way of Life’, in Sylvère Lotringer, *Foucault Live. Collected Interviews 1961-1984*, New York 1996, pp. 308-312.

² David Klein Martins, *From Monsters to Monsters: Perverted Predators and Diseased Deviants. Queer Representations in American Slasher Film of the 1980s* (MA thesis), University of Lisbon, Lisbon 2016, p. 15.

³ Harry Morgan Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (dissertation), University of Southern California, California 1996, p. 222.

is to be feared.⁴ The way the Conservative right instrumentalized the outbreak of HIV and AIDS for the pejorative social representation of LGBT people illustrates this well. Portraying the community as a group of predatory, vampiric creatures, who recruit their allies by transforming “normal” human beings through an exchange of bodily fluids, not only in horror movies but also in newspaper articles about the epidemic, was not uncommon.⁵

Queer theory, that emerged in the second half of the eighties, enabled new interpretations of monstrosity as a metaphor for non-normative sexualities. The monster can now be not only an outcast but also a nonconformist, counter-hegemonic, empowering character who deliberately stays outside the patriarchal social framework and its binary oppositions. In the queer readings of the horror genre, traditional values and normality become undesirable, while the queer monster is no longer frightening, but a heroic or lonely creature awaiting redemption.⁶ Against this background, the present text reflects on the different ways the monster or the monstrous can be used as metaphors in understanding queerness, and the queer lifestyle, with an emphasis on gay cruising, i.e. a specific form of queer connectivity, the act of searching for sex partners in public. Starting from the similarities between the monster’s solitude and the loneliness inherent in the queer experience, I move on to the tension between the mainstream, assimilationist gay rights politics and the revolutionary lifestyle offered also by Foucault. I address the uniforming and normative functioning of mainstream gay culture and by comparison the point of view of the Eastern European queer individual. Finally, I examine the current state of gay culture that some simply refer to as dead, and consider what possibilities are left to experience friendship and intimacy within this lifeless condition.

The lonely Minotaur

Central to Greek mythology, the Minotaur often appears in queer imagination and popular culture. Presumably because the myth rhymes perfectly with the monster’s use in homophobic rhetorics, as described above. The story demonstrates how we create our own enemies to later be able to defeat them. The half-human, half-bull-bodied monster is born of the arrogance of King Minos of Crete towards the gods. Later, when the Athenians kill Minos’ son, the Minotaur, exiled to the gigantic Labyrinth in the meantime due to its frightfulness, becomes a means of torture, terror, revenge, and punishment. A unique reading of the myth is given in the short story *House of Asterion* (1947) by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, which narrates the events from the point of view of the

⁴ Martins (note 2), p. 9.

⁵ Benshoff (note 3), pp. 222-223.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 239.

monster. In his interpretation, the melancholic and at the same time naive creature believes that by killing the young boys and girls, sent to the Labyrinth every nine years by the Athenians as sacrifice, he frees them from evil. In his perspective, death is the way towards redemption. Therefore he looks at Theseus, who eventually beheaded him, as his savior, expecting the hero to liberate him from his unbearable loneliness.

Compared to the *House of Asterion*, the 1971 rare queer classic, *Johnny Minotaur*, directed by the American poet and filmmaker Charles Henri Ford, has little hope of salvation. To the existential dilemmas raised by Borges, Ford's experimental film tends to offer a solution through the abandonment of standards, the giving up of the self to luxury, pleasure, and physical desire. *Johnny Minotaur* presents the creation of a film that explores the myth of the Minotaur on the sun-drenched shores of the island of Crete. The upcoming film is imbued with the sexual fantasies of the director, Carlos, who starts to develop feelings for one of the actors, Nikos, during the shooting, and so several times considers adopting the 17-year-old boy. The ubiquitous masturbating and sexually open characters remind us of the early twentieth-century boy nudes of the German photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden. It is hard to draw the line between *Johnny Minotaur* and the film being created in it, due to the surrealistic visual vocabulary and non-linear editing. The images are complemented by a series of monologues narrated by artists like Allen Ginsberg, Salvador Dalí, and Warren Sonbert, blending Ford's adolescent diary entries with philosophical reflections. At the end of the film, while one of the characters, presumably Nikos, masturbates with a paper-mache Minotaur mask on his head, we hear Ginsberg's conclusion that the Minotaur is the personification of fear at the end of conscious reasoning (i.e. the Labyrinth) and if one kills it, one also kills oneself.

On the one hand, Ford's piece, loosely following the Minotaur's myth, is about loneliness and the complicatedness of intimacy. On the other, it is about a host of socially taboo subjects ranging from incest, intergenerational desire, pansexuality to autoeroticism, therefore the film serves as a productive starting point for the present essay. While the attention of contemporary critics was not particularly stimulated by the sensitive topics involved, the organization of the premiere following the recent restoration of the film, which had suffered damage in the past decades, was fraught with problems. The film was preserved in 2014 by the Museum of Modern Arts in New York at the initiative of the Film-Makers' Cooperative's executive director, MM Serra, and has only been digitalized and made available online for a few months.⁷ The premiere, originally organized in

⁷ The film is available on demand on Vimeo since April, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/charlesfilms/407430960> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

MoMA, was unexpectedly cancelled by the museum without further explanation, and as a result, eventually, the Sie FilmCenter in Denver provided a venue for the event.⁸ Seeking for a logical explanation, Serra could not dissociate from the Lawrence Brose case, which shook the New York art scene at the time. Brose is an acknowledged avant-garde queer filmmaker and visual artist who has created several films that deal with homosexuality, homophobia, AIDS, and related topics. Accusing him of possessing thirteen hundred images of child pornography, Homeland Security and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement arrested him in 2009. Brose's persecution lasted for six years, as some have reported, unfounded.⁹ For example, a hundred images of the material allegedly depicting child pornography was exhibition print from the experimental film *De Profundis* (1997), which, ironically, interpreted Oscar Wilde's letters written from the prison after the poet had been convicted of homosexuality.

Serra saw a connection between the unexpected cancellation of the New York premiere and the fact that *Johnny Minotaur* portrays presumably underage characters naked or while masturbating. According to the director, the persecution of Brose pushes institutions that would otherwise be progressive into self-censorship. She also points out that while current legislation encourages us to deny that we have sexual desires before the age of eighteen, it does little to curb violence and child abuse within the sanctity of the family.¹⁰ The anxiety around underage sex is a more recent historical preoccupation, as can be seen from the film's contemporary critiques that were bothered by the corruption of the United States cultural underground, rather than the actors' age.¹¹ Kyle Harris, the author of a more recent article summarizing the preservation history of the film and its "twenty-first-century censorship," points out that what both current and contemporary criticism fails to notice in the film is the critical and conscious examination of the power dynamics involved in intergenerational, postcolonial relationships, and the problematic of pedophilic voyeurism. *Johnny Minotaur's* contemporary reception makes visible the normative value system that comes into play during canon formation. This value system, Harris adds, advocates for a sterilized gay history that can assimilate into the dominant culture, thus Ford's pedophilic discourse could hardly fit in.¹²

⁸ Eventually, the screening paved the way for Anthology Film Archives to host the New York State premiere of the restored film in June, 2014.

⁹ See, for example, Doug Ireland, 'The Martyrdom of Lawrence Brose', *Gay City News*, <https://www.gaycitynews.com/the-martyrdom-of-lawrence-brose/> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

¹⁰ Kyle Harris, 'MM Serra on whether Johnny Minotaur is art or obscene teen-exploitation', *Westword*, <https://www.westword.com/arts/mm-serra-on-whether-johnny-minotaur-is-art-or-obscene-teen-exploitation-5777650> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

¹¹ See, for example, Tom Seligson, 'Perverse Chic', *Evergreen Review*, 1971, September, pp. 74-76.

¹² Kyle Harris, 'Out of the Maze: The Preservation and Censorship of Johnny Minotaur, a Queer Cinema Classic', *Afterimage*, 2014, 42. 3., p. 5.

Zombie queer; or “The death of gay culture”

The unfolding of a less radical, assimilationist trend within the gay movement can be traced back to the nineties in the United States. This more mainstream line breaks with the countercultural rhetoric of the gay and lesbian liberation movement of the sixties and the seventies, and doesn't automatically distance itself from the dominant ideology and its hierarchical and competitive ideals. Progressive-left affiliations have been pushed into the background, replaced by a neoliberal identity/equality politics, a superficial “multiculturalism” and a Benetton-ad style diversity image.¹³ A new strain of gay moralism, partially as a reaction to HIV and AIDS, expressing disapproval of “promiscuity” and the “gay lifestyle,” as well as advocating for gay and lesbian marriage has also appeared. Lisa Duggan has coined the term “homonormativity” to describe the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian politics. Duggan says that the assimilationist movement does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them while promising a depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.¹⁴ Hence, even within gay culture, certain ideas and ways of life are desirable, while others, such as Foucauldian concepts or political radicalism, are considered outdated or, as the example of *Johnny Minotaur* shows, monstrous.

The work of Canadian artist and filmmaker Bruce LaBruce is particularly interesting in this regard. Since the eighties, when he established the queercore movement in Toronto, which merged the hopelessly bourgeois gay scene with punk, he has been promoting a militant, extreme, and radical homosexuality. Today's mainstream gay rights movement, he says, is conservative, based on conformity and political correctness.¹⁵ Instead, in LaBruce's films, one can encounter revolutionary politics, pornography, and terrorist aesthetics. His “most mainstream” work is *Gerontophilia* (2013), a reversed Lolita story that demonstrates the aforementioned complexity of intergenerational desire through the love of an eighteen-year-old boy and an eighty-one-year-old man. Old people, like the monsters appearing in his other films, are the last vestiges of an old school homosexuality that was subversive and celebrated the outsider.¹⁶ His concern about those who find their place in this world is aptly articulated by one of his characters who says that “a person who functions normally in a

¹³ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, Boston 2003, p. 44.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

¹⁵ Sergi Doladé, ‘Bruce La Bruce - A true revolutionary’, *Metal Magazine*, <https://metalmagazine.eu/en/post/interview/bruce-la-bruce-a-true-revolutionary-sergi-dolade> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

¹⁶ Manilo Converti, ‘Interview with Director Bruce Labruce, author of Gerontophilia’, *Psychiatry on line Italia*, <http://www.psychiatryonline.it/node/4635> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

sick society is himself sick, while it is only the non-adjusted individual who can achieve a healthy acting out against the overtly strict restraints and demands of the dominant culture.”

The quoted sentence is a paraphrase of German philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s account of industrial society,¹⁷ and it is delivered in the film *Otto; or Up with Dead People* by the character Medea Yarn. LaBruce’s 2008 piece makes way for the sub-genre of zombie porn within the horror genre, which he develops to perfection in his next film, *L.A. Zombie* (2010). It is a hardcore porn movie the zombie protagonist of which, the renowned porn star Francois Sagat, is literally able to fuck back to life those who have died of injustice, and he does so several times throughout the film. By contrast, *Otto; or Up with Dead People* only contains a few traces of porn, yet, without a gut fucking scene it wouldn’t be worthy of its genre. The story takes place in Berlin and, like *Johnny Minotaur*, it is about the making of a film. The film being shot, entitled *Up with Dead People*, is a political-porno-zombie movie that criticizes consumerist society and its alienating, anti-ecological aspects. During the casting, Medea meets Otto, the young zombie, whom she sees so authentic so that she chooses the boy to be the protagonist of her “magnum corpus.” The radical feminist director envisions Otto as the leader of the gay zombie revolution, the “gay Che Guevara of the undead.” We can’t decide if he is a real zombie or just a lost, homeless boy with mental disorders, but it becomes apparent that he is lonely, has a hard time finding contact with others, is indifferent to the things of the outside world, and suffers from an identity crisis.

Mindless zombies usually represent groups that society has deprived of humanity and are lacking autonomy. In a Marxist interpretation, the undead are the literalization of alienated labor, but they can also symbolize those that society considers contagious (e.g. queer people, people with HIV). LaBruce, however, was tired of zombies always being treated as worthless and passive. The director was more interested in the idea of the zombie as the ultimate consumer and the ultimate conformist, which constitutes the perfect metaphor for a modern capitalist society.¹⁸ With Otto’s character, he inverts the latter paradigm since Otto is a zombie who is non-conformist. He is a monster who doesn’t fit in, who is “conducting his one-man revolution against reality,” against those who all act alike, look alike, and go to the same places.

¹⁷ See, Herbert Marcuse, ‘Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society’, *Marxists Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/aggressiveness.htm> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

¹⁸ Bruce LaBruce, ‘Otto: An Introduction’, *Incognitum Hactenus*, <https://incognitumhactenus.wordpress.com/otto-an-introduction/> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

With the zombie metaphor, LaBruce gives a humorous picture of the gay scene and its cruising habits. He reminds those who have ever cruised in a park that it can be an experience just like in *The Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero's film from 1968 that has established the pattern for modern zombie movies). Not necessarily in a pejorative way, since anonymity, the interchangeability of body parts, and the sexual trance can all be quite exciting.¹⁹ At the same time, the director thinks that gay culture is already dead, deadened by technology and body fascism. In LaBruce's work, the gay scene emerges as a mindless, consumerist, ideology-driven mass that expels those who don't follow the lifestyle propagated by the mainstream. *Otto; or Up With Dead People* presents this mechanism: the protagonist is ousted by and therefore is the logical product of the materialist society, but alienated from the conformed and zombified gay masses, too. The zombie in the film, on the one hand, is a critique of the commodification of the gay scene and its assimilationist endeavors. On the other hand, zombie sexuality and pornography operate as a site of radical politics, offering, as noted by Shaka McGlotten and Sarah Vangundy, "a more vital kind of death, one that embraces a radical, in-your-face, sexual, if also a little grotesque, politics: the kind of politics that are increasingly anathema to gay rights organizations, slacktivists, and homonorms."²⁰

Eastern European monster queer

Mainstream gay culture is insensitive not only to social inequalities and the revolutionary potential of homosexuality but also to the diversity of geopolitical contexts. Given that the present essay appears in a volume aimed at enriching Eastern European queer history, I think this is an essential aspect. Over the past thirty years, several authors have drawn attention to the US-centrism of LGBT discourses. Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa's 2011 comprehensive book, *De-centering Western Sexualities*,²¹ is a milestone in this regard. The Polish authors outline the historical and cultural differences that endow the post-socialist region with the appearance of belatedness compared to the West. Of these differences, it is noteworthy that during the decades of the socialist dictatorship, there could be no public discourse around non-normative sexualities in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, as these were considered taboo. In addition, the AIDS epidemic, which has made it essential within gender studies in the US to develop queer theory, i.e., a theoretical discourse that shifts the focus from the body onto the normative systems it is surrounded by, was hardly or not at

¹⁹ Ibidem

²⁰ Shaka McGlotten and Sarah Vangundy, 'Zombie Porn 1.0: or, Some Queer Things Zombie Sex Can Teach Us', *Qui Parle*, 2013 Spring/Summer, 21.2, p. 115.

²¹ Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa, *De-Centring Western Sexualities. Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, London 2011.

all present in Eastern Europe before 1989. Focusing on local characteristics, their book deconstructs in case-studies the simplifying idea that there is a center and everything outside of it should be considered peripheral.

In the Eastern European literature of the nineties and two-thousands, several authors reflected on the schizophrenic state that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. In both Western and Eastern imagination, the unemancipated, at times monstrous, stereotypical character of the Eastern European queer individual, lacking a thorough knowledge of the codes and customs of the “official” gay scene, has also been constructed. Michal Witkowski’s 2004 novel *Lovetown*, which depicts the pre-1989 gay and trans community in Poland, is a good example of this. Almost two decades after the regime change, the narrator of the story cynically blames himself for the social image of gays still not being positive enough: “While we were going at it like dogs in the bushes, they’d come here with their volleyballs, athletics, and fitness regimens to drag us out of our pre-emancipatory, post-picketatory gutter,”²² he says, comparing his kind with the so-called “emancipated gays.” Tõnu Õnnepalu’s *Border State* (1993), the Estonian novel translated into most languages in the nineties, gives a gloomier picture of what it is like to be Eastern European and gay. The narrator of the story, presumably from one of the Baltic countries, is in Paris on a scholarship as a translator shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. He develops a relationship with a wealthy professor who offers to use his influence to keep him in the country when the narrator’s visa is about to expire, in return for sexual favors. When he realizes his vulnerable condition, he acts like a real monster and kills the professor.

In the cosmopolitan big cities of the former Eastern Bloc, the very gay image I have presented through the above examples has become dominant in the last ten years. Fast fashion, pop music, and the social media revolution all played a role in the emergence of a global, standardized scene permeated by the hierarchical and exclusive norms and value systems observed by Duggan in the United States in the early two-thousands. Due to the mainstreaming of gay culture, although there is more discussion of non-normative sexualities, there is at the same time less emphasis on the above-mentioned historical-geopolitical differences and the importance of understanding the past, which strongly defines Eastern Europe’s queer present. In addition, this seemingly progressive process is mainly based on the adoption of Western patterns. Since discourses critical of mainstream gay culture are not part of the imported package, the local scenes are lacking tools and vocabulary to thematize and address the issues characterizing today’s gay communities, described in detail in the following part.

²² Michal Witkowski, *Lovetown*, London 2011. (Kindle Edition)

The top predator

The concept of homonormativity helps to understand that the gay community's functioning does not necessarily call into question heteronormative ideals. It also makes it clear that mainstream gay culture is mostly meant to strengthen the position of white, middle-class gay men within patriarchal society. However, (from the above) it does not follow that the rules of this dominant order could not appear, indeed to an exaggerated extent, in more hidden spaces inaccessible to the general public. It seems utopian to think that the gay community would ever have been free of competition and hierarchy. As American literary critic Leo Bersani points out in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* (1987), referred to as one of the foundation stones of queer theory, "anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable." He then adds, "Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were going to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world."²³ The advent of online cruising at the beginning of the decade only exacerbated the eroticization of hierarchy and the triumph of muscular, defined bodies, while also producing a hyper-masculine ideal type that takes its "victims" as a top predator within the community.

Numerous factors play a role in the formation of the gay man's image, so, for example, the patriarchal male ideal also influences what kind of man we want to become and to be with as a homosexual. At the same time, the obsession with bodily perfection is closely related to the rise of social media. Over the past decade, apps like Grindr, Scruff, or Tinder have become essential in gay dating. Sex has always played a key role in the development of queer social networks, and these apps are based on this trend. As *Virtual Intimacies* (2013), a book examining the subject, aptly puts it, today "you can get dick to your house faster than a pizza."²⁴ However, if we observe how these apps were designed, it becomes apparent that they don't provide too many opportunities to get to know each other or make friends. In contrast, they enable you to filter according to different categories, such as age, body type, race, or HIV status, that is, to choose whose profile is shown while browsing, and whose isn't. While public sex spaces and dark rooms are more egalitarian in the sense that you never know in advance whom you will meet, online dating facilitates various forms of exclusion within the community. In the "gay meat market," one can eliminate those whom

²³ Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October*, 1987 Winter, Vol. 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism, p. 206.

²⁴ Shaka McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*, New York 2013, p. 3.

he is not curious about based on his preconceptions, while himself also being transformed into a packaged product. These apps have turned intimacy into a game based on a capital-generating logic, speed, rapidity, and the multiplicity of options.²⁵ Undoubtedly, this operating principle defines also the real-life interactions between the members of the community.

Encountering the different “tribes” in today’s gay clubs formed on the basis of body type, style, fetishes, and sexual preferences, one might feel as if one is wandering through Grindr’s virtual labyrinth. Besides, the hierarchy between the groups of the popular ones and the wannabe outsiders, evoking high school cliques, is also striking. Christine Schierano, a Liverpool-based criminologist, has spent several years observing the functioning of chemsex communities, a new trend in the gay scene, where such hierarchies are becoming even more apparent. Chemsex sessions are private orgies that can last up to several days, and where a group of men inject themselves with various stimulants that increase sexual performance. Members of the “subculture” sometimes give account also of more violent forms of bullying and exclusion.²⁶ I encountered Schierano’s research in *Vice*. The magazine sees chemsex as a new healthcare emergency and seeks to thematize the problem in its complexity with the involvement of different experts. In several articles, it also discusses chemsex’s impact on nightlife, that is, the connection between the new trend and the “death of gay club culture,” highlighting a shift perceivable in the field in the past decade. While queer clubs in the nineties and two-thousands, in sync with the drug use habits of the time, were characterized by glamor, drama, and excitement, today’s places appear to have a darker, predatory atmosphere triggered by sexual stimulants like crystal meth, and GHB.

Both Schierano’s accounts and *Vice*’s *Chemsex* (2015) documentary,²⁷ observing the phenomenon in London, show that this is not just a darker kind of hedonism. Chemsex can lead to (sex and drug) addiction; overdoses of the drugs used during the sessions can be fatal; psychosis, paranoia, and breathing problems are usually reported comedown effects; and due to frequent unprotected sex HIV and other STDs can easily spread in the community. Despite the risks involved, it has entered the mainstream, as well: while hookup apps provide a good platform for drug trafficking, one often sees Grindr user profiles exhibiting the need to distance themselves from the increasingly common practice with the motto “No chems” in the introduction line. The rise of chemsex illustrates the

²⁵ Shaka McGlotten and Katerine Sender, ‘Intimate Immanence’ (conversation), *First Monday*, <https://www.firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9257> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

²⁶ Max Daly, ‘London’s Chemsex Scene Can Be Dark and Deadly’, *Vice*, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9k533v/the-inside-story-of-londons-chemsex-scene (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

²⁷ The documentary can be viewed on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/wXF01BZ4bgU> (last visited: August 10th, 2020)

individual's alienation and burden of performance in today's gay scene, determined by technology and gentrification, as a result of which the number of queer community spaces in bigger cities is decreasing. As community ties weaken, so does the need for friendship and intimacy grow, but chemsex can only give the illusion of this. Interviewees say that the fear of loneliness plays a key role in the formation of such momentary communities. However, the question arises: Is salvation possible at all within the present circumstances? Can the Minotaur's unbearable solitude be overcome?

In this text, I have tried to show that no matter how hard one tries, it remains difficult to avoid the exclusionary structures of the dominant system. Alienation and melancholy are elicited in response to the efforts of the non-adjusted individual, and if one wants to get rid of this state, one easily appears as crazy, dangerous, or monstrous. We tend to interpret the situation where one gives up oneself and steps out of conscious existence as an escape and thus an inauthentic mode of being. However, running away can also be a radical act, not just a form of confusion in the maze. Because if one takes courage and faces up to reality, one may see no alternative but to get as far away from it as possible. Just like Otto, for whom, as a zombie, suicide is obviously not an option, at the end of LaBruce's film, sets off from depressing Berlin, without knowing his destination, to discover "a whole new way of death."

Images



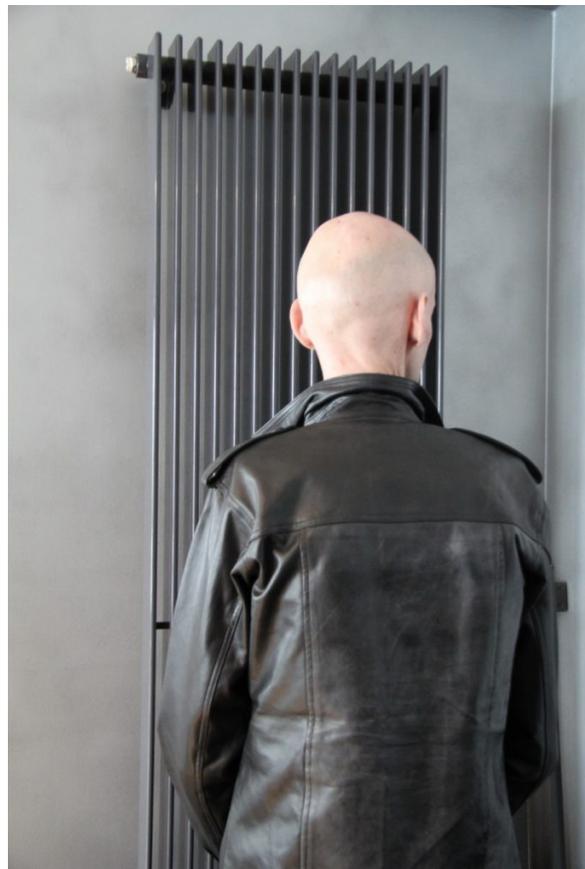
Still from *Johnny Minotaur* (1971) by Charles Henri Ford; courtesy New American Cinema Group



Still from *OTTO; or Up with Dead People* (2008) by Bruce LaBruce; courtesy Bruce LaBruce



Still from *L.A. Zombie* (2010) by Bruce LaBruce; courtesy Bruce LaBruce



Photograph from the series *The Tribal Chief* (2015-2016) by Lilla Szász; courtesy Lilla Szász. The series approaches the phenomenon of gay cruising in Budapest after the regime change in a particularly sensitive manner.