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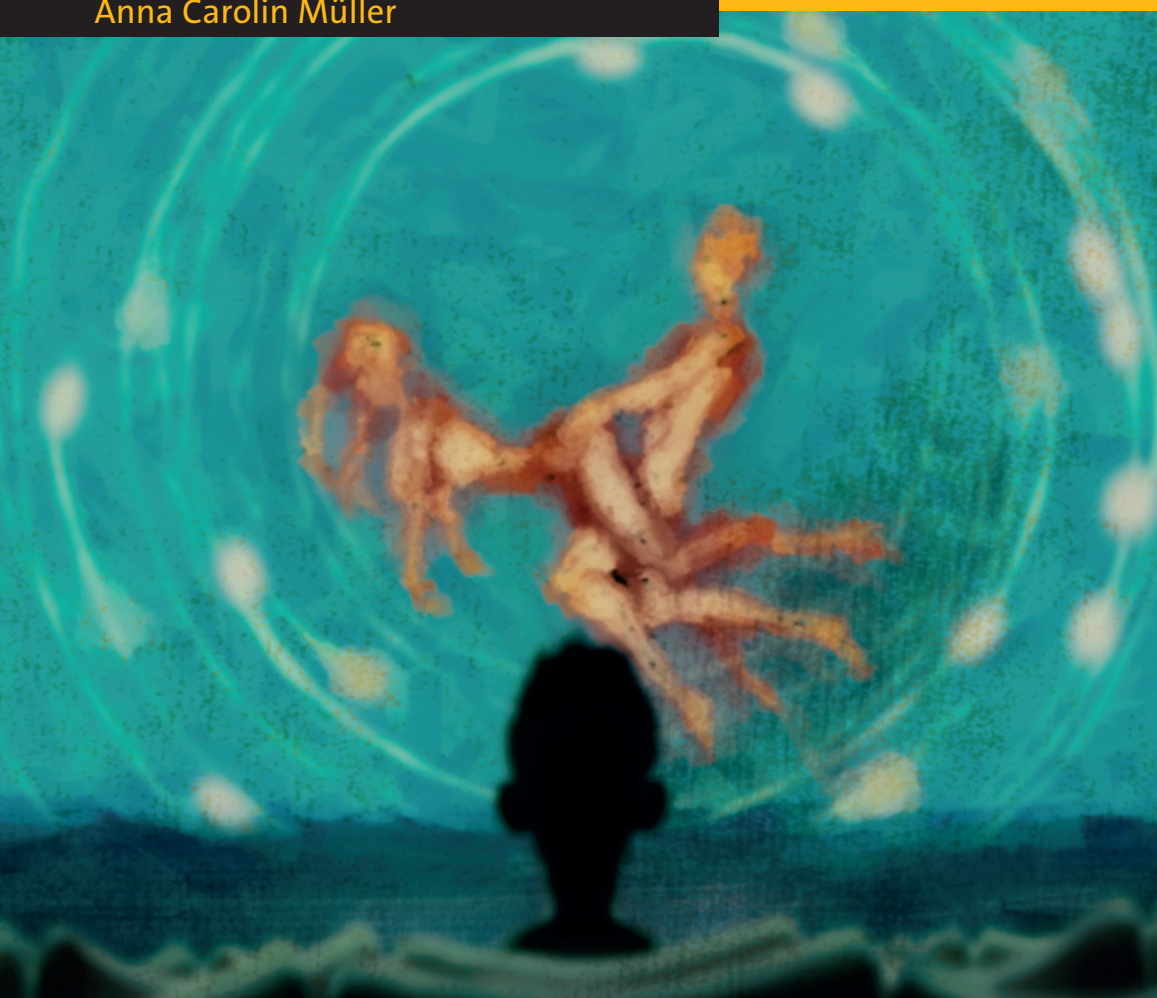
Queer Enough?

Homonormativity and Hegemonic Gay Masculinity in Contemporary Biopics

Anna Carolin Müller



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The title is adapted from the poem Howl by 20th century American poet Allen Ginsberg, whose life and work is dealt with in the film. In this study, the author examines how the films Howl, Stonewall and Milk enact the emancipation of their protagonists, while simultaneously reproducing their oppression and aestheticising their discrimination, thus making it consumable.

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When a few people are frank about homosexuality in public, it breaks the ice. Then people are free to be frank about anything and that's socially useful. Homosexuality is a condition, and because it alienated me, or set me apart from the beginning, it served as a catalyst for self-examination, or a detailed realization of my environment and the reasons why everyone else is different and why I am different.

(Allen Ginsberg in Howl)

Is that really what you want? What, to blend in? I mean, we are different, right? You know, I'm beginning to realize just how different we really are. […] You know, I'm getting to really feel like – like I just want to break something, you know?

(Danny Winters in Stonewall)

If a bullet should enter my brain, let it destroy every closet door. I ask for the movement to continue because it's not about personal gain, and it's not about ego and it's not about power. It's about the 'us's' out there.

(Harvey Milk in Milk)

Introduction: an Interdisciplinary Approach to LGBTQIAN+ Cinema

At the Academy Awards in 2006, one film drew special attention and is now widely considered a milestone in cinematic history. *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) was nominated for eight awards – far and away the highest number of nominations for that season – of which it won three. Thereby, Ang Lee became the first Asian American to win an Oscar for Best Director. The film also got the awards for Best Adapted Screenplay and Original Score but eventually failed to get the award for Best Picture, which caused great indignation within the LGBTQIAN+[1] community. Nevertheless, the film is regarded a trailblazer for other LGBTQIAN+-themed films to follow. It was amongst the first LGBTQIAN+ films that was produced for mainstream (i.e. heterosexual) audiences.[2] Moreover, featuring a love story between two male lead characters it marks the entry of openly displayed homosexual romance into mainstream Hollywood. The success of *Brokeback Mountain* entails an important expansion of the scope of LGBTQIAN+-themed films that were still exclusively found in the subcultural spheres of independent cinema in the 1980s and 90s. Popular cinema that depicts marginalised groups, such as the LGBTQIAN+ community, can make an important contribution to a more open and tolerant society, because they might represent a counter-construct to (hetero)normative reality and create sympathy for their struggles. But it also often approaches the limits of what is possible and can contribute to the reproduction and consolidation of stereotypes. Thus, visibility alone does not seem to be a criterion for improving structural problems.

From the very beginning, especially mainstream Hollywood filmmaking in the U.S. was heavily censored and offered an unrelentingly negative if not

1 The abbreviation stands for **L**esbian, **G**ay, **B**isexual, **T**rans, **Q**ueer/**Q**uestioning, **I**nter, **A**sexual/**A**gender, **N**on-binary and + other sexual and gendered identities.

2 Of course, there have been films that entered the mainstream before 2005, consider for example *Philadelphia* (1993) for which Tom Hanks won the award for Best Actor, but for many scholars and critics *Brokeback Mountain* was a moment of change. This will be examined more closely in chapter 1.3 After *Brokeback Mountain*: New Paradigms in LGBTQIAN+ Cinema.

derogatory image of lesbian, gay, bi, trans*,[3] queer, inter, asexual/agender, and non-binary characters – even though they were never absent from the screen. As in most Hollywood films, white males were usually at the centre of attention in films depicting LGBTQIAN+ characters. In the 1950s and 60s, the most prevalent image of male homosexuals was the effeminate sissy (cf. Russo 4), exclusively serving as a source of humour (cf. Russo 59), whereas in the 1970s and 80s the dangerous, predatory queer villain dominated the screens of mainstream cinema. Fuelled by the AIDS crisis, the representation of homosexuals as dangerous and contagious additionally marked homosexuality as a threat to 'normal' society (cf. Russo 122). It was not until the 1990s, when the emergence of New Queer Cinema helped pave the way for films to thrive in mainstream Hollywood cinema. Film scholar B. Ruby Rich called the new wave of LGBTQIAN+-themed films during the 1990s New Queer Cinema. It was a subcultural movement consisting of independent films with a clear political agenda that sought to undercut the heteronormative structures in society (cf. Rich *Cinema* xix). Representing the perspective of the marginalised or oppressed, these films had the power to establish an alternative view and to comment on the political and social environment they emerged in. However, Rich identifies the beginning of yet another new era following the release of *Brokeback Mountain* (cf. Rich *Cinema* 185). Unlike the independent films of New Queer Cinema, these mainstream productions seemed to be geared towards heteronormative tastes and more commercially oriented (cf. Rich *Cinema* 185). Rich claims:

> Once taboo or titillating, queers were now the stuff of art films, crossover movies, and television series [...] the price of all that mainstreaming on television was the demise of the boundary-pushing, ideology-challenging New Queer Cinema. (Rich *Cinema* 262-263)

Other scholars argue that reaching a wider audience did not necessarily herald the end of the films' subversive potential towards heteronormativ-

3 In accordance with Jack Halberstam's suggestion in *Trans* – A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (2018), I use trans* with an asterisk to indicate an expanded version of transgender, which was introduced to include a greater variety of individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Next to denoting transgender and transsexual persons, the asterisk is thus a placeholder for other suffixes such as person, feminine, masculine, girl, woman, man, boy, and many more. Also, it highlights the fluidity of gendered identities, as "the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity" (Halberstam *Trans** 4).

ity (cf. Nowlan 16; Juett and Jones ix). Nonetheless, the heightened incorporation of gay films into the mainstream U.S. film industry led to an intertwining of neoliberalist hegemonic structures with the production and marketing of films with LGBTQIAN+ content (cf. Knegt 6). Rich suggests that this initiated a process of adaptation, whereby these films had to forfeit some of their subversive potential and were limited in their portrayal of LGBTQIAN+ themes to only specific, heteronormatively shaped representations. This process might marginalise LGBTQIAN+ individuals other than (white, cis-male) homosexuals, while at the same time feigning to raise tolerance and speaking in the interest of all LGBTQIAN+ people.

This dissonance amongst scholars already points to one of my basic premises in *Queer Enough? – Homonormativity and Hegemonic Gay Masculinity in Contemporary Biopics*, namely, that there is a fundamental difference between *queer cinema* and LGBTQIAN+ *cinema*. In order to understand this difference, it seems vital to briefly define the concept of queer for the scope of this work. The term was used as a discriminatory slur for most of the 20th century, until some members of the LGBTQIAN+ community started to re-appropriate it during the late 1980s. In recapturing the term, these individuals sought to offer new possibilities for emancipation, empowerment, and stripping off shame, while for others *queer* remained a pejorative, shaming, and insulting label that sustained their oppression (cf. Smith 281). First circulating among activist circles, *queer* became a concept in academia during the 1990s. This development called the viability of the term into question since it was increasingly criticised for being either too radical (cf. Smith 281) or too idealistic (cf. Jagose 106). Moreover, some scholars pointed to the tendency of engendering the misleading impression that the queer community was a homogeneous group of people with the same goals, concerns, and, above all, a collective political agenda (cf. Butler "Critically Queer" 19-20; Warner *Queer Planet* xxvi; Smith 283). Nevertheless, I agree with Michael Warner that "'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (Warner *Queer Planet* xxvi). This perspective constantly reassesses queer as a concept and aligns it with a utopian vision that transcends its own meaning (cf. Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* 1). The inconceivability of the term becomes its constitutive feature, which, in its fluidity, can be used as a tool for subverting heteronormative structures. My conceptualisation of *queer cinema*, therefore, includes films that open up discursive spaces for critically engaging with (hetero)normative structures, while my use of LGBTQIAN+ *cinema* describes films that

represent LGBTQIAN+ themes or characters without necessarily reflecting the ways in which they are represented.

Based on this definition of queer cinema, *Queer Enough?* explores how LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters are represented in contemporary U.S. cinema. My central concern is to uncover structures in LGBTQIAN+ films that, on the one hand, possess a subversive potential aimed at heteronormative society, but, on the other hand, reproduce parameters that limit the representation of the LGBTQIAN+ community. For if one looks at popular LGBTQIAN+ films since the early 2000s, there appear to be reasonable grounds to suspect that only a less offensive, less radical and, so to speak, 'heteronormalised' form of queerness, i.e., predominantly the portrayal of cis-male, white, and monogamous gay men, finds appeal in mainstream cinema. Analysing a selection of films that followed *Brokeback Mountain*, I set out to scrutinise the visibility of LGBTQIAN+ characters in films to dissect in what ways they are depicted once their defamation in cinema seemingly ended. Thus, *Queer Enough?* raises the following questions: How are LGBTQIAN+ characters represented in contemporary LGBTQIAN+-themed cinema? Which aspects of their (queer) identity are shown, which are hidden? In what ways are especially white gay cis-men depicted in their negotiation of homosexuality and their gendered identity? How are other groups, for example LGBTQIAN+ members of non-white ethnic backgrounds, Blacks[4], lesbians, trans*, and drag queens, marginalised and misrepresented? In short, *Queer Enough?* examines to what extent the selected films engage with heteronormativity, homonormativity, and hegemonic masculinity.

As works of pop-cultural reproduction, films are ideally suited to highlight and critically engage with social structures. In order to achieve comparability and to be able to undertake a sound in-depth analysis, I settled on three films that address iconic moments and agents in the history of the gay rights movement. Organised by their historical chronology, not their release dates, these films are *Howl* (2010) directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedmann, *Stonewall* (2015) by Roland Emmerich, and *Milk* (2008) by Gus van Sant. My interest lies primarily in the representation of queer historiography, since it is an important means of empowerment for margin-

4 Black is capitalised in this book to mark it as the socially constructed racial identity rather than the colour black.

alised social groups. Thus, I chose to examine three contemporary biopics[5] which depict important figures and events in LGBTQIAN+ history. The introduction of LGBTQIAN+ films into the mainstream shows an interest in the cinematic reappraisal of the struggles for LGBTQIAN+ rights. Concomitantly, the prerogative of interpretation of these events is claimed by mainstream audiences. The films can be classified as mainstream cinema, as they are all distributed by larger Hollywood-related mainstream companies despite being produced by independent studios. In addition, they are made by established directors and all feature well-known actors, which is intended to appeal to a broader, mainstream audience. For these reasons, the three films seem to be a good starting point to examine the negotiation of hegemonic culture and the representation of LGBTQIAN+ history.

Howl is set in the late 1950s and consists of five narrative strands, that overlap and intermingle with each other and are accentuated by archival video footage, photographs, and newspaper articles. The first strand consists of an interview with Allen Ginsberg (James Franco) throughout which the film presents several flashbacks arising from Ginsberg's recounting, that show the genesis of the poem 'Howl,' which was to be banned due to its explicit references to homosexuality. The scenes in this narrative strand are marked as being in the past by their black-and-white colour scheme. Moreover, the plot constantly shifts to scenes re-enacting the obscenity trial against publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1957 as well as to the staging of the first public reading of the poem in San Francisco in 1955. Finally, an animated sequence that illustrates the content of the poem repeatedly disrupts the real-life scenes. Through this composition, the poem "Howl" gains special importance on the screen in structuring the whole narrative and aesthetic composition of the film. Not only does it serve as a connecting device at the intersection of the 'real' historic figures and events, the characters on screen, and the film as a work of art, but also accredits the poem a deeper metaphorical meaning: it symbolises Ginsberg's fight for the social acceptance of homosexuality and its release marks his coming out moment. Moreover, Ferlinghetti was ultimately acquitted, which was perceived as an important step for equal rights and freedom of expression. Thereby, the poem is presented as a tool to criticise social conditions and

5 Biopic stands for biographical picture, which usually depicts the life of a (famous) historical person. Strictly speaking, *Stonewall* is not a biopic in the typical sense of the genre since its central character is not modelled after a real-life person. This aspect and the reasons why the film was included anyway will be further explored in chapter 2.5.

becomes central for Ginsberg's struggle with his own sexuality, with the heteronormative structures that oppress him, and eventually for his emancipation.

Stonewall recounts the events that led to what is seen as the symbolic beginning of the gay rights movement in the U.S., the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Disowned by his parents because of his homosexuality, the film's fictional central character Danny Winters (Jeremy Irvine) has to make his way on the streets of New York City, where he meets a group of street youths who take him in. The film follows the protagonist closely and depicts personal as well as institutionalised oppression in his hometown via flashbacks, while inserting his story into the bigger picture of the history of discrimination against LGBTQIAN+ people. Since queers in the U.S. of the 1950s and 60s were not only oppressed by social exclusion and homophobia, but also by violent attacks by the police, they met secretly in clubs like the Stonewall Inn. There, the police repeatedly carried out raids, degrading the LGBTQIAN+ patrons of the club until they could not endure it anymore and launched a counterattack that would become known as the most famous uprising of the gay rights movement – the Stonewall Riots. Throughout the whole film, Danny is at the centre of attention, celebrating his emancipation by throwing the first brick, and hence initiating the riots. Thereby, the film relates one of the most iconic moments in queer history to his personal struggle. This contextualizing of the Stonewall Riots has earned the film a great deal of criticism, especially by members of the LGBTQIAN+ community, for having 'whitewashed' and 'straightwashed' the Riots. This is also due to the fact that Danny Winters is not modelled after the life of a real-life person, while *Stonewalls* narrative structure resembles that of the biopic tradition. Thus, Danny is presented to the viewer as if he *was* a historic figure – namely the person who sparked the gay liberation movement. Meanwhile the actual leading figures of the movement only get marginal roles in the film, if at all, or are portrayed in a stigmatising way.

Milk presents the political career of Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), one of the first openly living homosexuals elected to a political office. After serving only 11 months in office, Milk was assassinated by his colleague Dan White in 1978. The plot of the film mainly covers the final eight years of Milk's life and, thus, the timeframe of his political activism, during which he ran for public office four times. Having concealed his sexual identity for the largest part of his life, he now becomes an advocate for gay rights in San Francisco, striving for absolute visibility, eager to end homophobia and institutionalised discrimination. In an endeavour to show how the historical events

'really' took place from the perspective of the marginalised gay community, the film includes a frame narration that shows Milk recording an audio tape which was taken from the recorded will by the real-life Harvey Milk. Moreover, the film addresses the intense setbacks the gay rights movement had to endure during the 1970s due to the newly uprising religious right. Focusing on his relentless activism in the political environment in the U.S. of the 1970s, the film illustrates Milk's struggle to contribute new themes and variegated perspectives to the discourse on homosexuality negotiating heteronormativity as well as anti-homosexual and homophobic activism. Thereby, even though Milk is murdered in the end, the film emphasises Milk's legacy as a freedom fighter and his persistence on giving hope, to make a persuasive appeal to contemporary society.

The beat poet Allen Ginsberg, the rioters of Stonewall and the politician Harvey Milk, despite their diverging backgrounds, most clearly share that they have been stylised into iconic figures of queer American history and are collectively memorialised. The three films take this as an opportunity to create an appealing cinematic experience with the aura of historical importance through the choice of the biopic genre. Thereby, they delimit important developments in the history of gay rights and relate contemporary culture to these historic events. The most pervasive common features of the films are the framing of heteronormative structures as oppressive and discriminatory, the enactment of the protagonists' emancipation from these oppressive structures and the depiction of their efforts towards more tolerance. Their impact on the developments in the collective fight for equal rights in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s respectively is emphasised by presenting them as archetypes of male heroism such as the genius, the rebel, or the martyr, contributing to the mythologisation of the historical figures and themes. For all three protagonists same-sex attraction is central to their identity and affects their life and relationships with their close relatives, friends, and loved ones, especially, once they start challenging heteronormative structures. They all struggle with the ongoing negotiation process between their homosexuality, their own masculinity, and the masculine gender role that is upheld and enforced on them by society. Moreover, due to special features innate to the genre of the biopic, all three films seek to establish a different view on 'real' historic events. Thus, the films attempt to forge a cinematic gaze from the perspective of the marginalised or oppressed in order to rewrite historic moments and translate them into contemporary times.

Following the path of *Brokeback Mountain*, the films are marketed to a broader, heteronormative audience, seeking mainstream appeal. They all feature white cis-male actors who conform to normative ideals of beauty and masculinity (cf. Knegt 82). Moreover, the DVD covers also indicate this marketing strategy. *Milk* and *Howl* are presented like typical biopics. The covers emphasise the vocation or achievement of the historical figures portrayed, but not their queer identity: *Milk* highlights Harvey Milk's political role, *Howl* Allen Ginsberg's literary accomplishments. Moreover, the names of the main actors, Sean Penn and James Franco, are probably meant to appeal to the widest possible audience. Putting its subtitle "Where Pride Began" in capital letters on the cover, *Stonewall* follows a different marketing strategy, but with the same goal. Instead of showing the characters queer identity, it draws on its own claim to present the real historical background to the Stonewall Riots. An analysis of the three films, hence, gives valuable insights into the question of how the representation of homosexuality interlaces with heteronormative assimilation or subversion. Therefore, *Queer Enough?* sets out to examine in what ways the films might be able to criticise heteronormativity on the content level, while at the same time contradicting themselves on the formal-aesthetic level as they seem to remain entrenched in heteronormative structures and exhibit an aesthetics of homonormativity.

Locating *Queer Enough?* in the context of film studies, CHAPTER 1 will give a survey of the developments of queer cinema. Particularly important is the fundamental study *The Celluloid Closet - Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981) by Vito Russo, in which he shows the social mechanisms that created a negative image of homosexuals in films from the beginning of US-American film history until the early 1980s. In his view, the strongly heteronormative film industry can even be held partly responsible for the homophobia that was rampant in the United States (cf. Russo 248). As has already been pointed out, the independent films of the New Queer Cinema ushered in a new era of queer representation in the early 1990s (cf. Rich xix). Like many other scholars (e.g. Davies 173; Etherington-Wright and Doughty 196; Juett und Jones xi;103; Knegt 8; McKinnon 171), Rich recognises the film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) as initiating LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters into the mainstream and raises the question of how far the increased visibility has affected the subversive potential of films that followed. Engaging the debate on the effects of mainstreaming films with queer content, it connects the research question of *Queer Enough?* to the current state of research in the field.

Proceeding from these findings of queer cinema studies, my theoretical approach outlined in CHAPTER 2 is based on postmodern constructivist theories that question the concepts of sexuality and gender in general, and the binary opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality in particular. In addition to Michel Foucault's deliberations on the social construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality (cf. Foucault *Sexualities* 47-48), Judith Butler fundamentally influenced the discourse on heteronormativity (cf. Butler *Gender Trouble* 208). Moreover, the discussion on the definition of queer and possibilities for subverting heteronormative structures will be taken up again in the second subchapter. Building on this basic framework, I will explain the newer concept of homonormativity, which was coined by Lisa Duggan in 2003 and refers to a stratification within the LGBTQIAN+ community (cf. Duggan *Twilight* 50). Using the concept of homonormativity, I set out to advance Raewyn Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (cf. Connell *Masculinities* 77-78) and analogously introduce the term 'hegemonic gay masculinity,' describing the hegemonic gradient within the group of (male) homosexuals. In order to look beyond the content to the formal-aesthetic components, the theoretical concepts will be extended by methodological approaches referring to narrative structure and cinematography. For this purpose, I will draw on Judith Roof's concept of the 'heteronarrative' and Laura Mulvey's gaze theory and show to what extent the narrative structure and the established gaze support the films' modes of representation.

These historical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks serve as the basis for the analysis in CHAPTER 3. A combination of a broad examination of the content of the films with in-depth analyses of individual sequences, as well as the formal-aesthetic framing leads to the interpretations of the depicted forms of masculinity and homosexuality. After a brief historical outline that provides the factual background to the films as well as some methodological remarks, the analysis is divided into two major parts; in the first (chapters 3.1 and 3.2), I focus primarily on the content of the films, elaborating on how they portray heteronormative structures as negative for the characters and how the protagonists' emancipation from these structures is enacted. The second part of the analysis (chapters 3.3 and 3.4) then moves on to the formal-aesthetic level and unravels how the depiction of homosexuality is supported by the established gaze and the narrative structure to determine how the interplay of content and form might produce a homonormative aesthetic. My findings will be compared

in a conclusion that seeks to taper my theses and relate them to current debates.

In its interdisciplinary approach, *Queer Enough?* intends to give valuable insights into considerations of LGBTQIAN+ films and their mainstreaming. Focusing on the correlation between heteronormativity, homonormativity, and the formation of a queer subjectivity in popular films and their interrelation to contemporary cultural and political issues will provide vital background knowledge to an enhanced understanding of the depiction of LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters. Referencing important moments and agents of LGBTQIAN+ history, the exemplary analysis of the films *Howl*, *Milk*, and *Stonewall* serves to critically examine the ways in which the representation of homosexuality in contemporary mainstream U.S. cinema might denounce and to some extent also subvert heteronormative structures in society, while at the same time establishing and reproducing an aesthetics of homonormativity. Overall, my work therefore seeks to unveil hegemonic structures within the LGBTQIAN+ community but also contributes to the theoretical framework at the intersection of gender, masculinity, and queer cinema studies.

1. Queer Cinema

1.1 From the Celluloid Closet to New Queer Cinema

As in the famous Oscar Wilde quote from *The Decay of Lying* "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life," films, like all other works of art, take an active part in shaping the perception of the world. Not only do films reflect social and cultural circumstances, but also help to determine the construction, maintenance, challenge, and subversion of normative structures in society (Dyer 1; McKinnon 4; Seidman *Closet* 13). As Richard Dyer points out:

> How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken [...] these all have to do with how members of a group see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens. Equally, re-presentation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. (Dyer 1)

How LGBTQIAN+ are represented in works of art such as films therefore influences the ways they are perceived in society and vice versa. Likewise, Vito Russo, one of the first scholars who investigated the depiction of homosexuality in films, argues that "[i]mages found on our television and motion picture screens cannot be viewed in isolation from the political climate of the nation that produces them" (Russo 248). In his critically acclaimed book *The Celluloid Closet – Homosexuality in the Movies* (1987), he tries to unveil the social mechanisms undercurrent to the representation of LGBTQIAN+ individuals in Hollywood throughout its history. He shows that from the beginning of filmmaking until the 1980s, the mainstream depiction of homosexuals perpetuated a negative image of the LGBTQIAN+ community and thereby might even have taken part in fostering "rampant homophobia" (Russo 248). With the implementation of the Motion Picture Production Code or Hays Code in 1934 "gay representation in cinema became heavily censored. Images of homosexuality and bisexuality were banned; [...] Homosexuality was either restricted to avant-garde filmmak-

ing or it was heavily coded within the mainstream" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty185). Even though the Code was not enforced as strictly from the beginning of the 1960s and allowed the depiction of homosexuality (Russo 92), it was not revised before 1968 and replaced by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) film rating system (cf. Benshoff 131). However, Russo reveals that even though the Hays Code prohibited the depiction of gay characters (cf. Russo 92), LGBTQIAN+ characters have always been present in Hollywood films but were usually strongly stigmatised "as subtextual phantoms representing the very fear of homosexuality" (Russo 63). After the deregulation of the Hays Code and with the beginning of the sexual revolution in the 1960s Hollywood had to branch out to keep up with a diversifying audience (cf. Benshoff 131). Nevertheless, the portrayal of homosexuals in mainstream films of the 1970s and 80s remained mostly denouncing. Due to the perceived potential threat they pose to traditional perceptions of masculinity, gays had to be either ridiculed or marginalised. In contrast to the earlier image of the sissy, homosexuals were later depicted as overtly sexualised, "pathological, predatory and dangerous villains and fools, but never heroes" (Russo 122). Especially with the AIDS crisis looming up, a backlash of hatred of and discrimination against homosexuals was resumed in the film industry (Russo 123), leading Russo to conclude that

> anti-gay prejudice may be more prevalent now [i.e. 1987] than at any other time in our history. Never have Hollywood screenwriters felt so secure in their belief that it is acceptable to insult homosexuals, and nowhere has fear and hatred of gay people been more evident than in commercial, mainstream motion pictures, which reflect and encourage the prejudices of their intended audience. (Russo 123)

However, the AIDS epidemic ultimately ushered in a new uprising in the gay movement, despising society's indifference towards the massive number of deaths within the LGBTQIAN+ community. In response to the growing repression the group ACT UP "formed in 1986 to fight the government, rescue LGBT pride and dignity, and take on the pharmaceutical establishment; it demonstrated for the creation and release of new AIDS drugs as well as to stop 'war profiteering' on the backs of the dying" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* xvi).

Moreover, the renewed movement fighting for the visibility of LGBTQIAN+ characters gave way to a subculture producing homophile films that challenged the social patterns that defamed LGBTQIAN+ individuals and were so vigorously reproduced by mainstream Hollywood cinema. B. Ruby

Rich is the first to identify an increase in queer-themed films during the late 1980s and 1990s as a form of social movement seeking to transgress heteronormativity. She famously proclaimed the beginning of what she calls 'New Queer Cinema' in an article published in 1991 (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* xix). In her compelling study *New Queer Cinema – The Director's Cut* (2013), she further elaborates on the development of New Queer Cinema (nqc). According to Rich, this new wave of queer films

> was a fiercely serious cinema, intent on rewriting both past and future, providing inspiration for whatever and whoever was going to come next. As urgency and rage began to collapse into despair and frustration for the ACT UP generation, the New Queer Cinema created a space of reflection, nourishment, and renewed engagement. The nqc quickly grew — embryonically at first, with its first steps in the years 1985 – 91, then bursting into full view in 1992 – 97 with formidable force. (B. R. Rich *Cinema* xix)

The films were "unified by a common style: "call it 'Homo Pomo.'"[6] In all of them, there are traces of appropriation, pastiche, and irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 18) – in short, they all challenged heteronormative power structures. Accordingly, New Queer Cinema films were able to critique the social and political conditions in which influence they were made. They focused on the perspective of the oppressed and marginalised, which is not primarily congruent with a heteronormative mainstream audience (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* 18). A queer subjectivity was shown as something taken for granted, thus rejecting any essentialism regarding sexual identities. The best-known representatives of the movement include Jennie Livingstone's *Paris is Burning* (1990), Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), Gus van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991), Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992), Gregg Araki's *The Living End* (1992), and Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* (1999).[7] In addition, nqc was able "to reach a critical mass and tip over into visibility. An invention. A brand. A niche market" (B. R.

6 'Homosexual Post-modernism.'

7 Certainly, already before New Queer Cinema, there were films representing a queer subjectivity and/or culture. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* from 1975 might be a famous example. Moreover, the films of New Queer Cinema were not free of criticism. *Boys Don't Cry* was accused of factual inaccuracy by real-life people involved in the murder of Brandon Teena (cf. History vs. Hollywood n. pag.), while bell hooks criticised the representation of BIPOC in *Paris is Burning* (hooks 151-152). Nevertheless, I

Rich *Cinema* xix). However, the possibility to reach the heteronormative mainstream and even create a niche market for queer cinema within the capitalist structures of the film industry already presages the demise of New Queer Cinema. According to B. R. Rich, the rebellious potential of nqc film ended with its increasing popularity beyond the scope of independent filmmaking. Rich argues that the nqc underwent "a relatively rapid transformation from the fringe to the centre at the level of subjects and themes" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 262).

1.2 More Visibility, More Normality?

In comparison to the negative and discriminating representation of LGBTQIAN+ characters in mainstream cinema until the 1990s, when "the image of the polluted homosexual dominated the screen" (Seidman *Closet* 13-14), the increase in visibility and positive depiction by the end of the 20th century is of course an outstanding achievement. However, the praise of mainstream media for their inclusion of LGBTQIAN+ characters, themes, and issues has been challenged. The question about "the social costs of this new visibility" (Eng et al. 76) arises:

> If invisibility was the defining attribute of gay people in the past, we have in the last fifty years or so moved to a position of relative visibility for a group that encompasses fewer than 10 percent of society. But as we're learning, visibility, like truth, is rarely pure and never simple. (Gross 252-253)

This shows that the inclusion of LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters into the heteronormative mainstream, despite forging an increase in tolerance, can also lead to normative restrictions within the group of LGBTQIAN+. Steven Seidman regards the proliferation of LGBTQIAN+ themes in mainstream Hollywood as "the rise of the 'normal gay'" (Seidman *Closet* 14): "Gays are today not only routinely on the screen, and sometimes in blockbuster hits, but they are often portrayed as normal, good citizens" (Seidman *Closet* 23). Not only does this normality infer that homosexuals are just as any other human being and thus deserve the same rights, but that

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agree with B. R. Rich that these films seem to have opened new possibilities for queer representation.

> the normal gay is expected to exhibit specific kinds of traits and behaviors. He is supposed to be gender conventional, well adjusted, and integrated into mainstream society […]. The claim to normality justifies social integration but only for normal-looking and acting gays and lesbians. (Seidman *Closet* 14)

Thus, "mainstream cinema has […] excluded everything that is shameful to their perception of gay pride" (Halperin and Traub 17). This also affects the representation of sexual intercourse on-screen, since the normalisation "is accompanied by a sexual ethic that legitimates sex – for both heterosexuals and homosexuals – exclusively in intimate, preferably love-based, monogamous, preferably marital-type relationships" (Seidman *Closet* 155), which for Seidman ultimately "also narrow[s] the range of legitimate sexual-intimate choices, for gays and for straights" (Seidman *Closet* 157). Moreover, the mainstreaming of LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters has further marginalised LGBTQIAN+ individuals other than (male) homosexuals, while at the same time feigning to raise tolerance and speaking in the interest of all LGBTQIAN+ subjects (cf. Sender 7). As Katherine Sender points out, the "ongoing invisibility of bisexuals and the comic or pitiable presence of transgender people in mainstream media does not permit a 'we are everywhere' optimism beyond images of gender-normative gays and lesbians" (Sender 7).

Peter Knegt points out that the period between the emergence of the New Queer Cinema and the establishment of LGBTQIAN+ themes in mainstream productions of the 21st century

> represented a 'hegemonic negotiation' of the American film industry, which resulted in an acceptance of certain privileged gay themes within the mainstream, particularly those featuring white gays and lesbians played by attractive and 'gender-appropriate' actors and actresses. (Knegt 6)

The reason for this normalisation lies in the marketing strategies within neoliberalism since the queer subculture has been incorporated once a LGBTQIAN+ consumer niche was discovered (cf. Knegt 33). The 'normal' gay is

> 'respectable,' and therefore marketable. In most cases, the actors playing them are not only masculine, but also very attractive. […] As these films are marketed to general audiences, masculine, good-looking gay male characters create a more accessible diegesis for audiences. (Knegt 80-81)

Knegt interlinks the incorporation of LGBTQIAN+ independent film into mainstream Hollywood cinema with the division of the production and the distribution of the films. The films are usually produced by independent studios and then bought and redistributed by the speciality divisions of Hollywood studios, which is why he groups them under the label "Gay Indiewood" (Knegt 4), since "the films of this trend seem to generally represent a compromise between more progressive gay independent filmmaking of the early 1990s [...] and their heavily incorporated Hollywood counterparts" (Knegt 9). As he explains,

> 'new independent cinema' suggested that there was a 'gay market' for film. This situation introduced considerably more progressive images of gays into the 'Hollywood hegemonic project' as a result. It also placed the control of the films in the hands of the 'hegemons.' They were now marketed and distributed in the corporate interest of Hollywood studios. [...] Progressive gay images were being pushed into the mainstream, but only to provide financial gain for the Hollywood institution that had initially shunned them. (Knegt 55–56)

Therefore, he concludes that "'Gay Indiewood' is not a 'gay market' at all" (Knegt 81). Even more so, it also minimises the subversive potential of films with LGBTQIAN+ content, because it allows for the hegemons to keep their power structures upheld by denying the oppressed the agency to speak for themselves. Praising Hollywood for 'allowing' queer films, hence, "erodes the decades of gay independent film that came before it" (Knegt 101). Consequently, also Rich assumes that the current LGBTQIAN+ discourse seems to be homonormatively shaped, as she writes in the final chapter of her book: "the new generation complained that the LGBT universe was homonormative" (B.R. Rich *Cinema* 271-272).

Other scholars, however, depart from the assumption that the subversive impact of nqc ended with its absorption into mainstream culture. Accordingly, JoAnne Juett and David Jones argue in their introduction to the collected volume *Coming Out to the Mainstream: New Queer Cinema in the 21st Century* (2010), that films depicting LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters still possess the ability to challenge and hence renegotiate heteronormative culture. nqc did not simply evaporate with entering the mainstream, but advected into "a second wave of nqc that holds potential for influence beyond the original limits of an independent film audience, critics, and the academy" (Juett and Jones ix). Instead of perceiving mainstream culture as having "lodged queerity within the hegemonic logic of compulsory het-

erosexuality and global capitalism" (Juett and Jones x), Juett and Jones suggest that "in its revised, expanded form in the 21st century, the movement has found much greater appeal to a broader, mainstream audience" (Juett and Jones xi). Likewise, Bob Nowlan points out that the incorporation of queer films into mainstream cinema has affected both sides. Therefore, any changes in the perception of queer films "may result not only from the ability of 'the straight' to absorb, contain, co-opt, and tame 'the queer,' but also from the ability of the queer in turn to de-sorb, break open, free up, and render wild the straight" (Nowlan 16). As Juett and Jones submit,

> nqc no longer sits as the homosexual opposite pole of the binary opposition of hetero/homo or on either side of the gay/lesbian dichotomy; its new position is truly transgender, challenging the mainstream to look beyond traditional identification of character, director, and audience. 21st century political, cultural, aesthetic, and theoretical changes in gender perceptions and definitions have opened the way for queer cinema to move beyond binary challenges to promote a new wave of openness and inclusion. (Juett and Jones xii-xiii)

Thus, they argue that the films' entry into the heteronormative mainstream by no means heralds the end of their subversive potential but expands their reach and thus even strengthens their influence on society as a whole. Accordingly, films depicting LGBTQIAN+ individuals would still be able to challenge, subvert, and transgress heteronormativity. Nevertheless, Seidman usefully questions how these representations "make possible a life beyond the closet while leaving heterosexual dominance in place" (Seidman *Closet* 126), since, in his opinion, "[w]ithout challenging a culture of advertising, television, film, music, literature, and news that makes heterosexuality the norm and the ideal, there cannot be social equality" (Seidman *Closet* 16).

These two positions outlined above relate to questions of heteronormative subversion, i.e. the ability to take a critical stance towards oppressive structures in society versus heteronormative assimilation, i.e. the reproduction of parameters that can limit the possibilities of portraying LGBTQIAN+ characters and contributes to the consolidation of stereotypes. Thus, these positions provide the frame of reference for the analysis of the films in *Queer Enough?* and give rise to the question of *how* LGBTQIAN+ themes are presented in them. Since the film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) was one of the first major motion pictures to feature a love story with two leading homosexual roles, it is regarded by many scholars as a benchmark in queer

cinema history (e.g. Davies 173; Etherington-Wright und Doughty 196; Juett und Jones xi;103; Knegt 8; McKinnon 171). Rich even goes so far as to claim that it initiated "a shift in scope and tenor so profound as to signal a new era" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 185):

> For never before has there been a film by a brand-name director, packed with A-list actors at the top of their careers, with the scope and cinematography of an epic, that has taken an established genre by the horns and wrestled it into a tale of homosexual love with such a monumental scope. (Rich *Cinema* 185)

Hence, I consider it a trailblazer for the films in my analysis, which is why the following subchapter will briefly summarise the discussion on *Brokeback Mountain*. The film is an excellent example illustrating the effects of mainstreaming films with LGBTQIAN+ themes. Moreover, next to engaging the debate on assimilation versus subversion, the criticism of *Brokeback Mountains* already carves out the main issues of the discussions on the films that followed its lead such as *Howl*, *Stonewall*, and *Milk*.

1.3 After Brokeback Mountain: New Paradigms in LGBTQIAN+ Cinema

Adapted from Anne Proulx eponymous short story, *Brokeback Mountain* recounts the love story of Ennis del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) who meet shepherding in the mountains of Wyoming during the summer of 1963 and, despite marrying and having children, continue their forbidden on-off relationship for almost 20 years. Their relationship comes to a tragic end when Jack dies in an accident (or was killed by homophobes as the film insinuates through Ennis' imagination), leaving Ennis behind grieving and lonely. At the 2006 Oscar Nominations, the film won three Academy Awards for Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Original Score. Some fans pity that it failed to get the Award for Best Picture by a hair's breadth, while some members of the LGBTQIAN+ community even accuse the Oscar Academy of being homophobic for this decision. Overall, the film received much praise from critics and reviewers, but also provoked controversial discussions.

Film reviewers applauded the film for being

> a great love story, pure and simple. And the story of a great love that's broken and warped in the torture chamber of a society's intolerance and threats, an individual's fear and repression. It's a great romantic tragedy,

> in the end, with no possibility of a happy ending. (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 186)

Moreover, it was celebrated by many members of the LGBTQIAN+ community for finally rendering visible LGBTQIAN+ individuals and thereby questioning heteronormativity. Christine Etherington-Wright and Ruth Doughty relate the film's subversive potential back to its disruption of cinematic conventions: "Whereas classic Westerns featured rugged displays of heterosexual manliness, *Brokeback Mountain* dared to break with this convention by inserting a same-sex love story" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 195) and "invites the viewer to subconsciously reevaluate the history of the Western" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 196). Queering "the most sacred of all American genres" (Rich *Cinema* 186), *Brokeback Mountain*, according to Rich, "has blown it all wide open, collapsing the borders and creating something entirely new in the process" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 186). Questions of masculinity and sexuality almost impose themselves in *Brokeback Mountain.* Due to "society's extraordinary discomfort with male-to-male affection" (Ibson 189), John Ibson infers that it "raises disturbing issues about how all American men must navigate appropriate ways to express their fondness for each other, whether or not that fondness is accompanied by sexual desire" (Ibson 189). Thereby, the film shows the impact of oppressive structures the characters experience "by their fathers and by toxic masculinity, exaggerated masculinity, Marlboro-man masculinity. A masculinity that denies tenderness and defines itself in terms of doing harm" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 191). Setting the film in a classical Western surrounding and making use of the archetype of the cowboy combines these questions relating to the characters' masculinity with an American national identity, since the cowboy manifests an "American emblem par excellence" (Kitses 24) but is also subjected to overwhelmingly traditional perceptions of masculinity. As Jim Kitses points out, "Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist are nothing if not prototypical cowboys" (Kitses 24). However, they also defy the typical features of the cowboy usually depicted in classical Hollywood Westerns. "Cowboys had long been a gay fantasy" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 187), making them susceptible to be used either as stereotypical representations of gay men, serving "to enforce standards of masculinity" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 187), or strengthening the endeavour to queer the Western. Their herding of sheep rather than cattle makes the negotiation of questions of masculinity especially obvious. Despite their similar distribution in the American West, other than cattle, sheep have

long "been seen as interlopers, the property of a lower class of immigrants and minorities. Coloring such conflicts have also been hints of a gender motif in the suggestion of caring for sheep as a less manly pursuit" (Kitses 26). In this ambiguity, "Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist were more challenging to convention, powerfully confronting assumptions common within the gay community itself as well as outside it" (Ibson 196).

However, the film's transgression of boundaries is not limited to conventional understandings of both genre and masculinity, but also extends to the audience. Being "the highest grossing gay themed film" (Knegt 8) until then, *Brokeback Mountain* ushered in "a new trend in the theatrical distribution of such films" (Knegt 8). Addressing and being marketed to heterosexual, mostly female viewers, it managed to reconcile the "boundary-crossing among audiences" with "the willingness of many mainstream audiences not only to tolerate, but also to embrace queer cinema by voting with their dollars at the cineplex" (Juett und Jones xi). As has been pointed out above, Juett and Jones appraise this as a great "success in forging greater mainstream acceptance of queer perspectives in cinema" (xii), while other critics "feared the loss of transgressive and defiant queer cultures" (McKinnon 240). As Scott McKinnon usefully condenses, *Brokeback Mountain*

> wasn't the first Hollywood movie about gay men, even if it has at times been described as such. But it was a movie with an extraordinary cultural impact, which made gay male love and sex seem more visible than any movie had before. Homosexuality, via *Brokeback Mountain*, was seen as mainstream and accepted and yet continued to be heavily monitored and debated. Its reception lay at the heart of the paradox of gay life in the first decade of the 2000s: that gay culture and identity are so accepted as to be on the brink of extinction, and yet that homophobia and heterosexism remained within the accepted boundaries of public and political discourses. (McKinnon 171)

Thus, this "paradox of gay life" is related to the question "as to whether assimilation into the mainstream represented equality for or the death of gay culture" (McKinnon 240). Most abundantly, critics from within the LGBTQIAN+ community reproach the film for exhibiting a queer veneer while actually being heteronormative: "On one hand they applaud the lack of camp, effeminate stereotypes but on the other they feel that the characters of Ennis and Jack are 'too' straight" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 196). Knegt takes particular objection to the idea that "Hollywood

was applauded for allowing Brokeback to exist" (Knegt 100). In his opinion, this

> praise erodes the decades of gay independent film that came before it, and facilitated it, in the sense that Brokeback belongs to a new economic arrangement in Hollywood that is banishing truly independent films to $100,000 budgets and DVD bargain bins. (Knegt 101)

He explains this phenomenon with an "obvious marketability of this trend" (Knegt 82) that serves the dominant heteronormative ideology. Thus, he assumes that "had Jack and Ennis been effeminate characters, Brokeback would not have gone over as well as it did in the mainstream" (Knegt 81).

Other critics agree that by its "reliance on familiar form and mainstream affects" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 190-191), the film is buying into hegemonic structures. Harry M. Benshoff regards popular reviews of *Brokeback Mountain* as contributing to the reception of the film as heteronormative. Especially calling the film a "'gay cowboy movie' works to reduce the film's depiction of complex queer sexualities (both Ennis and Jack marry and have children) into (yet once again) the simplistic essentialist binary of gay versus straight" (Benshoff 261). Moreover, he criticizes the choice of subject matter for foregrounding white homosexual men: "Not only do such characters hide or elide other types of queer experience, but their generic moorings […] allow for the easy replication of pre-existing stereotypes" (Benshoff 261-262). Focusing on the aspect of universal rather than specifically queer love as well, William Conley Harris establishes the idea that "inclusion is, in this case, is not really inclusion; the universal category ('any ... love') trumps and subsumes the specific (gay love). Refusing to see difference, politically correct as the intent may be, can be a more benign form of closeting" (Harris 119). In a similar vein, Lisa Arellano reproaches the film for its "thoroughgoing commitment to heteronormative kinship" (Arellano 61). In her essay "The 'Gay Film' That Wasn't: The Heterosexual Supplement in *Brokeback Mountain*" she compares the short story by Annie Proulx with the screenplay for the film, which in her opinion expands the original story by a narrative that make the characters "intelligible through their reintegration into a heterosexual economy" (Arellano 59). Hence, she argues that

> *Brokeback Mountain* constructs gay characters as powerless and tragic victims of forces beyond their control; simultaneously, the film preserves heterosexual privilege by obscuring the ways that heteronormativity pro-

> duces an abjected other through social erasure and exclusion. (Arellano 59)

In Proulx's short story, the marriage and childbearing of Ennis and his wife Alma "is marked by discordance or unfulfilled expectation" (Arellano 63). Arellano argues that "[t]his noticeable grim characterization is replaced in the screenplay by a series of scenes that portray an infinitely more pleasing picture of heterosexual couplehood" (Arellano 63). Thereby, heterosexual "viewers are invited to recognize and identify with Ennis and Alma; they are, in effect, encouraged to understand Ennis as familiar. This invitation produces a second, corollary effect – a necessary aversion to Ennis's persistent desire for Jack" (Arellano 64). Harris goes even further in reproaching the film for (unintentionally) exhibiting a homophobic tone:

> From one angle, it reads as an antihomophobic polemic against the deforming and stunting impact of homophobia, which the film subtly implies may be endemic to heterosexuality rather than sadly anomalous. Yet it takes minimal effort to see *Brokeback's* potential to serve also as an *antigay* polemic, a cautionary tale about homosexuality not homophobia. (Harris 120-121)

Both Harris and Arellano agree that the screenwriters and director of *Brokeback Mountain* did not consider the political impact of the film thoroughly enough. This results in their rather harsh criticism that the film perpetuates normative perceptions of LGBTQIAN+ characters and themes.

As this short excursus on *Brokeback Mountain* shows, the controversy the film stirred emphasises the question of ambivalence when it comes to the visibility of LGBTQIAN+ lives. Hence, Rich rightly asks: "But visibility on what terms? Here, finally, is the heart of the *Brokeback Mountain* dilemma: [...] Is *Brokeback* merely the kind of gay-themed film that the marketplace can support?" (B.R Rich *Cinema* 198). The dilemma about visibility, however, is not unique to discussions on the film *Brokeback Mountain*, but rather, already points to the central motifs that emerge in the mainstreaming of LGBTQIAN+ films in general. Those seem to be the transgression of thematic, formal, and genre-specific boundaries, negotiations of (homo)sexuality with masculinity and American national identity, as well as the debate on assimilation versus subversion. Looking at the current state of research on the films *Howl*, *Stonewall*, and *Milk* reveals the relevance of these motifs for the analysis in *Queer Enough?*. Moreover, also authenticity

plays an important role in the films, since all three depict historic characters and events and claim a certain validity in telling the 'real' story.

Of the three films, Epstein's and Friedman's *Howl* can be described as the most transgressive regarding its form. In their essay "Ginsberg's Animating Typewriter: Mixing Senses and Media in *Howl* (2010)", Jørgen Bruhn and Anne Gjelsvik focus especially on the mixing of genres and media the film offers. They claim that the film's "experiment of form, clearly inspired by the bebop improvisations, fits the transgressive political and sexual content of the poem" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349) and thereby "propagates a poetics of lived experience and the crossing of boundaries between forms, conventions, and sexual experiences" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 358). They locate it somewhere between a "romantic *Gesamtkunstwerk*" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 350) and the "ut pictura tradition" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 356). Mixing authentic, staged, and animated scenes in "a blurring of the difference between fiction and documentary" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 350), *Howl* has been received as encapsulating current affairs. As Rich explains in her film review for *The Guardian*: "As Howl makes its debut, another trial is transfixing San Francisco. In a federal courtroom, with a conservative judge presiding, the trial over Proposition 8, banning gay marriage in California, is unfolding" (B. R. Rich "Howl" n. pag.). She refers to the 2010 trial that eventually overturned Proposition 8, a 2008 referendum in California with the aim to remove homosexual marriages from their status of state recognition. Moreover, Rich identifies the style of the film, which "allows Ginsberg, on the brink of turning 30, to speak for himself – out of the past, directly to us" (B. R. Rich "Howl" n. pag.) as one of the main reasons for its brisance remembering that when she watched the film, she "couldn't believe how relevant this still was" (B. R. Rich "Howl" n. pag.). Hila Shachar argues that the film "deliberately utilises and confuses the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and the present" (Shachar 151) to directly appeal to contemporary audiences (cf. Shachar 129). Not only does this enhances the film's "authentic touch of time and setting" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349), but it serves to appropriate or even radicalise the biopic genre conventions to use them for their own political agenda (cf. Shachar 129). The transgression of generic boundaries is upon the most-discussed topics for film reviews and research alike. Shachar describes *Howl* as "a hybrid-genre film that ultimately appropriates literary biopic conventions above most other generic categories, thereby situating it as both a literary biopic and a critique and deconstruction of one" (Shachar 151). Therefore, the film's genre can be described in multiple ways: it is a biopic of Allen Ginsberg's life, an adapta-

tion of a poetic text, as well as a semi-documentary about the circumstances of the poem's publication (cf. Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349-350). Even though it broaches the rather traditional genre of the biopic and "it could be said to weaken the poem's transgressive power, for instance through its rather safe depiction of drugs and sex" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 351), Bruhn and Gjelsvik highlight "the way *Howl* differs from the mainstream 'biopic' through the complex layering of different media" (Bruhn und Gjelsvik 351). Consequently, they find that "by combining the genres of film adaptation and 'biopic' it allows itself to discuss questions of interpretation, literary value, and censorship" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 360-361) in a celebration of the author's geniality. Presenting "the epiphanic visions expressed by the quasi-divine poet and his voice" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349) the film creates a tone that seeks "to match the vital artistic genius of Ginsberg" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 350), thus, following "a narrative tradition that highlights the making of an already 'great author'" (Shachar 131).

Moreover, the formal transgression mirrors the film's implied transgressive content. Especially "the animation sequences enhance the anti-capitalistic, anti-homogeneity, and anti-conformity strain of the poem" (Shachar 155). Similarly, I argue in "'An Imitation Never does have the Value of the Original' – Literarische Begegnungen im Film *Howl*" (2018), that the film emphasises the poem's symbolic character for the transgression of formal and textual boundaries. Highlighting the close connection between literature and sexuality, I submit that artistic freedom is symbolic of Ginsberg's sexual liberation (cf. Müller 144). On the one hand, the film questions the hierarchical relationship between original and imitation by showing that the literary adaptation is not to be understood as an attempt to precisely replicate the model text, but rather as a palimpsest[8]-like moment of literary encounter between the different media visualising the multiple interpretative approaches to a work. And on the other, by combining artistic expression with sexual identity, it deconstructs the hegemonic discourse that perpetuates heterosexuality as natural or original and homosexuality as unnatural or copy (Müller 131-132). Even though all of the interpretative approaches discussed above touch upon questions of sexuality, the inter-

8 Drawing on Gérard Genette's *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (1982), Linda Hutcheon sees adaptations in terms of intertextuality as palimpsests: „As a creative and interpretative transposition of a recognizable other work or works, adaptation is a kind of extended palimpsest and, at the same time, often a transcoding into a different set of conventions" (Hutcheon 33-34).

connection of sexuality with negotiations of masculinity as well as national identity in the film has not been carved out so far.

In contrast to *Howl*, which was mostly praised , Roland Emmerich's *Stonewall* was panned by (re)viewers for its historical inaccuracies. Especially members of the LGBTQIAN+ community levelled adverse criticism against the film for not showing an accurate picture of the events that are historically marked as the starting of the gay liberation movement: The Stonewall Riots. The criticism of having white- and cis-washed the riots was mainly directed at the role of the film's central character Danny, a white middle-class cis-male and "a fictional character inserted into a historical event of monumental significance to the LGBT community" (Keating, n. pag.). Many critics argue that Danny's fictional story marginalises the agency of transsexuals, lesbians, and queers of colour who were the 'actual' agents of the Stonewall Riots, as for example Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera (cf. Keating; Schou). In his defence, Emmerich argued that including Danny's fictional story served as "our entrée into the wild world of Christopher Street" (Jung n. pag.). Emmerich seems to assume that a white heterosexual audience would be able to identify with him and thereby the topic would enter mainstream discourses:

> 'You have to understand one thing: I didn't make this movie only for gay people, I made it also for straight people,' he said. 'I kind of found out, in the testing process, that actually, for straight people, [Danny] is a very easy in. Danny's very straight-acting. He gets mistreated because of that. [Straight audiences] can feel for him' (Emmerich quoted in Keating, n. pag.)

Since mainstream Hollywood cinema has been marked by rampant homophobia since its early days (cf. Russo 248), raising tolerance for LGBTQIAN+ themes could be seen as a valid argument for this approach. Furthermore, as Kyle Buchanan exerts, "we're coming up on the tenth anniversary of *Brokeback Mountain*, and it's still as difficult as ever to get a gay movie financed, let alone a period piece dealing with a pivotal incident that isn't taught in most high-school history books" (Buchanan n. pag.). Hence, some scenes of Danny's story are relatable for many belonging to the LGBTQIAN+ community, "particularly those set in Indiana, where his family disowns him for being gay" (Ginelle n. pag.). However, the decision to implement Danny's fictional character into a biopic-like film has been criticised to perpetuate dominant discourses despite seeming emancipatory (cf. Shugart 67). Thus, like other mainstream directors, "Emmerich takes

one of the most politically charged periods of the last century and turns it into a bland, facile coming-of-age story" (Lawson n. pag.). Thereby, he seems to presume that heterosexual acceptance would be at stake if the representation does not reflect dominant perspectives: "We simply must redirect as much history as possible through a white, bizarrely heteronormative lens, or else, the thinking goes, no one will care" (Lawson n. pag.). For this and other reasons, the film is accused of historical inaccuracy, which is among the most discussed topics in reviews and the few academic studies on the film.

Furthermore, *Stonewall* has been perceived as reflecting, but also influencing current discourses. For many LGBTQIAN+ activists, the criticism of the film is only the peak of a longer discussion on the structural exclusion of lesbians, queers of colour, and trans* activists, many of them sex workers and homeless, from the gay liberation movement following the Stonewall Riots. Already in the 1970s, Sylvia Rivera drew attention to these deficiencies. Nevertheless, her role during the riots was massively understated by excluding her from Emmerich's film (cf. Tedjasukmana 64). Instead of empowering the queer community, some critics argue that "Emmerich's attempt to make Danny a larger symbol of something, and the ham-fisted way in which he inserts Danny's drama into what's now seen as a world historical event, feels reductive and insulting" (Ginelle n. pag.). Others even go as far as to infer that the portrayal of the LGBTQIAN+ characters "reinforces the oppression of trans* people and creates a future of ongoing discrimination" (Appenroth 4). Cáel M. Keegan sees this as part of "an emergent pattern in mainstream representations of LGBTQ history" that he calls "aesthetic gentrification of queer and trans cinematic worlds" (Keegan 50). Emmerich' declaration that "'[a]s a director you have to put yourself in your movies, and I'm white and gay'" (Keating n. pag.), makes *Stonewall* "a fitting example of how some bourgeois, white gay cultural producers have adopted a thoroughly gentrified aesthetic practice for representing LGBTQ histories" (Keegan 53), thereby, "thoroughly erasing the crucial part trans women of colour played in the creation of gay liberation" (Keegan 54).

The film's mode of representation of historic events could serve to transgress the boundaries between fact and fiction, by which the underlying social issues adjunct to the gay liberation movement could be assessed. However, as Chris Tedjasukmana points out, the problematic aspect about the film's claim to authenticity by making use of the biopic genre was not so much the actual or supposed racist representation, but its "anachronistic narrative mode" (Tedjasukmana 67; ("anachronistischen Erzählweise,"

translation mine), which seemed to completely overlook the anti-racist cultural change that had been fought for in the context of queer historiography (cf. Tedjasukmana 67). In her film review for *The New York Times* Solvej Schou presents a similar argument when referring to another film titled *Stonewall* from 1995 which

> likewise faced criticism, with its similar plot of a young white gay Midwesterner heading to New York and befriending a group of drag queens and trans women. But the new 'Stonewall' arrives amid a much-changed society, in a year in which the Supreme Court declared same-sex marriage a constitutional right. (Schou n. pag.)

This misconception of historic developments renders the film "uninterested in any history that doesn't revolve around its white, male, stereotypically attractive protagonist," as Stonewall veteran Bob Segal resumes (Segal n. pag.). Hence, "Emmerich tries to have it both ways: He wants to be on the right side of history – to absorb the radical politics of trans activists like Rivera and Johnson – while shoehorning their stories into a market-tested white boy" (Jung n. pag.). Most reviewers agree that the transgression between fact and fiction by freely mixing events and characters based on real events and persons with a completely fictitious narrative comes at the expense of marginalising the 'real' agents of the Stonewall Riots. Despite criticising the film for its (cis- and) male-centredness, the negotiation of masculinity has not been addressed thoroughly by reviews and research.

Like *Howl* and *Stonewall*, *Milk* is mainly perceived in its historical significance, both in its authentic representation of the past and in its influence on present political developments. In this way, the film offers a form of transgression that connects past and present "stirring a hybrid of fact and fiction, the evidentiary and the imaginary coalescing into a convincing moment of historical revivification" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 248). For most film critics and scholars, *Milk* serves as a direct response to the Proposition 8 referendum that banned gay marriage in California and was campaigned for during the film's release in 2008 (cf. Ansen; Burns; Travers; Lenon 44, B. R. Rich). Rich remembers watching the film on its premiere night:

> When the film began and silence descended, the audience began to realize what a house of mirrors we had entered. As Sean Penn disappeared into the body, voice, and mannerisms of Harvey Milk, it got harder and harder to separate the world on the screen from the one outside the theatre. (Rich *Cinema* 247)

Thereby, she argues, the film "transcends its own status as a film and became a political act" (Rich *Cinema* 256). Similarly, David Ansen claims in his film review for *Newsweek* that "[i]n the wake of California's gay-marriage referendum, it's hard to overstate how timely 'Milk' feels" (Ansen n. pag.) and film critic Peter Travers points out in an article for *The Rolling Stone*:

> To those who say it's ancient history since Harvey's battle is no longer an issue, I say wake up and smell the hate crimes, and the bill banning gay marriage that passed on Election Day. To those who say its focus limits its audience, I say Harvey's focus was human rights and therefore limitless. (Travers n. pag.)

Thus, the film succeeds in "validating Milk's conviction that a gay politician could turn the tide of public opinion against homophobia" (Burns 319). As Andrew O'Hehir concludes: "'Milk' was never going to be just another movie, and in a season marked by the simultaneous election of our first Black president and the enactment of a gay-marriage ban in California, it's in danger of becoming primarily a symbol or a statement, and not a movie at all" (O'Hehir n. pag.).

Shifting the focus more on the film's transgression of genres, Julia G. Erhardt analyses *Milk* in order to carve out more general characteristics of LGBTQIAN+ biopics. In her opinion, the way the film adapts the genre and corresponds to the political situation during the time of its release bridges the gap between gay and/ or queer and more mainstream heterosexual audiences (cf. Erhart 261-279). For her, *Milk* "both is and is not a conventional biopic" (Erhart 261). The way the narrative is composed is a means to

> downplay the significance of the individual in favor of a collective movement, and in so doing express an idea of group identity that runs counter to the conventional privileging of the individual in the generic biographical form. At the same time, the fact that they are spoken by a blockbuster Hollywood star chosen to play an 'exceptional' individual within a movie bearing a one-man title makes it difficult *not* to view the film as a biopic. (Erhart 261)

In her opinion, Milk is "not a mainstream film but a movie targeted at a presumably guaranteed, albeit niche, audience" (Erhart 261) and at the same time "able to exceed its non-mainstream boundaries and potentially reach a wider audience" (Erhart 261). For this reason, the film "marks a departure from both the generic studio-era biopic and the earlier gay biopics"

(Erhart 274), since the "dramatic changes in social and political capital that many (especially middle-class, developed-world) LGBT individuals have enjoyed since Stonewall and particularly into the twenty-first century, make possible a commercial interest in 'other' historical LGBT lives" (Erhart 263).

Suzanne Lenon, on the one hand, distances herself from the assumption that the film offers a different, possibly queer perspective, even though she acknowledges that "Proposition 8 and its aftermath breathed social and cultural meaning into the critical acclaim *Milk* received, and the movie itself became a way to rouse and anchor support for gay (marriage) rights" (Lenon 45). On the other hand, however, she finds that "the film reproduces the logic of a single-axis identity and politics that racializes gay as white, one that ultimately works to entrench whiteness at the heart of lesbian and gay equality seeking projects" (46). Therefore, she finds that the film reflects "the hegemonic whiteness of mainstream queer activism" (49):

> The movie's overarching narrative frame of a movement coming into political and social visibility, recounted without the tangible presence of bodies of colour or where such bodies mediate the whiteness of gay male self-determination, produces an erroneous discursive construct that equates gay as white. (47)

For Lenon, the film clearly positions itself in the debate on assimilation versus subversion. Hence, "focusing on Harvey Milk as an individual not only gives the contemporary lesbian/gay/queer movement a white idol, but also canonizes a certain white gay male history as the story of queer liberation" (Lenon 47).

In a very different approach towards the film's converse with its characters' masculinity, Sara Martín Alegre argues that both the documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk* and the feature film *Milk* "fail to read and interpret adequately the process by which patriarchal masculinity grants power to marginal or subordinated masculinities and other minorities, remaking itself in the process as liberal masculinity" (Alegre 180) and thereby "disregard [Milk's assassin Dan] White's struggle to safeguard his traditional masculine identity, […] nonchalantly dismissing this struggle as just primal bigotry" (Alegre 180). In her detailed research, Alegre elaborates that "White's backward patriarchal sense of entitlement to power rather than his homophobia [was] the main reason for his violence" (Alegre 191). Otherwise, however, the negotiation of masculinity with (homo)sexuality

and American national identity in the film has not been thoroughly addressed.

As has been shown in this short assessment of the current research as well as film reviews, the three films are examined in terms of themes such as transgression, authenticity, masculinity, American national identity, as well as the debate on assimilation versus subversion. However, the interconnection of these themes and a broader perspective on masculinity and queer (film) studies has not yet been adequately studied and thus constitutes the academic void *Queer Enough?* seeks to address. For my conceding analysis it will be necessary to delineate the most important theoretical concepts such as hetero- and homonormativity, queer subversion, and hegemonic (gay) masculinity in the succeeding chapters. Moreover, I will introduce the methodological concepts of the heteronarrative and the gaze, in order to interlace all of the above concepts and make them applicable to the films.

2. Queer Theory

For the theoretical scope of *Queer Enough?*, I wish to diverge from a primarily historical perspective on heterosexuality and homosexuality to establish a sociological view on the subject. I will establish the theoretical framework based on post-modern (de-)constructivist theories claiming that, instead of being naturally given categories, the concepts of gender and sexuality in general and the binary opposition of hetero- and homosexuality in particular are socially and culturally constructed. Consequentially, since the social construction of hetero- and homosexuality creates a hierarchical order, it will be crucial for the analysis of the films to examine the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity more thoroughly. I will expound Judith Butler's concept of the 'heterosexual matrix,' which is based on Monique Wittig's 'heterosexual contract' and Adrienne Rich's 'compulsory heterosexuality.' These three concepts serve to explain the notion of heteronormativity and to examine the possibilities to subvert heteronormative structures by the appropriation of queer. I will then move on to examine the newer concept of homonormativity, which was coined by Lisa Duggan in her work *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003). Moreover, Raewyn Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity' will be an important concept since I am interested in the entanglements of heteronormative structures and masculinity. Having established the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity,' the notion of homophobia can be explained in its complexity. I wish to move away from a purely psychoanalytical perspective of 'latent homosexuality' to a broader socio-political view. Simultaneously, Connell's ideas also serve to examine the possibility for LGBTQIAN+ individuals to transgress heteronormativity and homophobia and thereby question and possibly enhance the discourse about masculinities. Furthermore, I wish to expand the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' and establish what I would call 'hegemonic gay masculinity.' This combines Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' with the notion of homonormativity and serves as the analytical basis to examine the hegemonic relations within the group of homosexual men and other members of the LGBTQIAN+ community represented in the films. And finally, as they are part of the process of cultural production, the films analysed in this thesis make use of mechanisms to

challenge heteronormativity and/or homonormativity and can therefore be analysed with regard to their subversive potential. Thus, the final part of this theoretical approach will give a general introduction on how cinematic techniques like the narrative style or the gaze may or may not facilitate the subversion of cultural discourses about sexuality.

2.1 Heteronormativity and Queer Subversion

To analyse how the hegemony of heterosexuality was established it is necessary to consider how heterosexuality compares to its allegedly 'infamous' counterpart homosexuality. The binary opposition between the two has been the subject of many constructionist approaches towards sexuality which seek to expose their supposed essentialism as artificial rather than natural. According to this viewpoint, all "sexual norms, values, perceptions, and behaviors" (Schwartz 80) are culturally and socially constructed:

> In contrast to thinking about sexuality as biological or 'natural,' with the prime goal of reproduction, constructionists have aimed to show the myriad ways in which human sexualities are always organized through economic, religious, political, familial, and social conditions. (Plummer 16)

One of the most influential works concerned with the 'invention' of hetero- and homosexuality is Michel Foucault's book *The History of Sexuality – An Introduction* (1976). Foucault argues that the 18th and 19th centuries saw "a transformation of sex into discourse" (Foucault *Sexuality* 36) which helped to "expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction" (Foucault *Sexuality* 37). Before, sexuality was mainly discussed by means of "matrimonial relations" (Foucault *Sexuality* 37) and the married couple was central to social and cultural analysis. Modern industrial societies, in contrast, developed an increasing interest describing forms of sexualities that did not abide by the religious rules of Christian marriage (cf. Foucault *Sexuality* 37-38). While before sexual deviation was silenced, now "[t]here emerged a world of perversion" (Foucault *Sexuality* 40). The categorisation of sexualities in early modern societies, according to Foucault, "defined new rules for the game of powers and pleasures" (Foucault *Sexuality* 48):

> In point of fact, this power had neither the form of the law, nor the effects of the taboo. On the contrary, it acted by multiplication of singu-

> lar sexualities. It did not set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexuality, pursuing them according to lines of indefinite penetration. It did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals. (Foucault *Sexuality* 47)

This also changed the denomination and identification of norms and deviants and "the physiological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized" (Foucault *Sexuality* 43). Homosexuality was detached from being labelled as aberrational behaviour and became essential to the character or identity of a person: "the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault *Sexuality* 43). My interest in Foucault's analysis lies primarily in the observation that the shift of discourses about sexuality at the same time induced "a multiple implantation of 'perversions'" (Foucault *Sexuality* 37). Thereby, the exercise of normative power structures moved from the restriction of behaviour, happening 'outside' of the individual, to the restriction of identity, 'inside' of the individual:

> The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power and sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. (Foucault *Sexuality* 48)

Hence, in modern Western societies, power is no longer enforced by an absolutist ruler from above but becomes an integral part of human interactions. Furthermore, in his essay "The Subject and Power" (1982), Foucault defines power not as a static instance , but as flexible interactions between institutions and individuals (cf. Foucault "Power" 794). Identifying power as the determining authority for the distinction of normative and deviant characteristics, he regards "the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions" (Foucault "Power" 791). It is crucial to note that in Foucault's concept of power, the individual is not impotent but "'thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up" (Foucault "Power" 789). Thereby, it attaches a constructed identity to the subject:

> The form of power applies to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his

> own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault "Power" 781)

The resulting self-discipline brought forward complex power relations which create binary oppositions such as the interconnection of hetero- and homosexuality. Consequently, a normative discourse was established to ensure the hegemonic position of heterosexuality.

Drawing on Foucault's theories, both Jonathan Katz and John D'Emilio trace the historical process by which hetero- and homosexuality were "created as ahistorical and taken-for-granted" (J. Katz 69). While J. Katz focuses on the social construction of heterosexuality, D'Emilio ties in where Foucault and other theorists seem to conclude and wants to capture the "concrete social processes" (D'Emilio 263) that undergird the emergence of the homosexual. What unifies these two approaches, however, is their Marxist perspective that regards modern capitalism as the source for the development of the categories of homo- and heterosexuality. J. Katz claims that "[t]he growth of a consumer economy fostered a new pleasure ethic" (J. Katz 70), whereas D'Emilio acknowledges the transformation of the family which "took on a new significance as an affirmative unit, an institution that provided not goods but emotional satisfaction and happiness" (D'Emilio 265) with the growth of capitalism. Accordingly, these economic developments facilitated "the separation of sexuality from procreation" (D'Emilio 266) and simultaneously "made possible the formation of urban communities of lesbian and gay men" (D'Emilio 266). Before capitalism, "[t]here was, quite simply, no 'social space' in the colonial system of production that allowed men and women to be gay. Survival was structured around the participation in a nuclear family" (D'Emilio 266) which was "so pervasive that colonial society lacked even the category of homosexual or lesbian to describe a person" (D'Emilio 265–266). Beyond that, J. Katz distinguishes yet another reason for the categorisation of hetero- and homosexual: the "rise in power and prestige of medical doctors" (J. Katz 69) who defined "a new ideal of male-female relationships that included, in women as well as in men, an essential, necessary, normal eroticism" (J. Katz 71). In J. Katz' opinion, this new medical approach towards sexuality was "deeply authoritarian. The doctors' normalizing of a sex that was hetero proclaimed a new heterosexual separatism – an erotic apartheid that forcefully segregated the sex normals from the sex perverts" (J. Katz 72–73). Normalising one form of sexuality implies that it is in constant need of its 'other,' since, as

Diana Fuss points out, "the denotation of any term is always dependent on what is exterior to it (heterosexuality, for example, typically defines itself in critical opposition to that which it is not: homosexuality)" (Fuss 1). As a result, with one being a natural category and the other its deviation and thus unnatural, the binary opposition of hetero- and homosexuality does not ground on an equal footing but is highly affected by the hierarchy and the power relations executed on homosexuality by heterosexual norms, or in short, by heteronormativity. The segregation of normal from deviant forms of sexuality hence was a crucial step for the establishment of heterosexuality as the unscrutinised norm. This is manifested in the ways certain norms that regulate society come to be seen as naturally given – such as heterosexuality, which "soon triumphed as dominant culture" (J. Katz 73) and became "the most ordinarily taken for granted aspect of sexuality that there is" (Schwartz 80).

Accordingly, Amy Lind claims that "heteronormativity is a form of power and social institution" (Lind 205). She explains that until today, "political institutions reproduce heteronormative bias and are in the business of sexuality, even when they claim otherwise" (Lind 208). This means that

> the concept of heteronormativity speaks more broadly to how societal norms, institutions, and cultural practices contribute to institutionalizing a form of hegemonic, normative heterosexuality that is discriminatory in both material and symbolic ways. (Lind 191)

Likewise, Adrienne Rich argues "that heterosexuality [...] needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*" (A. Rich 637). In her critically acclaimed essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), she carves out her concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" (A. Rich 632; 641; 645), which works by "a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness, which suggests that an enormous potential counterforce is having to be restrained" (A. Rich 640). This cluster of forces coincides with the power relations Foucault refers to, and ultimately stands for the discursive structures that render the hegemony of heterosexuality possible. As Monique Wittig convincingly shows in her essay "The Straight Mind" (1980), multiple discourses

> interpenetrate one another, support one another, reinforce one another, auto-engender, and engender one another. [...] The ensemble of these discourses produces a confusing static for the oppressed, which makes

> them lose sight of the material cause of their oppression and plunges them into a kind of ahistoric vacuum. (Wittig 104)

Thus, similar to A. Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality", Wittig's concept of the "heterosexual contract" (Wittig 110) is determined by various discursive structures but at the same time renders itself as naturally pre-given and thereby obfuscates the fact of its own cultural and social construction. Judith Butler's key work *Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) eminently discusses this conclusion. Butler critically enhances the notions of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and the 'heterosexual contract' advanced by A. Rich and Wittig, to assert her idea of the 'heterosexual matrix.' At the beginning of Butler's argumentation stands her radical rejection of the differentiation between sex as biological on the one hand and gender as cultural on the other that sprang from earlier feminist and constructionist thinking (cf. Butler *Gender Trouble* 9-10). For her, the idea that sex is something naturally given "is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 23-24). Accordingly, these gender norms suggest that "for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expressed female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 208). Thus, Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' is in fact constituted of a "grid of gender intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 208). She explains:

> 'Intelligible' genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the 'expression' or 'effect' of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (Butler *Gender Trouble* 23)

This means that the categories of sex, gender, and sexual desire need to be consistent to "produce configurations of behaviour that would be seen by others as normative gender behaviour" (West and Zimmermann 134).

Moreover, "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 33). Like Wittig's assumption of an "obligatory character of the 'you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be'" (Wittig 107) within the social construction of sexuality, Butler emphasises that "the 'unity' of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 43). Therefore,

> [t]he cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender. […] Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. (Butler *Gender Trouble* 24)

Homosexuality is one of those cases that 'fail to conform.' In this case, the relation between desire and sex is seen as not being in congruence since sexual interest in members of the same sex is perceived as not fitting into the correct performance of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 127). By doing one's gender right, social practices are performed that actively (re)produce the 'heterosexual matrix.' Moreover, following Wittig, Butler argues that the binary opposition of men and women at the same time render heterosexuality the only legitimate form of sexuality (Butler *Gender Trouble* 24; Wittig 108).

To explain the possible strategies to transgress these normative standards and thereby potentially enhance the hegemonic discourse, it seems useful to revisit Foucault's concept of power. According to Foucault, possibilities of subversion are always already included: "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed" (Foucault "Power" 794). He even goes so far as to claim that "[i]t would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape" (Foucault "Power" 794). Since, according to Butler, there is no "'doer' behind the deed" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 33), possibilities of subversion seem to be limited: "Without an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations

of domination within society" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 33-34). However, as "an ongoing discursive practice, it [the gender performativity] is open to intervention and resignification" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 43). Therefore, the pejorative failure to conform to the "[h]eteronormative common sense" (Halberstam *Queer Art* 89), can be reframed into the affirmation of "existing alternatives to the hegemonic system" (Halberstam *Queer Art* 89). Consequently, the refusal of heteronormative conditions "presents an opportunity rather than a dead end" (Halberstam *Queer Art* 96). As Butler points out,

> precisely because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder. (Butler *Gender Trouble* 24)[9]

This means clear-cut gender identities in which the categories of gender and sexual orientation overlap can be diffused by queer social practices which constitute a break of gender norms. "This break is a space where the performative character of gender identity can clearly bee seen" (Gutterman 65). As a result, subversive queer social practices expose "the fragility of the binaristic logic that frames the predominant cultural notions of sexual and gender identity categories" (Gutterman 64). Since the "practice of the social labelling of persons as deviant operates [...] as a mechanism of social control" (McIntosh 183), one possibility for LGBTQIAN+ individuals lies in their self-identification. By naming themselves, not only do they become visible, but they also claim agency and, thus, a position of power. This is why the re-appropriation of the once homophobic slur 'queer' is seen as an important step in the development of LGBTQIAN+ rights.

By drawing on its historic as well as socio-political genealogy from the 1970s onwards as well as discussing the implications that emerged with the re-appropriation of the term 'queer,' the following chapter seeks to define

9 As Butler points out in the essay "Critically Queer" (1993), "[t]he failure to approximate the norm, however, is not the same as the subversion of the norm. There is no promise that subversion will follow from the reiteration of constitutive norms; there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion" (22).

the concept 'queer' in order to carve out its viability for the subversion of heteronormativity and thus its aptitude for literary and filmic analysis. One of the main challenges is that "there is no generally acceptable definition of queer; indeed, many of the common understandings of the term contradict each other irresolvably" (Jagose 99). Due to the many opposing opinions, defining the term is a highly controversial endeavour. Most obviously, this is related to the controversial etymology of the term which was once used to describe homosexuals with a negative connotation (cf. Smith 281).[10] Even though the term has been re-appropriated by many individuals of the LGBTQIAN+ community to offer new possibilities of emancipation and empowerment, the label queer remains pejorative, insulting, and offensive to others (cf. Jagose 103; Smith 281). Moreover, there have been extensive debates about the practicability and availability of the category 'queer' for a variety of reasons (cf. Butler "Critically Queer" 19-20; Cohen 440).

For most of the 20th century, queer was a pejorative expression or derogatory term for effeminate men at first, and later homosexuals in general (cf. Oxford English Dictionary). However, as Butler argues, it has always been more than an insult for homosexuals since the use of the term perpetuates the power structures so rigorously upheld by the heterosexual matrix:

> The term 'queer' emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity. The term 'queer' has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names, or rather, the producing of a subject *through* the shaming interpellation. (Butler "Critically Queer" 18)

Working with Althusser's notion of interpellation,[11] Butler shows that the label queer has always been deeply inscribed into the identity formation of

10 As Jagose points out, also the appellation gay was once "mobilised as a specifically political counter to that binarised and hierarchised sexual categorisation which classifies homosexuality as a deviation from a privileged and naturalised heterosexuality" (Jagose 72).

11 According to the French philosopher Louis Althusser, interpellation describes the mechanism within an ideology that subordinates the individual to its subject position. His most recited illustration of ideological interpellation is the situation when a police officer calls out "Hey, you!". In the instant that any individual present turns around, this person accepts the invocation and thus the subject position that he or she has been ascribed to (cf. Althusser 142). In *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), Butler expands Althusser's theory of interpellation, which in her sense becomes the act of naming through which an individual assumes either

the subject: "The power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. [...] This is less an 'act,' singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" (Butler "Critically Queer" 17).

In the late 1980s, some members of the LGBTQIAN+ culture began to rebel against these structures by reclaiming the term queer to re-appropriate it for their own positive use. Even though, at first sight, language is the target of re-appropriation, it has a wider effect on the perception of a specific group and the underlying power structures that a designation like queer implies:

> To reclaim literally means to make one's own, to regain, retrieve, recover, repossess, salvage, or rescue. We reclaim terms, words, specific phrases, so that we refashion their meanings to correspond to our particular goals, we rescue or salvage them from their earlier, often derogatory, meanings, we repossess them so that we make them our own, so that their meanings have the authority of our ownership behind them. Thus, the immediate target of 'reclamation' is language. However, language alone is not the ultimate goal of reclamation – linguistic reclamation is usually a tool for disarming the power of a dominant group to control one's own and others' views of oneself. (Godrej 2)

Thus, naming themselves and thereby identifying with their social role, the individuals become active and powerful themselves. Self-identification, most importantly though, implies not feeling ashamed for what one is. Accordingly, Ingrid Hotz-Davies sees shame as an

> efficacious mechanism of social control, a tool which gains its power from the fact that it can work directly inside the selves of those insulted, shunned, expulsed forcing them as it were to turn against themselves at the behest of a force that appears external but that has, in fact, its toxic allies within the psychological makeup of the individual exposed to its dictates. (Hotz-Davies 169)

The re-appropriation of an insult can, hence, be described as a form of auto-interpellation that serves to "disinterpellate" (Hotz-Davies 172) by "*showing* to anyone and everyone that one is not ashamed and cannot be

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a male or female sex, and is thus constructed as a subject within the heterosexual matrix (cf. Butler *Bodies* 81-83). (She uses the example of uttering "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" after the birth of a child whereby the newborn is directly categorised within the binary gender order and subjugated to heteronormativity (cf. Butler *Bodies* xvii)).

interpellated by shaming" (Hotz-Davies 172). At least for some parts of the LGBTQIAN+ community, the re-appropriation of "the term queer as a figure of pride is a powerful act of cultural reclamation, and strategically useful in removing the word from that homophobic context in which it formerly flourished" (Jagose 104). Thus, re-appropriating the term served as a cultural practice for homosexuals to empower themselves by reversing the power structures that evolve around the label queer. One of the first public claims for a positive self-identification with the term was made by the American organisation 'Queer Nation.'[12] In a 1990 leaflet they explain why they use the word instead of 'gay,' even though they are aware of the fact that for many homosexuals it is "forcibly bittersweet and quaint at best – weakening and painful at worst" ("Queers Read This"). Despite raising these objections, they emphasise the power of the term to counter homophobia: "QUEER can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him" ("Queers Read This"). Similar to techniques used, for instance, by the Black Power Movement, "the taking back of negative words has been a survival strategy" (Smith 285) for this new generation of homosexuals. Consequentially, it served as a counteraction towards a more conservative mainstream of gays and, hence, as "a strategy, an attitude, a reference to other individuals and a new self-understanding" (Smith 280).

With entering the realm of academia, and often in line with post-structuralist and constructivist thinking, the term started to become even more differentiated. Queer developed into a concept

> that problematises normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality – and that, consequently, is critical of all those versions of identity, community and politics that are believed to evolve 'naturally' from such consolidations. By refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal. (Jagose 99)

Eve K. Sedgwick, amongst others, played a vanguard role in carving out its academic significance by defining the term in close relation to the feelings of shame that it alludes to: "Queer, I suggest, might usefully be thought

12 The organisation 'Queer Nation' formed in 1990 in New York to discuss possibilities to counteract violence directed at homosexuals (cf. Smith 277). Both Queer Nation and its British counterpart 'OutRage' use the label queer as a form of empowerment with "often extravagant actions" (Smith 279) that indicate their "'in your face' agenda" (Smith 278).

of as referring in the first place to [...] those whose sense of identity is for some reason turned most durably on the note of shame" (Sedgwick 'Queer Performativity' 60). Thus, for her, "'queer performativity' is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma" (Sedgwick 'Queer Performativity' 58) but simultaneously also "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick *Tendencies* 8). Scholars like Butler and Sedgwick promoted a conceptual shift of 'queerness' towards "the performativity of gender and sexuality in the formation of identities" (Valocchi 751) and hence included power structures upheld by heteronormativity. Nevertheless, queer theory has also been criticised for different reasons.

Firstly, some scholars have objected to queer theory as well as queer activism for being politically and socially impractical because they are either seen as too "radical and oppositional" (Smith 281), sometimes even "described as aggressive" (Jagose 126), or "too politically naive and idealistic to be effective. Ignorant of the real machineries of power, queers will not be able to achieve anything from the marginalised position they champion" (Jagose 106). Others, like Cathy Cohen, claim that they are not radical enough and, therefore,

> a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism. In many instances, instead of destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything 'queer.' An understanding of the ways in which power informs and constitutes privileged and marginalized subjects on both sides of this dichotomy has been left unexamined. (Cohen 438)

The main argument against the usage of queer, though, is the accusation of over-generalising a group of people that have a great variety of interests and issues. Despite being an all-encompassing category, queer has become another exclusionary category for some members of the LGBTQIAN+ community. Especially an older generation of homosexuals refuses to identify with the label even with a positive connotation since it "painfully recalls the homophobic abuse of a former era" (Smith 281). In her essay "Critically Queer" (1993), Butler points out that even though the re-appropriation the term queer can be a powerful act of subversion, one is never fully able to

occupy a term. The "history of the usages that one never controlled, but that constrains the very usages that now emblematize autonomy" (Butler "Critically Queer" 19) always resonates with it. According to Butler, this "conceit of autonomy implied by self-naming" (Butler "Critically Queer" 20) ignores the "complex and constitutive history of discourse and power which composes the invariably ambivalent resources through which a queer and queering agency is forged and reworked" (Butler "Critically Queer" 20). In this sense, and in particular when it is used as an identity category, queer might possibly "enforce a set of overlapping divisions" (Butler "Critically Queer" 20). Particularly lesbians, non-white homosexuals, non-binary, trans* and inter* persons often do not or cannot identify with a community that does not address intersectional issues. Opponents of a collective 'queer agenda' argue that "queer politics brings very differently sexualized and differently politicized people into a movement that, despite its heterogeneity, must address broad questions and common identifications" (Warner *Queer Planet* xvi). Thereby, "it reinforces a spurious idea of lesbian and gay homogeneity" (Smith 283) that is not necessarily given, especially because, as Warner points out, "too often the common ground has been assumed to be that of relatively dominant positions: whites, males, and middle-class activists of the United States" (Warner *Queer Planet* xvi). This critique shows that also queer theory is not invulnerable to normative constraints. Butler illustrates this proposition by drawing a parallel to the ongoing discussion on the political benefit of coming out of the closet:

> As much as identity terms must be used, as much as 'outness' is to be affirmed, these same notions must become subject to a critique of the exclusionary operations of their own production: for whom is outness an historically available and affordable category? […] Who is represented by *which* use of the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethical, or religious affiliation and sexual politics? What kinds of policies are enabled by what kinds of usages, and which are backgrounded or erased from view? (Butler "Critically Queer" 19)

However, neither Butler nor Warner generally reject the usage of queer or queer theory, but rather call for a careful examination and constant re-examination of the concept. Butler advocates a more critical debate on the exclusions drawn by queer theory in order "to extend its range, to make us consider at what expenses and for what purposes the terms are used, and through which relations of power such categories have been wrought"

(Butler "Critically Queer" 20).Likewise, Warner emphasises "a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner *Queer Planet* xxvi). This means "for both academics and activists, 'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (Warner *Queer Planet* xxvi). Condensing Butler's and Warner's thoughts, it seems not sufficient to define queer as simply counter-normal or non-normative, but to additionally emphasise its productiveness to defy prevailing norms and conventions.

Likewise, Cohen argues that the concept of queer might "be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin" (Cohen 438). This indicates the great potential of queer to open up a discursive counterspace to the normal and thereby scrutinise questions of heteronormativity and homonormativity. In this sense, queer "occupies the space of the notyet, is always promissory, horizonal" (O'Rourke 108). As José Esteban Muñoz further points out, being bound to a utopian vision in the future, queer becomes an ideal that might go beyond the preoccupation with pragmatic approaches to present issues:

> Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. (Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* 1)

He argues for leaving behind the short-sighted and assimilationist present form of "queer thinking that embraces a politics of the here and now that is underlined by what [he] consider[s] to be today's hamstrung pragmatic gay agenda" (Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* 10) and calls for "being singular plural" (Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* 10) to approve of the differences within the group of the LGBTQIAN+ community while envisioning an idealistic queer future. This vision includes that "queer posits a commonality between people which does not disallow their fundamental difference" (Jagose 112) and hence, ideally, queerness can be conceptualised as a "mode of opening up to and meshing with the strangeness of others, of opening up to the incalculable strangeness of the future to come, of opening up to aesthetic and political practices that do not yet exist but need to be envisioned" (O'Rourke 115). Even though this understanding is rather impalpable since it refers to a very idealistic conception of queer that has not occurred

yet, it seems useful to compare the idealistic visions of a queer utopia to the present reality in order to detect the gaps and breaks within the dominant hetero- or homonormative culture. For instance, it is important to understand that queer theory and activism should not stop questioning heterosexist norms after some achievements – gay marriage being the most prominent example – have been successfully reached. At the same time, of course, queer does not generally oppose claims such as gay marriage:

> It does not offer itself as some new and improved version of lesbian and gay but rather as something that questions the assumption that those descriptors are self-evident. Queer is not a conspiracy to discredit lesbian and gay; it does not seek to devalue the indisputable gains made in their name. Its principal achievement is to draw attention to the assumptions that—intentionally or otherwise—inhere in the mobilisation of any identity category, including itself. (Jagose 126)

Most importantly, then, queer constantly needs to be redefined and reassessed to account for its utopian vision and should become "distinctly anti-assimilationist" (Smith 279). It is "a politics that does not search for opportunities to integrate into dominant institutions and normative social relationships, but instead pursues a political agenda that seeks to change values, definitions, and laws which make these institutions and relationships oppressive" (Cohen 444-5).

Another reason why the re-appropriation of the term queer might have become so successful is the perception that self-identification implies not feeling ashamed for what one is. In accordance with Foucault's idea of the implantation of perversion, Ingrid Hotz-Davies sees shame as an

> efficacious mechanism of social control, a tool which gains its power from the fact that it can work directly inside the selves of those insulted, shunned, expulsed forcing them as it were to turn against themselves at the behest of a force that appears external but that has, in fact, its toxic allies within the psychological makeup of the individual exposed to its dictates. (Hotz-Davies 169)

Subversive social practices pursued by LGBTQIAN+ individuals can only be productive when, or more precisely because, they "refuse [...] to accept that the shamings and the feelings of shame [they are] exposed to are justified" (Hotz-Davies 169). Therefore, shamelessness becomes a productive counteract against heteronormative structures, "a weapon against a ubiquitous threat of homophobia and in general the tyranny of the normal" (Hotz-

Davies 181). This might also be a reason why the slogan 'Gay Pride' became so prevalent in the gay liberation movement. Lind emphasises the ambivalence of the notion of visibility regarding homo- and heterosexuality by demonstrating the dynamic process between the invisibility of heterosexuality as the unmarked sexuality, and its visibility as the normalised, ubiquitous sexuality. A similar mechanism is at play with homosexuality, which is marginalised and thereby pushed into invisibility while it is simultaneously hyper-visible as the abject 'other,' perverse sexuality (cf. Lind 190). Lind points out that sexuality itself might be regarded as "a form of power, one that has been used both in repressive and productive ways" (Lind 190). Seen from a productive angle, the power structures that repress deviant forms of sexuality can be used to fight against the repression (Lind 190), while becoming visible can be an empowering process to move out of the margins of society. Thereby, one important mechanism for homosexuals to make themselves visible is coming out of the closet. Lind defines the closet as "a metaphor of privacy and secrecy" (Lind 196), while coming out marks the symbolic act "of entering the realm of public life" (Lind 196). No longer accepting invisibility, subordination, and marginalisation by society, it can be seen as an act of self-empowerment. LGBTQIAN+ individuals become visible, refuse to feel ashamed, and are able to challenge heteronormativity.

However, the relation of the closet and of coming out is a more complex process. In her critically acclaimed book *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick identifies the charged relationship between knowledge and ignorance with regard to the closet. Drawing on speech act theory and performativity, she claims that "'[c]loseted-ness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (Sedgwick *Epistemology* 3). Thus, coming out is "a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" (Sedgwick *Epistemology* 70). Many LGBTQIAN+ individuals experience several coming-out-moments in the course of their lives. Often they first come out to one group of people who seem more open-minded or who they feel they can trust (for instance their close friends) and stay longer in the closet in front of others who might be more conservative or possibly homophobic (for instance their family members, work colleagues, or members of their religious affiliation) (cf. Seidman 8; Chambers 25). In his book *Beyond the Closet* (2004), Seidman defines the closet therefore as

> a condition of social oppression. Closeted individuals suffer systematic forms of disadvantage and disrespect. Accordingly, the closet is not simply a product of individual ignorance and discrete acts of prejudice and discrimination, but is created by the actions of the government, the criminal justice system, families, and popular and scientific culture. In short, the closet refers to a state of gay oppression produced by a condition of heterosexual dominance. (Seidman *Closet* 8)

Rather than an individual decision, coming out is linked with heteronormativity and the social pressure that comes along with it. Some scholars even see heteronormativity as the precondition for the closet, arguing that it "produces the closet, for without the presumption of heterosexuality, there would be no closet. And heteronormativity constitutes the closet as a liminal realm […] that is impossible to fully inhabit or fully vacate" (Chambers 25). In agreement with this view, Butler argues that the closet does not unfold its full power without the heteronormative discourse surrounding it. Even more important to her, however, is the assumption that the correlation between heteronormativity and the closet leads to the formation of 'new closets' once someone has come out:

> If I claim to be a lesbian, I 'come out' only to produce a new and different 'closet.' [...] being 'out' always depends to some extent on being 'in'; it gains its meaning only within that polarity. Hence, being 'out' must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as 'out.' In this sense *outness* can only produce a new opacity; and *the closet* produces a promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come. (Butler 'Imitation' 309)

Therefore, even though she acknowledges the positive impact coming out might have for some, she opposes any essentialist approach and is very conscious of the inherent risk "that the subjection that subjugates the gay or lesbian subject in some way continues to oppress, or oppresses most insidiously, once 'outness' is claimed" (Butler 'Imitation' 308–309). Insidiously, because homosexuals might be under the impression of freeing themselves while, in reality, the act of coming out might become normative (in that there is a 'right' way of coming out) as a regulatory tool of the oppressive system of heteronormativity. Likewise, Stephen Valocchi claims that "the naming of and then the fight against the closet, a process that is taken as a mark of progress for gays and lesbians, has the consequence of inscribing the homosexual/heterosexual binary deeper in public life and in the official

commitments of the gay and lesbian movement" (Valocchi 761-762). This conclusion links the discussion of the closet to the more general question of visibility. The affirmation of one's homosexual identity was and still is an important step for the advancement of gay rights. Nonetheless, identity categories presume some kind of core identity or core trait and might thus serve to make exclusions. Of course, this does not mean that affirmative acts should be abandoned, but rather calls for a careful interaction with identity categories. Butler condenses the argument as follows:

> There is no question that gays and lesbians are threatened by the violence of public erasure, but the decision to counter that violence must be careful not to reinstall another in its place. Which version of lesbian and gay ought to be rendered visible, and which internal exclusions will that rendering visible institute? Can the visibility of identity *suffice* as a political strategy, or can it only be the starting point for a strategic intervention which calls for transformation of policy? [...] This is not a call to return to silence and invisibility, but, rather, to make use of a category that can be called into question, made to account for what it excludes. (Butler 'Imitation' 311)

For this reason, Seidman believes that "simply coming out does not rid us of feelings of shame and guilt, and that visibility alone does not threaten heterosexual privilege" (Seidman *Closet* 7).

Moreover, gay or queer pride in its function of gaining visibility and stripping off shame, has also been criticised in more recent discussions. Concentrating on the notion of shame, the essays in the collected volume *Gay Shame* (2009), edited by David Halperin and Valerie Traub, reject the cultural self-affirmation they associate with 'gay pride' (cf. Halperin and Traub 8). The reason for this lies, according to Deborah Gould's paper, in a certain "desire for relief from the painful condition of non-recognition owing to sexual difference [which] can create a pull toward social conformity, and specifically toward adoption of mainstream political norms" (Gould 224). This development, however, comes "at the cost of suppressing gay difference and buying into mainstream oppressive values" (Gould 245). Thus, she argues that "countering shame by disavowing that which the mainstreams deems shameful and unworthy of recognition" (Gould 246) does not help to challenge "society's understanding of what is shameful" (Gould 246). According to the authors of *Gay Shame*, instead of taking "pride in gay difference" (Gould 246), gay pride has "turn[ed] into mere social conformity" (Halperin 44).

This argument can be further undergirded by Jack Halberstam's critique of gay pride for its reactionary tendencies. In his essay "Shame and White Gay Masculinity" (2005), Halberstam seeks "to unravel and make visible the deeply invested identity politics of white gay men that have obscured more radical agendas" (Halberstam "Shame" 220). Comparing the logic of gay pride to feminism and the rebellion against racism, Halberstam condenses that, by centring on white (cis-)males, the gay movement advances pride as a weapon against shame, however, without "taking apart the social processes that project shame onto queer subjects in the first place" (Halberstam "Shame" 224). By stabilising the binary opposition of shame and pride, gay pride does not process the social reality that many queers live in and is therefore not able to challenge the circumstances that produced shame after all. Therefore, it is important to consider not only *that* someone is out of the closet or *that* homosexuality is visible but also *how* that person is out and visible and what this means for their surroundings. Eventually, normativity needs to be challenged rather than making it work towards the assimilation of homosexuality into the realm of heteronormativity. As a result, I suggest that visibility can only be a precondition to challenge the normative power structures in society and is thus just the basis for subverting heteronormativity by queer social practices and the accompanying self-empowerment. With the help of a queer utopia always looming in the future (and which might never be reached), hegemonic relationships within the boundaries of queerness can be detected and described, for instance, the dominance of white, homosexual cis-men within the LGBTQIAN+ community. This will be examined more closely in the following subchapter, drawing on Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity and Raewyn Connell's hegemonic masculinity.

2.2 Homonormativity and Hegemonic Gay Masculinity

Despite the phonologic and morphologic similarities to the word heteronormativity, it would be wrong to infer that homonormativity is the simple reversal of heteronormativity and describes a privileging of homosexuals over heterosexuals.[13] It is rather a concept to describe the dominance of a

13 Some scholars do indeed refer to the term in this sense, but as Lisa Duggan argues, "there is no structure for gay life, no matter how conservative or normalizing, that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual

certain group within the LGBTQIAN+ community as well as the reluctance of this group to challenge the subordination of queers by heteronormativity. Even though this is definitively the most extensive consequence of homonormativity, the concept is more complex than that and, as will be examined in the following subchapter, closely related to the social stratifications implemented in a neoliberal society. Lisa Duggan was the central theorist to coin the term 'homonormativity' and to investigate its correlation with neoliberalism. The implications of her theory, however, have been carved out before, especially by Michael Warner. For this reason, I will first take a broader look on the issue of hierarchisation in the gay community before I will sketch the genesis of the concept in Duggan's sense and how it was further developed by other scholars.

Already in 1993, ten years before Duggan made the term 'homonormativity' popular, Warner describes what he later called 'gay normality' in the introduction to the anthology *Fear of a Queer Planet – Queer Politics and Social Theory* (1993), initially as a debate about finding a "common ground of 'identity politics'" (Warner *Queer Planet* xvi) within the LGBTQIAN+ community. However, in his opinion, "too often the common ground has been assumed to be that of relatively dominant positions: whites, males, and middle-class" (Warner *Queer Planet* xvi). This lies in the structural organisation of the gay liberation movement and its close ties with capitalism:

> In the lesbian and gay movement, to a much greater degree than in any comparable movement, the institutions of culture-building have been market-mediated: bars, discos special services, newspapers, magazines, phone lines, resorts, urban commercial districts. Nonmarket forms of association that have been central to other movements – churches, kinship, traditional residence – have been less available for queers. This structural environment has meant that the institutions of queer culture have been dominated by those with capital: typically, middle-class white men. (Warner *Queer Planet* xvi-xvii)

In *The Trouble with Normal* (1999) Warner further specifies this thought by analysing more thoroughly what 'normal' means and which implications this involves. For him, the notion of acceptance by the majority is central

coupling" (Duggan *Twilight* 94). Also, Peter Drucker stresses that: "[t]he rise of homonormativity by no means implies that the larger societies are less heteronormative; on the contrary homonormativity reflects and adapts to the heterosexual norm. The superficial multiculturalism characteristic of neoliberalism barely masks growing racial inequality" (Drucker 220).

for the urge of a minority group to be regarded as 'normal' i.e. "certified, approved, as meeting a set of normative standards" (Warner *Trouble* 56). "Like most stigmatized groups, gays and lesbians were always tempted to believe that the way to overcome stigma was to win acceptance by the dominant culture, rather than to change the self-understanding of that culture" (Warner *Trouble* 50). This form of integration, according to Warner, is problematic in so far as it creates a "hierarchy of respectability" (Warner *Trouble* 49) that assumes that it "makes them more respectable, easier to defend, the worthier pillars of the community, and the real constituency of the movement" (Warner *Trouble* 49). This implies that "those who are most concerned with winning respect might find themselves wishing that their peers in shame would be a little less queer, a little more decent" (Warner *Trouble* 50).

Arguing in a similar fashion, Helene A. Shugart points to the urge of many male homosexuals for "viability in a heterosexual and heteronormative community" (Shugart 70). For her, their concerns about their respectability obfuscates "the range and complexity of gay (and lesbian) identity [...], and 'acceptable' gay identity is limited to that which most closely approximates heteronormative conventions of masculinity" (Shugart 73). This development led to what Steven Seidman calls "the rise of the 'normal gay'" (Seidman *Closet* 13-14):

> the normal gay is expected to exhibit specific kinds of traits and behaviors. He is supposed to be gender conventional, well adjusted, and integrated into mainstream society; [and] conforms to dichotomous gender norms, that is private, tender, caring, genitally centered, and linked to love, marriage, and monogamy. (Seidman *Closet* 14-17)

Seidman argues that assimilationists replaced the more radical liberationists of the 1970s and forged the legal equality of gays within the realm of heteronormativity (cf. Seidman *Closet* 227). Problematic about this process is that the "claim to normality justifies social integration but only for normal-looking and acting gays and lesbians" (Seidman *Closet* 14) which "involves minority rights, not the end of heterosexual privilege" (Seidman *Closet* 14). Thereby, those "gays and lesbians have been complicit with a heterosexual power-structure fundamentally indifferent or inimical to them" (Jagose 115). According to anti-assimilationist theorists, then, this complicity creates new forms of exclusions that marginalise members of the LGBTQIAN+ community who are not assimilated to mainstream society. Urvashi Vaid usefully condenses this argument in her book *Virtual*

Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation (1995): "The irony of gay and lesbian mainstreaming is that more than fifty years of active effort to challenge homophobia and heterosexism have yielded us not freedom but 'virtual equality'" (Vaid 5). For her, actual equality cannot be achieved without challenging the structural and institutional status quo within larger society. Instead of simply integrating an assimilated form of homosexuality, the institutional manifestations of heteronormativity as such have to be transformed to be more inclusive of racial, gender, and economic difference.

In summary, without using the same terminology, other scholars have made use of the concept of homonormativity in similar ways to Duggan. The following paragraphs will now examine her perspective more closely. In her book *Sex Wars – Sexual Dissident and Political Culture* (1996), Duggan describes how she realised in the late 1990s that the sexually and gender-diverse LGBTQIAN+ community was not as inclusive as she thought it was, especially with regards to issues of class or race. She learned that it was in fact dominated by a white middle-class majority (cf. *Sex Wars* 214-215). To specify her perspective, she takes the struggle for gay marriage as an example. Very similar to other anti-assimilationists' argumentation, she calls attention to the negative impact of a desire for respectability inherent to being married: "Both legally and socially, married couples are held in greater esteem than unmarried couples because of the commitment they have made in a serious, public, legally enforceable manner" (Duggan *Sex Wars* 227). "If pursued in this way", however, "the drive for gay-marriage equality can undermine rather than support the broader movement for social justice and democratic diversity" (Duggan *Sex Wars* 228). In her critically acclaimed book *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003) she draws a connection between the desire for respectability of some homosexuals and the neoliberal structures they developed in. She argues that "within the neoliberal mainstream, some proponents of 'equality politics' [...] promote 'colorblind' anti-affirmative action racial politics, conservative-libertarian 'equality feminism,' and gay 'normality'" (Duggan *Twilight* 45). Consequently, she develops her definition of homonormativity by inferring that these

> new neoliberal sexual politics [...] might be termed *the new homonormativity* – it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privat-

> ized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (Duggan *Twilight* 50; italics added for emphasis)

Thus, in the same fashion as Warner and Seidman, Duggan asserts that gay normality, or homonormativity, stratifies members of the LGBTQIAN+ communities and thereby creates hierarchies of respectability. People who clearly conform to the heterosexist norms of gender intelligibility sit at the top while the bottom of the hierarchy is made up by those who are less conforming to these normative standards. What is *new* about her concept of homonormativity, though, is that it encompasses the increasing trend towards more right-wing gay conservative politics within the LGBTQIAN+ community which was brought about by a higher public visibility of homosexuality in more recent years. In Duggan's opinion, gay assimilation developed from being a matter of (personal) preference for those who are "the most assimilated, genderappropriate, politically mainstream portions of the gay population" (Duggan *Twilight* 44) to becoming enforced by political groups of gay conservatives that vehemently wish to deny more 'deviant' LGBTQIAN+ individuals access to basic human rights by "invoking a phantom mainstream public of 'conventional' gays who represent the responsible center" (Duggan *Twilight* 44).

Most distressingly for her, those groups are gaining more and more popularity.[14] Thereby, for Duggan, "[t]his new formation is not merely a position on the spectrum of gay movement politics, but is a crucial new part of the cultural front of neoliberalism in the United States" (Duggan *Twilight* 49). This shows that the homonormative agenda seeks to promote one 'legitimate' form of homosexuality while at the same time forcing everyone who does not concur with this norm into the invisible realm of privacy. The public/private debate shifted from the need for a right to privacy (as a relief from the anxiety of being exposed as homosexual and thereby publicly shamed) to initiatives for public visibility, which started in the 1970s and were further advanced by AIDS activists in the 80s and 90s (cf. Duggan *Twilight* 51). However, alongside this radicalisation concerning the right to 'public privacy,' "a new strain of gay moralism appeared – attacks on 'promiscuity' and the 'gay lifestyle' accompanied advocacy of

14 In the chapter 'The Incredibly Shrinking Public' she extensively criticises a manifesto by the writers of the Independent Gay Forum (IGF) called 'Forging a Gay Mainstream,' in which they explain their assimilationist gay conservative views as the most positive way to co-live with the heteronormative majority of society (cf. *Twilight* 50-51).

monogamous marriage as a responsible disease prevention strategy" (Duggan *Twilight* 53). From within this 'new strain,' the gay conservatives have been advocating homonormativity from the 1990s onwards.

Other scholars, for instance Gavin Brown, do not agree with Duggan. He criticises her concept of homonormativity by emphasising that "standard Homonormative[15] critiques fail to adequately explain or appreciate the positive benefits lesbian and gay men might accrue from being able to openly socialize as gay people in sexually mixed leisure spaces" (Brown 1068), even though he acknowledges that "these benefits are not universal and come with costs attached" (Brown 1065) and that "gay life has become privatized and domesticated" (Brown 1066). In my opinion, this argument misses the point that some LGBTQIAN+ individuals still suffer from stigmatisation while others benefit from neoliberal privileges. Moreover, it suggests that Duggan's critique of homonormativity entails that being gay means to be radical and that gays cannot choose to lead more private, conforming lives. This, however, is completely off Duggan's point; instead, she tries to excavate the structures which oppress those LGBTQIAN+ individuals who do not conform, often not by choice but because of their sexual and cultural practices.

Peter Drucker, by contrast, usefully expands and works upon Duggan's concept of homonormativity in his book *Warped – Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism* (2015), equally stressing that "neoliberal moral deregulation has not only expanded sexual possibilities but also fostered new kinds of conformism" (Drucker 19). He puts even more emphasis on economic reasons for the emergence of gay normality, ever since "there are profits to be made from LGBT niche markets" (Drucker 20). Moreover, he criticises that "lesbian/gay identities have become increasingly 'homonationalist,' taking their place in an intensifying global hierarchy and an unequal world" (Drucker 220). The concept of homonationalism is closely related to that of homonormativity because it describes the exclusion of certain LGBTQIAN+ individuals from the understanding of an American national identity. The term was first brought up by Jasbir Puar in 2007. She

15 The capital H in 'Homonormativity,' according to to Brown indicates "a clear distinction between homonormativity, as an assemblage of specific social changes in a range of countries over the last two decades that appear to have had particular social and political consequences, and Homonormativity, the conceptual theorization of those changes" (Brown 1065). For the purpose of *Queer Enough?*, this distinction is redundant, since I will make use of Duggan's conception of the term which covers both aspects.

claims that the LGBTQIAN+ movement is used to justify racism, xenophobia, and specifically prejudice against Islam, which is perceived as fundamentally homophobic, while at the same time the discrimination against the LGBTQIAN+ community that still occurs in Western societies is deliberately ignored (cf. Puar 83). Although in this format, it is a tool of right-wing populism, the structures of homonationalism are also found in other cultural and social phenomena. As bell hooks points out:

> Concurrently, marginalized groups, deemed Other, who have been ignored, rendered invisible, can be seduced by the emphasis on Otherness, by its commodification, because it offers the promise of recognition and reconciliation. When the dominant culture demands that the Other be offered as sign that progressive political change is taking place, that the American Dream can indeed be inclusive of difference, it invites a resurgence of essentialist cultural nationalism. The acknowledged Other must assume recognizable forms. (hooks 25)

Thus, the urge to belong to the American cultural mainstream can lead to the creation of new forms of exclusion. I agree with Duggan, Drucker, and hooks that including only a certain group of homosexuals and not questioning the power structures and hierarchies within neoliberalism legitimises the inequalities that these structures constitute. In this sense, the term homonormativity can be used to describe both the discourses and the social practices that are involved with it. In order to do this, I would like to introduce the concept of 'hegemonic gay masculinity' which is based on Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Condensing essentialist, positivist, normative as well as semiotic approaches to masculinity, Connell suggests that "[r]ather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioural average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives" (Connell 'Social Organization' 33). She argues that "'[m]asculinity,' to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (Connell 'Social Organization' 33-34). In consistence with Butler's notion of performativity, Connell identifies gendered identities as performative "*gender projects*" (Connell 'Social Organization' 34), which implies that "'[h]egemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic

position in a given pattern of gender relations" (Connell 'Social Organization' 38).

In her definition of hegemonic masculinity, Connell emphasises the influence of four features: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalisation. Based on Antonio Gramsci's model of hegemony, hegemonic masculinity "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees [...] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 'Social Organization' 38-39). However, the hegemony of one group "is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power" (Connell *Masculinities* 77) and is, hence, "a 'currently accepted' strategy" (Connell *Masculinities* 77). Since hegemony usually involves the cultural dominance of one group, the oppression of another, hence subordination, is inevitable. In the case of hegemonic masculinity, subordination is displayed on two main layers. On the overall level, women are oppressed by the cultural hegemony of men in general, while in particular, "there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (Connell *Masculinities* 78). The subordination of homosexual men might be one of the most apparent examples. According to Connell, it is

> more than a cultural stigmatization of homosexuality or gay identity. […] Oppression positions homosexual masculinity at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity. (Connell 'Social Organization' 39-40)

In Connell's view, this accounts for the fact that homosexuality is so "easily assimilated with femininity" (Connell 'Social Organization' 40) even leading to a "symbolic blurring with femininity" (Connell 'Social Organization' 40) in the cultural representation of gay men. Moreover, it leads to "an array of quite material practices" (*Masculinities* 78) for the subordination of homosexuals and other 'deviant' forms of masculinity which "include political and cultural exclusion, cultural abuse [...], legal violence [...], 'street' violence [...], economic discrimination and personal boycotts" (Connell *Masculinities* 78). Nevertheless, even men who are not part of the group of hegemonic men "gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal divided, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell *Masculinities* 79). For this reason, Connell accredits especially heterosexual men a "relationship of complicity with

the hegemonic project, [...] without the tensions and risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy" (Connell *Masculinities* 79). In contrast to "naked domination or an uncontested display of authority" (Connell *Masculinities* 79), this situation enables them to form coalitions with women which are necessary for functioning social formations (such as the family) and which exercise male domination through cultural institutions (such as marriage) (cf. Connell *Masculinities* 79). Whereas hegemony, subordination, and complicity "are relations internal to the gender order" (Connell 'Social Organization' 41), marginalisation describes the interaction of these concepts with other social and cultural structures, most notably race and class. Moreover, it is "always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (Connell 'Social Organization' 42) and "therefore creating subsets of hegemonic masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 847).[16] Accordingly, to analyse the complex relations of masculinity, Connell distinguishes "two types of relationship – hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity on the one hand, marginalization/authorization on the other" (Connell *Masculinities* 81).

Within the social organisation of masculinity, also violence plays an important role as it "is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions, for example, in heterosexual violence against gay men" (Connell 'Social Organization' 44). Not only does violence in this sense become "part of a system of domination but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection" (Connell *Masculinities* 84). An increase in violence from the hegemonic group is in Connells view the "most visible evidence of crisis tendencies" (Connell *Masculinities* 85), which "may, for instance, provoke attempts to restore a dominant masculinity" (Connell 'Social Organization' 45). Nonetheless, those crisis tendencies might as well initiate changes in the hierarchy of intermale dominance, which underlines the instability as well as variability of hegemonic masculinity:

> Hegemony may be accomplished by the incorporation of such masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in the form of discredit or violence. In practice, both incorporation and oppression can occur together. This is, for instance, the contemporary position of gay masculinities in Western urban centers, where gay com-

16 This, of course, implies that the "relation of marginalization and authorization may also exist between subordinated masculinities" (Connell *Masculinities* 81). I will examine this thought more closely when introducing the concept of hegemonic gay masculinity later in this chapter.

> munities have a spectrum of experience ranging from homophobic violence and cultural denigration to toleration and even cultural celebration and political representation. (Connell and Messerschmidt 848)

This indicates the possibility of an internal hierarchy within the group of homosexual masculinities, which has already been discussed in the chapter about homonormativity. Before I will carve out what I would like to introduce as 'hegemonic gay masculinity,' I will elaborate on homophobia, which is often manifested in violence against homosexuals and strongly connected to disruptions in the concept of masculinity and an increasing instability of hegemonic masculinity.

Not only does Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity emphasise "the depth and pervasiveness of homophobia" (Connell *Masculinities* 39) and how closely it is "connected with dominant forms of masculinity" (Connell *Masculinities* 40), but also serves well to establish an understanding of homophobia[17] that usefully expands psychoanalytic theorisations. To arrive at a multi-layered definition of the term, it will be vital to clarify the psychoanalytical notion first. I will then go on to examine a broader socio-political view of homophobia in order to apply Connell's concept. In psychoanalysis, homophobia, is seen as 'latent homosexuality,' which derives from repressed homoerotic desires. It is the "irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance" (Adams et al. 440) a person feels when confronted with homosexuality. Several theoretical strands have tried to unearth the reasons for the phenomenon of latent homosexuality which implies "an externalization of the person's hatred and fear of his or her own homosexual feelings. The heterosexual projects his fear of his own homosexual desires onto the external world" (Wickberg 56). Thereby, the "anxiety about the possibility of being or becoming a homosexual" (Adams et al. 440) is described as being caused by "remnants of homosexuality in the heterosexual resolution of the Oedipal conflict" (Adams et al. 441). On the one hand, this model serves well to explain the "emotional malaise and irrational attitudes displayed by some individuals who feel guilty about their erotic interests and struggle to deny and repress homosexual impulses" (Adams et al. 441). On the other hand, however, it is not sufficient to explain the multidimensional structures of negative attitudes towards homosexuality that are so deeply in-

17 Even though many aspects that pertain to homophobia also apply to trans*phobia, I will concentrate on the definition of homophobia and its entanglements with masculinity.

culcated into heteronormative culture and that especially male homosexuals experience with other men.

Michael Kimmel tries to account for broader socio-political impressions men have about their social position in his essay "Masculinity as Homophobia – Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" (2001). Even though the psychoanalytical model of latent homophobia as the "repudiation of the homosexual within" (Kimmel 276) cannot be neglected in Kimmel's opinion, he sees homophobia as "more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay" (Kimmel 277). Instead, he argues that a pervading incongruence between the social and the individual self-awareness of men accounts for the fact that they might see themselves as powerless, even though – seen as a group – they are the ones in hold of power (cf. Kimmel 282). Likewise, Luca di Blasi stresses this line of argumentation. In his book *Der weiße Mann – Ein Antimanifest* (2013), he examines why men have the impression that they steadily lose significance in society and how they deal with this problem. He claims that white, heterosexual, middle-class cis men who have heretofore set the normative standards in society fear the rise of other possible models of masculinity because they confound their own decentralisation with marginalisation and the depletion of privileges with discrimination (cf. di Blasi 8; 48-49). This implies that those heterosexual men, who do not realise their own privileging in society and therefore do not feel powerful as individuals, perceive the whole group of heterosexual men as victims and thus forcibly try to keep up or even expand their power (cf. di Blasi 18). Condensing Kimmel's and di Blasi's argumentation, homophobia can be described as the manifestation of a culturally engrained male anxiety about their own status in society next to an individually experienced phobia stimulated by one's own repressed desires.

To add yet another layer to the definition of homophobia, these anxieties are also strongly connected to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity since men who feel powerless often fear that they do not meet the social requirements for the masculine gender role. Gregory M. Herek observed, for instance, that the "[p]ersonal and institutional prejudice against lesbians and gay men" (Herek 452) is usually accompanied by a generally more conservative mentality, including "religiosity [and] adherence to traditional ideologies of family and gender" (Herek451) in several studies he conducted. This shows that homosexuality is perceived as a threat to hegemonic masculinity and the discursive structure of heteronormative societies.

Similar to Connell, also Kimmel emphasises that "[m]anhood is neither static nor timeless" (Kimmel 267) nor "the manifestation of an inner essence" (Kimmel 267) and claims that masculinity is "a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world" (Kimmel 266). At the same time, "[w]ithin the dominant culture the masculinity that defines white, middle-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured" (Kimmel 284). Not only are deviant forms of masculinity measured against the hegemonic model, but all men are constantly assessed in terms of their own ability to conform to the gendered norms. The emphasis in Kimmel's essay thereby lies on the anxiety to be exposed as not being a 'real man' according to the standards of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Kimmel 274-276). As a result, any instabilities in the system of the hegemonic discourse threatens a man's definition of his own masculinity and may cause deeply seated insecurities in his identity.[18] He thus concludes that homophobia is usually associated with

> the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as (Kimmel 277)

These feelings of fear and shame Kimmel described here are then projected onto individuals who diverge from the normative model of masculinity. Since their own uncertainty about their manliness in public "probes men to enact all manners of exaggerated masculine behaviours and attitudes to make sure that no one could possibly get the wrong idea about [them]" (Kimmel 280), they feel like they have to degrade homosexuals who "become the 'other' against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stack a claim for their own manhood" (Kimmel 280). Moreover, violence plays an important role in homophobia, as for instance, "[t]error is used as

18 Kimmel examines the phenomenon of homophobia and sexism by drawing on the psychological explanation for the behaviour of bullying children: "the *least* secure about his manhood" (Kimmel 274) is usually the one who constantly bullies other children, proving his own masculinity by degrading other, most often inferior children (cf. Kimmel 274–275).

a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions, for example, in heterosexual violence against gay men" (Connell *Masculinities* 83). Thus, Connell concludes that violence is a tool for sustaining the hegemonic position of masculinity, "authorized by an ideology of supremacy" (Connell *Masculinities* 83). Any aberration from the norm is thus "met with efforts to silence, change, or destroy the differences" (Gutterman 62), making the shaming, subordination of, as well as violence against homosexuals an integral part of homophobia. Nonetheless, also LGBTQIAN+ culture brings about new forms of hierarchies, a position which will be addressed by the introduction of the concept of 'hegemonic gay masculinities.'

Since the power structures inherent to hegemonic masculinity are not stable, but "always contestable" (Connell 'Social Organisation' 38), the struggle against the normative form of masculinity is immanent to the concept. As has been shown in the elaboration of the term homonormativity, there also exists a hierarchy within the LGBTQIAN+ community and amongst homosexual men that favours assimilation to heteronormative standards in society. The following paragraphs seek to put this view into relation and combine the concept of homonormativity with Connell's hegemonic masculinity to carve out what I call 'hegemonic gay masculinity.' As Connell has argued, homosexual masculinity has always been seen in relation to the normative standards of hegemonic masculinity, which served to account for its deviation and "involved the criminalization of male-to-male sex, as well as intimidation and violence outside the law" (Connell *Masculinities* 154-155). The reason for this lies in the broader arrangement between the sexes, that is

> organized mainly through the heterosexual couple. This is the taken for granted meaning of 'love' in popular culture and it has massive institutional support. Masculinity is necessarily in question in the lives of men whose sexual interest is in other men. (Connell *Masculinities* 90)

As has been argued before, homosexuality is associated with femininity. "Patriarchal culture has a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity" (Connell *Masculinities* 143). Accordingly, for gay men, encounters with hegemonic masculinity "often have an undercurrent of threat. Weariness, controlled disclosure, and turning inward to a gay network are familiar responses" (Connell *Masculinities* 155). To avoid hegemonic masculinity, gay subcultures were formed that "negotiat[ed] boundary relationships with mainstream society" (Connell *Masculinities* 144). In the wake of the gay rights movement, these subcultures "grew and became institutionalized"

(Connell *Masculinities* 144), which led to a "stabilization of lesbian and gay sexuality as a public alternative within the heterosexual order" (Connell *Masculinities* 85).

However, once institutionalised the hierarchisation of gay practices branched out since social institutions are necessarily affiliated with power relations. This leads to an "internal conformity of the gay world" (Connell *Masculinities* 152) and to a presupposed understanding of gay masculinity. As Connell suggests,

> 'coming out' actually means coming *in* to an already-constituted gay milieu. There has been debate among gay theoreticians, especially those influenced by Foucault, about the collective identity sustained in this milieu: whether it is a means of social regulation and, thus, ultimately, oppression. (Connell *Masculinities* 152)

This form of oppression manifests itself in the cultural practice of the members within the gay community. Even though "an affirmation of gay identity and a consolidation of gay communities" (Connell *Masculinities* 159) is generally appreciable, it may also have negative effects. Especially the younger generation of homosexual men "have little sense of being connected to a broad movement of reform" (Connell *Masculinities* 159). They "are in a position to adopt, negotiate or reject a gay identity, a gay commercial scene and gay sexual and social networks, all of which they encounter ready formed" (Connell *Masculinities* 161). As a result, these men are relatively apolitical and no longer interested in challenging the heteronormative structures that suppressed their precursors some decades earlier:

> The gender eroticism of these men, the masculine social presence most of them maintain, their focus on privatized couple relationships and their lack of solidarity with feminism point in the same direction. There is no open challenge to the gender order here. (Connell *Masculinities* 161)

These men can be described as homonormative, as they are not challenging heteronormative standards in society and thus produce 'hegemonic gay masculinity.'

To explain what I mean by hegemonic gay masculinity, I will draw on Connell's classification that involves the notions of hegemony, suppression, complicity, and marginalisation (cf. Connell *Masculinities* 77-82; 'Social Organisation' 38-42). Concerning the dualism of hegemony and suppres-

sion, I suggest that the most heteronormatively assimilated gays, that is the most homonormative ones, constitute the current form of a hegemony that seeks to suppress everything that does not conform to these standards – especially men who do not adjust to their masculine gender role. The aforementioned institutionalisation of gay subcultures plays an important role for this aspect, since "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power" (Connell *Masculinities* 77). That the standards for relationships are heavily relying upon the heterosexual model is a telling example for homo- and heteronormative assimilation. Accordingly, monogamous marriage-like relationships are valued higher than having affairs or various sexual encounters with different men (cf. Connell *Masculinities* 153-154). Moreover, also in their appearance, some gays prefer to assimilate to the heteronorm while resenting other gays that do not conform to this normative "perceptions of gayness" (Connell *Masculinities* 156). The homosexuals Connell interviewed for her study were "critical of men who 'flaunt' their gayness" (*Masculinities* 156) and "express[ed] distaste for queens, i.e., effeminate gays" (Connell *Masculinities* 156). One of them maintained that he was "a very straight gay" (Connell *Masculinities* 156). Connell goes on to explain that "[t]he apolitical outlook of the group itself demonstrates the stabilization of a public alternative to hegemonic masculinity" (Connell *Masculinities* 162), however, this phenomenon comes with the price of establishing other forms of oppression. As Seidman points out, "some gays, mostly white, middle class, and urban, have benefited from legal reform and a softening of homophobia. But the vast majority of lesbians and gay men still feel compelled to take refuge in the closet" (Seidman *Closet* 5). Warner's thoughts on gay normality as well as Duggan's concept of homonormativity have shown, these white, middle-class gays constitute a norm which is the most assimilated to the heteronormative mainstream in society. Even more so, they might even claim the power of hegemonic masculinity. These gays are at the top position of the hegemonic gradient and thereby facilitate the subordination of other LGBTQIAN+ individuals; thus, they form hegemonic gay masculinity.

In contrast to hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic gay masculinity is complicit on two levels. Firstly, it is complicit with hegemonic masculinity in general since "gay communities provide a certain resistance, but not a significant challenge, to the culture of male dominance in the society as a whole" (Connell *Masculinities* 144). This is, however, a very contradictory position, because hegemonic masculinity seeks to oppress homosexuality

and a man "cannot become homosexual without shattering this hegemony somehow" (Connell *Masculinities* 162). At the same time, "hegemonic masculinity has social authority, and is not easy to challenge" (Connell *Masculinities* 156). For Connell this is closely related to the fact that the construction of one's masculinity is a very complex process:

> Some engagement with hegemonic masculinity is found in each of these lives. It ranges from heavy commitment to wistful fantasy, but it's always there. In no sense is their homosexuality built on a lack, a gender vacuum. Yet the construction of masculinity occurs through relationships that are far from monolithic. The gender dynamics is both powerful and sufficiently complex and contradictory to be inflected in different ways. (Connell *Masculinities* 147)

Hegemonic gay masculinity can thus be described – as Connell also suggests for the 'very straight gay' – as "a loyal opposition to hegemonic masculinity" (Connell *Masculinities* 202). Moreover, there is also complicity with the standards of hegemonic gay masculinity within the gay community. This means that many gays are complicit with the hegemonic model even though they do not necessarily live up to these standards. As Connell points out "[t]he relation of marginalization and authorization may also exist between subordinated masculinities" (Connell *Masculinities* 81). As for hegemonic masculinity, this accounts for the marginalisation of masculinities that are further affected through intersectional relations. Especially the factors of race and class, and gender identity play an important role in this, since hegemonic gay masculinity is dominated by white, middle-class cis men.

In summary, hegemonic gay masculinity is closely related to homonormativity, 'the normal gay,' or the 'very-straight-gay.' However, the concept conflates the aforementioned notions to describe homosexual masculinity and serves well to concentrate on relations of various masculinities within the LGBTQIAN+ community. Moreover, considering Connell's classification of factors that serve to stabilise hegemonic masculinity, it might be useful to analyse how queers negotiate hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalisation. The following chapter elaborates on the ways in which these strategies are manifest in works of cultural representation such as films, which can be analysed as representing and at the same time determining social perceptions about LGBTQIAN+ individuals.

2.3 Formal-Aesthetic Features of Queer Cinema

When describing the representation of LGBTQIAN+ individuals in films and in order to determine whether or not the films analysed in *Queer Enough?* can be regarded as queer, it is crucial to define queer cinema. Benshoff and Griffin delineate five factors for queer film that serve as the foundation for my methodological approach towards queer cinema. They argue that a film "might be considered queer if it deals with characters that are queer" (Benshoff and Griffin 9). Keeping the legacy of defamation of LGBTQIAN+ individuals in cinema very much in mind, however, "the mere presence of a queer character [does not] make a film a queer film" (Benshoff and Griffin 9), since often films "use a single stereotypically queer character as the butt of homophobic jokes" (Benshoff and Griffin 9). Inspired by the Bechdel-test, which examines the portrayal of women in motion pictures,[19] the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has developed a test to determine whether or not a film portrays LGBTQIAN+ characters in a stigmatizing way. According to the so-called Vito-Russo-test, a film is not discriminatory toward LGBTQIAN+ individuals only if all of the following criteria are met:

- The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender.
- That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity. I.e., they are made up of the same sort of unique character traits commonly used to differentiate straight characters from one another.
- The LGBT character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect. Meaning they are not there to simply provide colorful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or (perhaps most commonly) set up a punchline. The character should 'matter.' (GLAAD)

However, even if all of the three statements apply to a film, its aesthetic can foreground a particular image of LGBTQIAN+ characters. Thus, also Benshoff and Griffin submit that "a queer film is one that both contains queer characters and engages with queer issues in some meaningful – as

19 The test was made famous in 1985 by American cartoonist and author Alison Bechdel in her comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*. It is not a scientific test but is now widely used to perceive and judge the stereotyping of female characters and to draw attention to the fact that women are misrepresented in feature films.

opposed to derogatory or exploitative – way" (Benshoff and Griffin 9-10). Furthermore, the process of production, or the "authorship" (Benshoff and Griffin 10) of the film, as they call it, might as well be a factor to define a film as queer. As they contend, "queer filmmakers can and do inflect a queer sensibility into their work, even when obvious gay and lesbian characters and issues are not present" (Benshoff and Griffin 10). Then, also the reception of the film might determine whether a film is queer. According to Benshoff and Griffin, a queer film can hence be "one that is viewed by lesbian, gay, or otherwise queer spectators" (Benshoff and Griffin 10). For this reason, any film can be considered a queer film, which is why "a whole system of reading Hollywood films 'against the grain,' known as *camp*, evolved within early-twentieth-century gay cultures, in effect queering manifestly straight films" (Benshoff and Griffin 10). Camp refers to a stylistically excessive way of perceiving cultural products of all kinds (such as film, music, literature, visual arts, fashion, furniture, interior design, and others), which is oriented towards artificiality and exaggeration. According to Susan Sontag, "[c]amp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon" (Sontag 54). For her, theatricality, passion, and playfulness must be visible; also, camp irony is predominantly used in a sentimental and affectionate way, never wanting to merely show off the chosen objects, persons, and works of art or expose them to ridicule (cf. Sontag 59-60). Moreover, another parameter for considering a film as queer assumes the affiliation with a certain genre. As Benshoff and Griffin point out, the narrative structure of some genres is more suitable for queer cinema, including, next to avant-garde or independent films, science fiction or fantasy films, as they sometimes portray "new and varied types of sexualities" (Benshoff and Griffin 11), or the "hyperreal world" (Benshoff and Griffin 11) of musicals, or animations for "blurring the real and the unreal, figuring identity as fluid, and imagining fantastic spaces in which shape shifting and sex changing are as plausible as anything else" (Benshoff and Griffin 11). Eventually, Benshoff and Griffin argue that whether a film is queer depends on how the film facilitates a certain way to look at the action and characters on screen. Thus, the so-called *gaze* which is established in a film might account for the film's queerness (cf. Benshoff and Griffin 11).

For the analysis of the films I have chosen, I suggest that the gender or sexuality of the author or creator as well as the spectator are not expedient for the purpose of deciding whether a film might be considered queer or not. This is mainly because the belief that only a queer 'author' is able to make a queer film is a very exclusionary as well as essentialist

assumption. Especially with the ongoing discussion about the meaning of queer altogether, barring any perceived non-queer filmmakers from the community of queer cinema is, in my opinion, highly unrewarding for the larger discourse about queer. This is even more true for the third factor: even though the camp way of 'reading against the grain' and the queering of straight cinema sets an example in favour of the visibility and positive perception of the LGBTQIAN+ community, I do not fully agree with their argument, since only LGBTQIAN+ recipients are able to perform this act of queering, whereas straight viewers are never able to perceive a film as queer then. Not only does this determine the definition of queerness, but also perpetuates the dichotomous relation of 'queer' and 'straight' as definite binary categories. Moreover, for me, there is a semantic difference between the *queering* of film, which can be described as a social practice and is not quite the same as a *queer* film as such. The sexual orientation of the filmmaker or the recipient is not a viable parameter for my analysis which is why I will not focus on the author- and spectatorship of the films. Most convincingly, hence, whether films represent the homosexual characters we see onscreen in a meaningful and non-derogatory way can be subsumed by the analysis of their content and their formal-aesthetic design.

Alexandra Juhasz usefully expands Benshoff and Griffins list of features by arguing that "for cinema to be truly queer, to be productive, or even better yet, dissident, I will insist that it need be attached to something that matters: a stake" (Juhasz 262). Hence, radical and productive queer cinema, in her opinion, "takes into account current tensions – the changing politics of visibility and identity construction, and other such inequitable distributions among queers – and allows these unsettleds to be seen within a stable format" (Juhasz 260). Instead of reproducing "replicas or copies of dominant forms where LGBT people are merely transplanted into the already-written and acceptable roles of melodrama or reality TV" (Juhasz 257), however, queer cinema "copies more common media conventions to play these recognizable and comfortable forms against something uncommon, disruptive, and queer" (Juhasz 257). Referring to José Muñoz' concept of disidentification[20] as an "erotic play between content and form" (Juhasz 257), she positions queer cinema between assimilation and opposition to dominant heteronormative ideology. Thereby, "the incompatible of truly queer claims, characters, goals, as they rub against the more expected

20 Muñoz describes disidentification as the act of defying the identification of a subject according to Althusser's notion of interpellation (cf. Muñoz *Disidentifications* 11).

and acceptable forms of indie narrative cinema, produces a friction that can transform cinema" (Juhasz 257). In a similar vein, Nowlan proceeds from formal-aesthetic criteria and submits that queer cinema "foregrounds the constructedness and performativity of social identities" (Nowlan 17). Thereby, it "actively strives towards the deconstruction of binary opposites, and especially, violent hierarchies" (Nowlan 18) and "emphasizes – and valorizes – boundary crossings, liminal and proximate states, hybridities and fusions, and contradictions and paradoxes" (Nowlan 18). He argues that queer cinema exhibits a camp sensibility as it "is often hyper-self-reflexive and overtly foregrounding of intertextuality, as well as frequently relying extensively on appropriation and expropriation, pastiche and montage, and irony and parody" (Nowlan 18). Not only does queer cinema "emphasize[…] defiance, refusal and demand versus the normative" (Nowlan 18), but it

> rejects both separatism and assimilation, and both ghettoisation and normalization, while dismissing a resort towards setting up positive role models with which straight audiences can easily identity [sic], as well as other conventional moves as part of non-queer lgbt film that caters toward a potentially easy crossover appeal with mainstream audiences who are willing to accept 'good queers' [...] yet who are at the same time unwilling to accept 'bad queers' (Nowlan 18)

This engenders "tensions emanating from an intrinsically contradictory as well as definitively utopian desire: on the one hand to maintain an edgy, alternative, marginal, and even underground social-sexual existence, and on the other hand to defeat and transcend prejudice, denigration, repression, and subjugation" (Nowlan 19), in short to rebel against the structures one wants to be accepted by which is the general ambiguity of queerness (cf. Nowlan 17-19). Likewise, Amy Borden identifies a "recognizable homonormative style dominated by conceptions of white gayness" (Borden 101) in mainstream as well as in independent films. She perceives "queerness as a film practice rather than a genre" (Borden 99). Since "genres suggest objective status and discursive boundaries, conceiving queer cinema as an international practice rather than as a genre retains indeterminacy as the key value of queer studies" (Borden 100). She distinguishes queer cinema from LGBTQIAN+ cinema, which "draws from classical Hollywood style - narrative closure, spatial and temporal coherence, and a cause and effect plot - to build mainstream and community-oriented films that work to normalize LGBTQ+ characters" (102). In queer cinema, by contrast,

"process takes precedence over identity by valuing hybridity and indeterminacy [which] reasserts a celebration of the radical as a fundamental aspect of LGBTQ+ politics" (Borden 99). Building on this distinction, I aim to delineate LGBTQIAN+ *cinema* from *queer cinema*. Whether or not a film is classified as queer cinema can be ascertained by pursuing a close reading on the content level as well as an analysis of the aesthetic composition. For this reason, it is worthwhile to study the films' narrative structure and thus how they make use of genre-specific ways of cinematic narrating, including genre-specific roles as well as the gaze that is established on screen.

2.4 Heteronarrative and the Gaze

Structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers such as Northrop Frye and Roland Barthes establish a connection between the concepts of narrative, archetypes, myths, hegemony, and ideology. Drawing on structuralist theory in his seminal work *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Frye assumes that a system of simplification (i.e. language) filters our perceptions and breaks them down into more simple ideas that can be narrated. For literature and other forms of narrative art, this means that certain conventions are established that govern the way narratives are composed and read (i.e. understood) (cf. Frye 104-105). These conventions are expressed in symbols that function as a "communicable unit" which Frye calls "archetype: that is, a typical or recurring image" (Frye 99). In contrast to later postmodern or deconstructivist perspectives, Frye does not locate these archetypes in ideology, but tries to formulate a theory of literary criticism from 'within,' suggesting that the knowledge about literature derives directly from literature itself. Roland Barthes, in comparison, establishes a different concept of myth, which he defines in *Mythologies* (1957) as "a system of communication" (Barthes 109) that

> abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all the dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes 143)

Thus, "what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality" (Barthes 119) and "it is always in part motivated" (Barthes

126) and produces "universalism, the refusal of any explanation, an unalterable hierarchy of the world" (Barthes 154). Instead of hiding its tendency to perpetuate simplified models of the world, the major function of myth is to naturalise its concept. Thereby, dominant ideas are so naturalised they become common sense and hence seem politically innocent. Ultimately, ideologically upheld hierarchies are not derived from a person's own experience but made coherent and comprehensible through simplifications which are mediated through narratives (cf. Barthes 143; 151-154). This means that the use of certain narrative traditions within cultural production, whether as myth or archetype, influences the way 'reality' is perceived and, hence, takes an active part in shaping and upholding hegemonic structures. Deciphering these mythological structures serves to grasp the relation between language and power structures and, extending Frye's position, unveil the ways in which ideology is inculcated in society. As a powerful agent in popular cultural production, the cinema has its own narrative conventions, myths, and archetypes, which shape the ways in which 'reality' is perceived.

Beginning in the studio era (between the 1920s to the 1960s), American filmmakers have created a narrative tradition that became the most powerful and pervasive style, almost "a lingua franca for worldwide filmmaking" (Bordwell 1). David Bordwell argues that Hollywood, including its speciality divisions, features

> fairly firm standards of plot construction and characterization. A film's main characters, all agree, should pursue important goals and face forbidding obstacles. Conflict should be constant, across the whole film and within each scene. Actions should be bound into a tight chain of cause and effect. Major events should be foreshadowed ('planted'), but not so obviously that the viewer can predict them. Tension should rise in the course of the film until a climax resolves all the issues. (Bordwell 28)

The narrative structure influences the way "viewers turn dramatic and visual patterns into an intelligible story" (Bordwell 16). This intelligible story, like myth, is shaped by socially constructed presuppositions pertaining to class, hierarchy, race, or – as of special interest for *Queer Enough?* – gender and sexuality. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of intelligibility, Judith Roof examines "how ideas of sexuality and narrative inform one another" (Roof xiv) and postulates that "the sexuality of narrative is straight" (Roof xxvi). As "organising epistemes and as expressions of figuratively heterosexual reproductive ideology in twentieth-century Western culture" (Roof xxvii), narrative and (hetero)sexuality are "interdependent, mutually re-

flective, reciprocal" (Roof xxvii) and thus inextricably linked. Together, the two concepts uphold and perpetuate "heteroideology" (Roof xxviii), since narrative in Roof's opinion "plays a large part in the stubborn return of a particularly heterosexual normativity" (Roof xxix). The structure of this narrative, which Roof calls "heteronarrative", follows a heterosexual logic of reproduction that renders the appearance of homosexuality impossible unless it "provides the pretext for the heteronarrative's spectacular return" (Roof xxiv) through which "narrative typically reorganizes its perversities into a heterosexual mainstream" (Roof xxxiv). Heteronormative viewers can enjoy watching homosexual content, because they already know that the heteronormative equilibrium will be reinstalled at the end. This certainty not only originates in techniques of foreshadowing from within the narrative itself, but also because the viewers have already experienced this form of narrative many times before. For Roof, this raises the question "how it is possible to divert that mainstream into a lesbian narrative without having that narrative simply reinscribe the heteronarrative with lesbian players" (Roof xxxiv). According to her, instead of content, a different formal composition is the important realm for "shifting the very understanding of story" (Roof xxxv) and thus "would effect small changes in ideology" (Roof xxxvi).

Therefore, films that challenge traditional narrative structures "allow for a critique of Hollywood narrative and its insistent focus on heterosexual romance" (Benshoff and Griffin 11). When analysing the narrative structure, it seems especially useful to examine the special features innate to the genres of the films, since it determines the code (i.e. the organisation of signs in a text) or discourse of Hollywood narrative filmmaking (cf. Benshoff 43). A more open or experimental genre or a mix of different genres might mirror the possible subversive content of a queer film. According to Laura U. Marks, hybrid cinema usually

> implies a hybrid form mixing documentary, fiction, personal, and experimental genres, as well as different media. By pushing the limits of any genre, hybrid cinema forces each genre to explain itself, to forge any transparent relationship to the reality it represents, and to make evident the knowledge claims on which it is based. Hybrid cinema is in a position to do archaeology, to dig up the traces that the dominant culture, and for that matter any fixed cultural identity, would just as soon forget. One cannot simply contemplate a hybrid (or a work of hybrid cinema):

> one cannot help but be implicated by the power relations upon which it reflects. (Marks 8)

By transgressing the borders of genre, hybrid cinema might enable other forms of transgression. Furthermore, the way the camera guides the view of the audience determines the films' narrative structure. For this reason, I will focus on the way the cinematic gaze is established in the films as the second parameter to assess whether the films support or challenge the 'heteronarrative.' For the analysis of the gaze in the aesthetic composition of the films, it will be useful to elaborate on the (alternative) gaze that is established in queer films. As Benshoff and Griffin suggest, a queer gaze changes "the very act of experiencing a film – the psychological process of looking at and identifying with characters" (Benshoff and Griffin 11) and hence, enables the recipient to perceive the film "from a queer viewing position" (Benshoff and Griffin 10). The analysis of the gaze in films was made popular by Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Drawing on Lacanian gaze theory, she argues that classic Hollywood films encourage the viewer to take on a male perspective, the 'male gaze.' This leads to a "'masculinisation' of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real-life movie-goer. Inbuilt patterns of pleasure and identification impose masculinity as 'point-of-view'" (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 125). Thereby, women are turned into the objects of representation, mere "icons" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 12), who have no function despite supporting the male protagonist who, in contrast, symbolises the "representative of power" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 12). As "the bearer of the look" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 12), the male protagonist also controls the audience's gaze and perception. Mulvey despises mainstream Hollywood cinema of the 1960s and 70s for "reflecting the dominant ideological concept" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 7) and thereby "cod[ing] the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 8). Mulvey suggests that alternative cinema, in contrast to mainstream Hollywood productions, is able to "leave [...] the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with the normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 8). For her, shifting the gaze can only happen if films "free the look of the camera and free the look of the viewer" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 18). When applying Mulvey's concept to the representation of homosexuals in films, certain parallels to the representation of women can be identified: homosexuals

were also objectified in mainstream Hollywood films for the sole reason to foster the dominance of heterosexuality.

Thus, the question arises how the gaze can be queered. The strategy of making 'the other' visible and thereby shifting the perspective towards the marginalised, might construct a new cinematic gaze from a queer-centred perspective that differs from the patriarchal male gaze identified by Mulvey. Jack Babuscio, for instance, relates to what he calls a 'gay sensibility,' which is, following Sontag's notion of camp, "a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; [...] a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed and defined by gayness" (Babuscio 40). This relies on the assumption that gays perceive the world differently and thus showing a film from the gays' perspective presents the world from a different angle. Or as Andy Medhurst puts it: "The homosexual perception, precisely because of its marginalised nature, may see the order of things more clearly than those perceptions implicated in the maintenance of that order" (Medhurst 58). However, this position might essentialise gayness to a homogeneous experience, which suggests that all gays see the world in a similar way. Even more so, Erin C. Tobin points to the fact that using categories like lesbian, gay, and queer in such an essentialising manner leads to an exclusivity that might establish a lesbian or gay gaze that is limited in scope, since in this case "spectatorship becomes a fixed position determined by sexual orientation" (Tobin 63). Thereby, the gay or lesbian "perspective is the 'normative' viewing position" (Tobin 63). This might create what I call a homonormative gaze in opposition to a queer gaze. For Tobin, "a queer gaze is not synonymous with 'gay gaze,' but rather, it is an active and deliberate reading-against-the-grain that intentionally challenges normative viewing and hegemonic representation" (Tobin 64). Drawing on Sedgwick, who argues in *Epistemology of the Closet* that the discourse of sexuality is based on a binary opposition of hetero- and homosexuality which can be deconstructed through a queering of this either/or dichotomy, Tobin suggests "a queering of the straight/gay spectator dichotomy (and it should be noted that 'queering' in this sense denotes a destabilization and complexity) enables a queer gaze" (Tobin 64). This "opens up possibilities for non-heteronormative viewing" (Tobin 9), regardless of the sexual orientation of the viewer or the subjects viewed. The gay gaze might thus be able to pursue identity politics for (white male gender-conforming) gays but does not challenge the structures of heteronormativity. In contrast to the homonormative gaze, which has an assimilative function, a queer gaze "challenges dominant assumptions about

gender and sexuality" (Benshoff and Griffin 10). Hence, I distinguish three different gazes: a queer gaze which transgresses heteronormative patterns, a gay gaze that allows for a gay sensibility, and a homonormative gaze, that enforces homonormative structures. By enabling the recipient to perceive the film "from a queer viewing position" (Benshoff and Griffin 10), it changes "the very act of experiencing a film – the psychological process of looking at and identifying with characters" (Benshoff and Griffin 11), and hence, the male gaze.

Therefore, the queer gaze "questions any 'natural' appearance, and the transformability of our identities contests that there can ever be a unified subject who is the spectator of the world" (Wray 70). As Tim Wray argues, "ambiguity is perhaps the key identifying feature of queer culture. Looking through the queer gaze we search for these ambiguities – for the hidden, disguised and imaginary" (Wray 72). The gaze that is established in most Hollywood films, however, takes on the perspective of white, heterosexual men and is thus a male (homonormative) gaze. Benshoff and Griffin suggest that the reason for this lies in the presupposition that "many heterosexual viewers are still resistant to seeing through a queer character's worldview. In psychological terms, the act of identifying with a queer character may be threatening to someone's sense of his or her own gender or sexuality" (Benshoff and Griffin 11). Due to the structures upheld by hegemonic masculinity, a queer gaze "poses a potential threat to some men's sense of masculinity: admitting an interest in such films poses a challenge to their presumed patriarchal authority" (Benshoff and Griffin 11-12). A heteronarrative structure or use of genre and a gaze that do not challenge heteronormativity while at the same time privileging hegemonic gay masculinities perpetuates homonormative structures and can therefore not be described as queer. Combined with the theoretical concepts of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and hegemonic gay masculinity, I suggest that these two parameters form a valuable basis for the analysis of the films' narrative structure and formal-aesthetic composition.

2.5 Historical Background and the Biopic Genre

The three films I have chosen for my analysis narrate iconic moments and agents in the history of the LGBTQIAN+ rights movement. Before I will outline my methodological approach that helps to undertake an in-depth analysis of the films' content and formal-aesthetic composition, I want to

discuss the historical background to both the social, cultural, and political context of the films as well as the historical figures depicted in them. In order to remain in the chronological sequence of the historical events (not the films' release dates), the emergence of the Beat Generation, with Allen Ginsberg and his poem "Howl" (1956) at its core, will be examined by setting it against the background of the American political and cultural environment in the 1950s. The focus lies on the public reception of the poem and the subsequent legal indictment of its publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti, since these occurrences take centre presence in the film *Howl*. From there, I will move to the historical context for the film *Stonewall*, which includes the social, cultural, and political developments that lead to the Stonewall Riots in New York's Christopher Street on June 27, 1969 – for many the watershed moment in LGBTQIAN+ history – as well as the central figures that participated in the riots. For the historical background of the film *Milk*, I will focus on the gay liberation movement in San Francisco and the legislation against homosexuals which oscillated between relaxation and regression, as well as the emergence of the anti-gay countermovement eventually ushering in a new wave of gay rights activism at the end of the 1970s. This will include the main facts and figures of Harvey Milk's life and political career as well as the circumstances of his assassination by his colleague Dan White.

The discursive environment during the period following World War II was mainly based on the conformity of U.S. society. This so-called consensus (or Liberal consensus) gained its peak in the 1950s, when passive behaviour was highly encouraged by a political system (cf. Wittner 121) that "typically attempts to justify dominance by appealing to self-evident or 'common sense' truths" (Sterritt 26). As David Sterritt points out,

> [i]ntellectuals who championed alternative views or subordinate groups were considered wrong not only for the opinions and constituents they chose to represent but also for their audacity in daring to challenge the unified popular will. (Sterritt 27–28)

Not only was consensus identified with passivity, loyalty, and conformity, but also fostered socially stimulated 'othering' – a performative act of demarcation and stratification by which people are made 'other' (cf. Wittner 123). The conservative family episteme of the 1950s led to a high marriage rate at a relatively young age, mostly for the reason to avoid premarital sex (cf. Norton 814). Establishing the strict adherence to classical gender roles and traditional views on sexuality (cf. Norton 814) helped to intensify

the repression of homosexuality (cf. Kazin et al. 394), which was widely seen "as a clinical aberration" (Plummer 17) and even more so "as beyond respectability" (Eaklor 101). After World War II, "only heterosexual intercourse within marriage was deemed socially acceptable, and consequences for sexual misconduct could be severe" (Norton 816). The "condemnation of homosexuality" (Rayside 131) served the U.S. government "in its determination to maintain a public sphere uncorrupted by deviant sexual practices" (Rayside 131), which is why homosexuals were "subjected to violence and contempt" (Schwartz 85). The important role of fear should not be underestimated in this context: the fear of Communism, of an all-out atomic war, but also of homosexuality and everything deviating from the social norm (cf. Sterritt 77). Starting a crusade against so called un-American behaviour which included homosexuality, the US government, especially Senator Joseph McCarthy, equalised sexual deviance with Communism and thereby framed it as a negative force that tried to corrupt American values (cf. Harris 223). Thus, "heterosexual panic blurred into patriotic panic" (cf. Harris 224):

> The equations of un-natural/un-American worked with reciprocal efficiency to deter difference by constructing a binary of health and disease mapped onto one of patriotism and treason. The alignment of queer and commies enabled, therefore, the rise of a national security state with panoptic ambitions, while disguising the economic bottom line to the politics of containment, naturalizing as loyal duty the commitments to marriage, family, and corporate organization. (cf. Harris 224)

A group of young intellectuals and writers surrounding Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William S. Burroughs sought to challenge those moral pillars of 1950s society in the U.S. – they came to be known as the Beat Generation.

Allen Ginsberg was born into a Jewish family in Newark, New Jersey in 1926. His father Louis Ginsberg was also a poet and a high school teacher, and his mother Naomi was a Russian émigré. They led a bohemian and leftist lifestyle and were politically active in Greenwich Village, New York. Both of his parents became vital influences on Ginsberg's literary work, but in very different ways. His father influenced the young writer as his poetic predecessor, while his mother's mental illness, which was treated by means of neurosurgical lobotomy, was a recurrent topic in his writing. The procedure seemingly traumatised the young Ginsberg, especially because he had to sign the paperwork for his mother's surgery, and he accounts for

this painful experience of his childhood and youth in his poetry. After he graduated from high school in 1943, Ginsberg entered Columbia University in New York where he met Kerouac and Burroughs and was drawn more and more into their rebellious artistic activities, which eventually culminated in their expulsion from university (cf. Watson 23–37).

The core Beat Generation writers[21] were a relatively heterogeneous group unified by their "shared horror of conformity, social engineering, and the death of spontaneous living" (Sterritt 23) and their "rejection of the nuclear family system, the bedrock of American society" (vaan der Bent et al. 7). "They challenged the Puritan work ethic ingrained in American culture" (vaan der Bent et al. 8) and thus played an important role in "post-World War II Bohemian culture in the United States and constituted a countercultural movement that opposed 'square,' bourgeois culture" (vaan der Bent et al. 2). Nonetheless, early critics would "tend to perceive the Beats as isolated rebels who recklessly and often spontaneously defied authority" (Levy 107), leaving the political scope of their works un-regarded. From today's perspective, this view does not do justice to their political influence since the Beat writers were indeed "willing and able to engage themselves on political and legal battles, as they did when they defended their constitutional right to write, publish and distribute their works" (Levy 107). As Christopher Gair convincingly argues, "[a]lthough there was only minor interest in civil rights on the part of most of the Beat Generation" (Gair 26), they got involved with other marginalised groups and cultural forms. They were, for instance, fascinated by jazz music and Afro-American urban vernacular (cf. Gair 26-27). Hence, Ginsberg and his peers

> were not uniformed guerrillas organizing violent assaults on mainstream ideology, nor did they intend to be. Rather, the most influential among them were radically individualistic thinkers who fought consensus and conformity more by eluding or transcending these than by mobilizing militant allies for some sort of head-on sociocultural battle. (Sterritt 104)

Despite their cultural activism from the 1940s onwards, "their profile only started to assume national significance as an alternative to white American orthodoxies after the publication of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*

21 The canonisation of the male writers has led to an underrepresentation of the female writers and activists of the Beat Generation. Thus, the movement has received criticism for fighting moral beliefs about gender and sexuality from a distinctly male perspective (cf. Knight 6).

in 1956" (Gair 27). However, their recognition as literary figures with high cultural value did not ensue until the early 1970s. In the 90s, their reception shifted to a downright "Beat Craze" (van der Bent et al. 1).

Most critics claim that the public reading of Ginsberg's "Howl" in October 1955, which took place at the Six Gallery in San Francisco, constituted the birth of the Beat Generation (cf. Gair 28; E. Katz 193; Sterritt 106), "most accurately foreshadowing Ginsberg's future activity as a political gadfly" (Sterritt 106). As a political poet, Allen Ginsberg was "able to look behind America's curtains of conventional propriety to see how repressive aspects of culture are actually affecting people" (E. Katz 184). The readings of *Howl* "took place in a clearly political context" (E. Katz 184) and the poem "has a distinct and deliberate relationship with the national and international politics of its day" (E. Katz 184). The poem offers criticism directed against U.S. consensus but is also read as a clarion call to enhancing the sexual discourse of the time (cf. Doty 14). Bob Rosenthal claims that "Allen's howl wakes readers to use eyes and ears and tongues to strip the gaze away and perceive the world with clarity no longer hidden or denied. [...] For so many, it was simply being able to say, 'I'm Gay. I am Okay. I am Gay'" (Rosenthal 44).

Nevertheless, "[w]ith its candid references to sex, drugs, madness, and nightmares, the poem was considered obscene" (Shinder xx). After its publication as *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956 by City Lights Books in San Francisco, publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti was arrested and charged with disseminating obscene literature. For the conceding trial in 1957, Ferlinghetti sought help from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), who "quickly assembled a top team of defense attorneys, including […] J.W. 'Jake' Ehrlich" (Levy 110), while "Assistant District Attorney Ralph McIntosh, who had a long record of successfully prosecuting publishers and producers of nudist publications and pornographic movies [...] represented the state" (Levy 110). It is important to note that Ehrlich called nine well-esteemed literary experts "with outstanding qualifications in the literary field" to the witness stand (Ehrlich 116), while his opponent's witnesses lacked this elite status and reliability (cf. Ehrlich 116). "McIntosh called only two expert witnesses, David Kirk and Gail Potter. In contrast to those called by the defense, neither Kirk nor Potter were leading figures in the field of literary criticism" (Levy 111). Favourably judging for the poet and the publisher, "[a]ll of the defense experts agreed that 'Howl' had literary merit, that it represented a sincere effort by the author to present a social picture, and that the language used was relevant to the theme" (Ehrlich 116).

Eventually, the poem was pronounced not obscene by Judge Clayton W. Horn, a decision seen as a crucial landmark victory in censorship debates that paved the way for the publication of other supposedly obscene works of art (cf. Levy 112–113). Paradoxically, "by seeking to censor 'Howl,' conservatives added greatly to the Beats' fame and influence. The trial transformed 'Howl' from an obscure poem into a best-seller and the Beats from a minor artistic movement into defenders of democracy" (ibid 107–108). Ginsberg, hence, became "part of a movement that emerged in the late 1950s, blossomed in the early 1960s, and reached its zenith toward the close of the decade" (Levy 116). This assumption was further confirmed by Ginsberg's involvement in the beginning countercultural activities and especially the hippie movement. Topics such as gay rights, freedom of expression, censorship, the legalisation of drugs, and religious freedom were on his political agenda. Ginsberg claimed that the Beat Generation is strongly linked to the decriminalisation of divergent sexualities and the emergence of the civil rights movement (cf. Watson 302). Therefore, the Beat Generation is often regarded as a trailblazer for the gay liberation movement that came to full bloom after the Stonewall Riots in 1969.

While the 1950s where defined by consensus and conformity, the two following decades were a period of revolutionary social upheaval which resulted in the installation of new civil rights for many marginalised groups. As has been argued before, during the post-war era of consensus, homosexuality was a delicate issue in American society. Thus, the first step towards the formation of a movement was to "conceptualize […] homosexuals as a minority group 'imprisoned within a dominant culture'" (Kazin et al. 394). Founding the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles in 1950 was seminal for this development. Being soon installed in other cities across the U.S. (e.g. San Francisco and New York), the organisation introduced the term homophile and was quite radical in its plans of action (cf. Carter 18). However, the radicalism soon diminished and the Mattachine Society "incorporated as an educational and research group, espousing the belief that by providing accurate information about homosexuality to the public it could 'eliminate discrimination, derision, prejudice and bigotry'" (Carter 19). Inspired by the African American movement and countercultural activism that "challenged multiple forms of erotic repression" (Stein 12), homosexuals and other sexual minorities began to grow more and more radical during the 1960s. This development "found expression in new slogans like 'Gay Power,' as well as in more confrontational forms of protest, especially in relation to police harassment in burgeoning urban gay enclaves" (Kazin

et al. 395). Pivotal were the Stonewall Riots starting on June 28, 1969 in New York City, which were widely seen as the "symbolic beginning of the gay liberation movement" (Norton 865) and soon spread over the whole country (cf. Plummer 17). The Stonewall Inn was a former horse stable that became a restaurant in the 1930s and a gay bar in 1967. Opened as a so-called bottle club, which only allowed members in who brought their own drinks, the operators adopted a method "commonly used by organized crime to circumvent liquor laws" (Stein 2). It was a popular location for a variety of people of all classes, races, sexes, and genders. Even though most of the patrons were probably white, middle-class, and identified as gay men, "[t]here was a significant and visible presence of gender-queer people, some of whom identified as butches, drags, queens, transsexuals, or transvestites. Some were hustlers and prostitutes" (Stein 3). Since the bar was "unlicensed, unsanitary, and suspected of violating liquor laws" (Stein 3) and there were rumours about "investigations into police corruption, male prostitution, and blackmailing rings," it was raided by the police on a regular basis. Ed Murphy, who ran the Stonewall Inn and was said to have had connections to organised crime and mafia circles that bribed the police, usually ensured that the raids proceeded without significant complications for the bar (cf. Carter 79-80). This seemed to have happened during the early morning hours of June 28 in 1969. As usual, the police officers raiding the bar checked on the patrons' IDs and "detained several bar employees, patrons without identification, butches, transvestites, and people who talked back or fought back" (Stein 3), everyone else was supposed to leave, but soon a crowd of people coming from inside and passers-by gathered in the street in front of the Stonewall. When the police emerged from the bar and tried to conduct the captives, the crowd suddenly erupted: "According to some accounts, a lesbian was the first to fight back; multiple accounts emphasize the distinctively aggressive defiance of trans people and street youth" (Stein 5). Being outnumbered by the protesters, the police lost control and retreated into the Stonewall Inn, which was violently attacked by the crowd. "Eventually police reinforcement arrived and members of the Tactical Patrol Force, specialists in riot control, tried to clear the streets. Over the next several hours, thousands of people rioted in the streets with campy courage and fierce fury" (Stein 5). The event soon went down in history as "an iconic symbol of resistance to oppression and an inspirational example of empowerment for the dispossessed" (Stein 1) and

> [o]ver the next several decades, as the rebellion was commemorated in pride protests and parades in and beyond New York, the building where the uprising began was used for various commercial purposes. In 2016, President Obama officially designated the Stonewall Inn Monument at the site of the Stonewall Inn. (Stein 5)

Even though the importance of the Stonewall Riots for gay rights is uncontested, the circumstances surrounding the riots are debated controversially amongst activists, artists, and historians. In the introduction to his documentary history of the Stonewall Riots, Marc Stein argues that the riots were idealised to a great extent. "Keeping in mind that *there is always more to the story*" (Stein 5), he shows that to produce a conclusive, monodimensional truth about what happened during the early hours of June 28, 1969, is impossible and, in fact, also not desirable. In Stein's opinion, the riots are "justifiably viewed as a key moment in the mobilization of one of the most transformative social movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (Stein 1). Nonetheless, the experience and interpretation of historic events are highly dependent on their context as well as on the "cultural identities," "social roles," and "communication networks" (Stein 2) of the people involved and might also "change over time" (Stein 6). This is the reason why a "single person's narrative does not and cannot provide us with the authoritative truth of what happened" (Stein 2). All attempts to express the 'truth' about the Stonewall Riots would therefore lead to a homogenisation of the LGBTQIAN+ community which in all probability comes at the expense of groups and individuals who are already often misrepresented and the most negatively affected by intersectional discrimination. Assembling a variety of different materials from various sources, Stein's book tries to avoid presenting 'the truth' about Stonewall and rather raises questions about the mystification of the riots and its effects on historiography. There are several myths about the Stonewall Riots that he addresses in his introduction. In the following, I will focus on the three most pervasive ones, namely that the riots were unprecedented, that it was the culmination of homophile activism of the preceding years and that it ushered in a new era for LGBTQIAN+ people.

First, Stein dismantles the myth that the riots were "a spontaneous eruption of anger and an unprecedented explosion of resistance" (Stein 8). Not only is this myth one of the most widely spread perceptions of the riots, but also the most pervasive, since it is "repeated subsequently during pride marches, and now invoked commonly in the mainstream media" (Stein

8). Moreover, the "campy version of this interpretation places emphasis on the fact that the funeral of Judy Garland[22] […] took place hours before the riots began and contributed to their emotional intensity" (Stein 8), which is an oversimplification of the processes that led to the rebellion and trivialises their political scope. Surely, it was not the first time in history that LGBTQIAN+ people fought back, opposed the police, and stood up for their rights, since "there were long traditions of LGBT resistance and protest and [...] these traditions influenced both the rebellion and the mass mobilization that followed" (Stein 8). In 1966, for instance, a very similar riot took place in the Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco but did not become as famous as Stonewall (cf. Kazin et al. 395). Thus, contrary to the view that the riots were unprecedented, some historians argue that "the uprising was the culmination of two decades of organized LGBT movement activism in the 1950s and 1960s" (Stein 8). Stein agrees that political activism happening before Stonewall had "laid the foundations for the riots by changing the consciousness of the community and country, challenging gender and sexual oppression of U.S. society, and promoting the notion that LBGT people were entitled to freedom, equality, and justice" (Stein 9). However, he is highly aware of the fact that the homophile movement was not at all homogeneous and in part very assimilationist. As he submits, many homosexuals[23] of that time (especially members of the Mattachine Society) "embraced the politics of respectability" and "few homophile activists believed that rioting was an effective or desirable form of protest" (Stein 10). Moreover, these more conservative gays took offence at bars such as the Stonewall Inn which "led them to criticize gender and sexual practices that they commonly associated with gay bars, including casual sex, sexual promiscuity, sex work, public sex, erotic expression, and gender transgression" (Stein 10). Finally, another myth about Stonewall assumes that "the dark and dreary world of homosexuality in the pre-Stonewall era suddenly disappeared in June 1969 and was replaced by the light and bright universe of gay liberation" (Stein 8), which is of course a highly misleading view of the developments of gay rights in the U.S. and thus

22 The actress and singer Judy Garland was an icon of the LGBTQIAN+ subculture "whose triumphs and tragedies had been followed by many LGBT fans and whose rendition of 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' had inspired queer hopes for better futures" (Stein 8).

23 In fact, Harvey Milk was one of the conservative homosexuals who preferred to pass as heterosexual and leave his sexual activities to privacy. (cf. Carter 31)

has little support amongst gay activists and historians. Despite the fact that homosexuality was slowly being decriminalised,[24] sexual intercourse between members of the same sex remained illegal in most U.S. states and "[u]ntil 1973 homosexuality was labelled a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association" (Norton 865). Opinion polls show that still in 1977 homosexuals were not tolerated by a significant majority of the population (cf. Fejes 2) and their oppression was seen as legitimate due to their immorality and corruption of 'true' American values (cf. Fejes 6). As a result, LGBTQIAN+ people still had to face severe discrimination and incomparable defamation: they could be expelled from their jobs or from college and were often also legally prosecuted (cf. Norton 865). Moreover, after a period of reforms that improved the situation for gays in the 1960s, the lager political context took a turn for the worse towards the end of the decade. Developments such as the escalation of the Vietnam war, the deaths of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the increase in police violence and the election of the conservative Republican Richard Nixon for President (cf. Stein 13-14) had "radicalizing effects of rising expectations and dashed hopes" (Stein 12) which found their expression in the rebellion. However, some would argue that the "radical potential [...] was lost as the LGBT movement moderated, mainstreamed, bureaucratized, and institutionalized" (Stein 16). Thus, any "linear narratives of progress" should be replaced by more "periodic and cyclical" (Stein 17) approaches to the history of the LGBTQIAN+ rights movement.

Furthermore, as has already been pointed out, the LGBTQIAN+ community is in no way a homogeneous group of people with a collective identity and, hence, also improvements varied massively depending on identity markers such as sex, gender, race, and class. Despite growing liberation for mostly white, middle-class gays, discrimination did not suddenly end "especially against people of color, immigrants, poor people, sex workers, and gender-queers" (Stein 7). In fact, these groups were excluded when the gay liberation movement became more and more mainstreamed and thereby also more white, middle-class, and homonormative. The early commemoration marches were soon dominated by white males, who laid claim to the riots and were, hence, criticised harshly, since the other members of the community felt and in fact were marginalised by this claim (cf. Stein

24 Illinois was the first state to repeal sodomy laws in 1961, but it was not until 2003 that the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled sodomy laws unconstitutional (cf. Bernstein 17-18).

17) despite the assumption that "it was the effeminate men who did most of the fighting" (Carter 204). According to some activists, the important role of lesbians, trans* people, queers of colour, street youths, and sex workers in the Stonewall Riots was systematically de-emphasised already at the beginning of the 1970s (cf. Tedjasukmana 64).[25] Thereby, white, middle-class, and male demands within the gay rights movement were privileged while other groups of the LGBTQIAN+ community were marginalised and misrepresented – a tendency that was extensively criticised by activist Sylvia Rivera during the Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally in 1973 (cf. Tedjasukmana 64). Rivera, who identified as queer and non-binary (Duberman 124-126), but was often described "as Puerto Rican, gay, and trans" (Stein 17), had to fight her way to the stage amongst catcalls to deliver her angry speech about the missing solidarity for homeless queer youths within the community.[26] Rivera herself had fled her intolerant family and lived on the streets with a group of other homeless youths. Changing her name from Ray to Sylvia (cf. Duberman 66-67), she started "[h]ustling on Times Square at age 11" (Duberman xxi). She and her friends were regular customers at the Stonewall and so she happened to be present during the night of the riot (cf Duberman 192-202). She is reported as having anticipated the monumental impact of the revolt as she uttered "I'm not missing a minute of this – it's the *revolution*!" (Duberman 198) when the riot started. Even though she was amongst the rioters and became an active member in the newly formed organisation Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and its spin-off Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) (cf. Duberman 235), she got marginalised by the other members:

> A Hispanic street queen's transgressive being produced automatic alarm: Sylvia was from the wrong ethnic group, from the wrong side of the tracks, wearing the wrong clothes – managing single-handedly and simultaneously to embody several frightening, overlapping categories of Otherness. By her mere presence, she was likely to trespass against some

25 The group of people involved in the Stonewall Riots is often referred to as gay, even though it was more diverse. The reason for this might be that "the words and concepts used in 1969 are not the same as the ones used decades later, it is often necessary to translate when encountering identity-based terms" (Stein 18). Nonetheless, this assumption is in my opinion not sufficient to explain the ways in which queers of colour, trans*, and homeless people were excluded from the movement later.

26 The speech is accessible online on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o.

> encoded middle-class white script, and could count on being constantly patronized when not being summarily excluded. (Duberman 235-6)

Frustrated with the trans*phobic and trans*misogynist climate during meetings and its culmination when she wanted to draw attention to the miserable situation for queer street youths on the stage of the 1973 commemoration parade, but was not allowed to speak at first, she quit her participation with the GLF and the GAA, but "continued to march in the yearly Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, missing only twice in twenty years" (Duberman 282). Moreover, with her close friend Marsha P. Johnson, she later founded the organization Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries (STAR), which helped queer street youths by providing a shared home for them (cf. Duberman 251-255). Rivera herself lived on the streets for most of her live and died of cancer aged 50 in 2002 (cf. Jacobs n. pag.). Next to Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, born as Malcolm Michaels Jr. and "commonly identified as African American, gay, and trans" (Stein 17), was also one of the initiators of the riot and another important figure in the aftermath. Some activists argue that she might even have started the riot by throwing a shot glass into a mirror inside the Stonewall Inn, shouting, 'I got my civil rights.' As historian David Carter points out, this assertion cannot be validated (cf. Carter 298), but Johnson was most definitely on the vanguard of the movement (cf. Calafell 27). NYPD inspector Seymore Pine, who led the raid on the Stonewall Inn during the night of the riot, acknowledged in his testimony that "the first significant resistance that he encountered inside the bar came from transvestites" (Carter 261). Activist Craig Rodwell reported to have seen Johnson "climb to the top of a lamppost and drop a bag containing a heavy object on the [police] car's windshield, shattering it" (Carter 188). Even though her activism was similarly marginalised as Rivera's, Johnson became a leading figure in the fight for gay and trans rights throughout the years following the Stonewall Riots. Not only was she involved in the GAA and GLF and later in their own organization STAR, but also in ACT UP during the AIDS crisis, disclosing in 1992 that she was HIV positive herself (cf. Calafell 27). Her mysterious death in July 1992 that has not been resolved to date has caused controversy, because it was initially declared a suicide and later an accident, but many of Johnson's peers believe it was murder (cf. Calafell 27; Dubermann 310; Jacobs n. pag.). After years of misrepresentation and marginalisation, New York City eventually honoured both Rivera and Johnson with a memorial statue in Greenwich Village, close to the former Stonewall Inn (cf. Jacobs n.

pag.). While this could be read as a positive sign for more liberation, queer struggles can thereby easily be incorporated into US-American national identity. The debate about the exclusion of trans people, BIPOC as well as street workers and homeless queers from the gay liberation movement is still discussed controversially today and by far not settled yet.[27] What came to be the gay liberation movement was dominated by white, male, cis-gendered homosexuals who pushed the issue of gay rights from the rebellious margins into the mainstream political agenda. One of the most well-known figures for this development was Harvey Milk. The following paragraphs will summarise some of the developments during the 1970s, especially focusing on Milk's political activism as well as antagonism and his assassination.

In the 1970s, San Francisco was one of the few cities where the gay liberation movement established an active community (cf. Fejes 6; 182). It was soon labelled "'the international gay Mecca'" (Shilts 57). As Randy Shilts convincingly argues in his biography *The Mayor of Castro Street – The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (1982), "[t]he story of Harvey Milk is, to a large extent, the story of the gay movement in San Francisco, and, ultimately, the nation" (x). Like many homosexuals during that time, Milk decided to keep his sexuality a secret for most part of his life. "Remaining 'in the closet' offered individuals some protection against widespread discrimination, but that option also made it very difficult to organize a political movement" (Norton 865). He had been leading a closeted, rather conservative life, serving in the Navy, working as a successful researcher at the Wall Street firm Bache & Company and had not participated much in political matters (cf. Carter 35, Shilts 44-45). Moreover, for Milk, "homosexuality was something to conceal, to be vaguely ashamed of, certainly nothing to walk down the street and crow about" (Shilts xv). At some point in his life, Milk developed an increasing interest in politics and abruptly decided to change his entire lifestyle when he was fired after spontaneously joining a protest against the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970 (cf. Shilts 45). Soon afterwards, in 1972, Milk and his partner Scott Smith left New York and settled in The Castro, a former Irish dominated working class quarter of San Francisco which was about to become the city's gay neigh-

27 The release of the documentary *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* in 2017, for instance, fueled the debate around the narrative authority over Johnson's life story. Director David France was accused of having whitewashed her and her peers' struggle by "engag[ing] in colorblind strategies that erase Johnson's experience as a *black* trans* activist, instead framing her as a queer victim" (Calafell 28).

bourhood and the centre of Milk's political activism: "Castro Street had become Harvey's hometown, and he had worked to make it a hometown for tens of thousands of homosexuals from around the world" (Shilts xvi), gaining him the unofficial title of the mayor of Castro Street. Convinced that "[s]omebody had to change society" and that he would "be the one to do it" (Shilts 84), Milk ran for office as City Supervisor three times and once for a position in the California State Assembly, which he lost only by a hairsbreadth (cf. Shilts 176). Victory eventually came in 1977, when he prevailed against sixteen other candidates and was elected to the Board of City Supervisors by 30% of the vote (cf. Shilts 217). Moreover, despite his short time in office and with the help of mayor George Moscone, Milk even managed to pass a civil rights bill that outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation. The only colleague who voted against the ordinance was the Irish Catholic Supervisor Dan White, with whom Milk had had a political dispute over White's proposed objection to a psychiatric centre in White's district. White declared war on Milk since Milk had voted against his agenda, so he would vote against Milk's gay rights ordinance in return (cf. Shilts 233-234). Even though Milk tried to make peace with him, White was never able to settle their dispute. Moreover, he frequently clashed with other members of the Board of Supervisors and finally resigned from office in 1978 for the stated reason that the annual salary of $9.600 would be insufficient to provide for a family. Ten days later, however, he changed his mind and tried to claim his job back (cf. Shilts 297-299). In spite of reinstating White, as he had previously agreed to, mayor Moscone decided to appoint a liberal politician who had been active in his neighbourhood (cf. Shilts 299-309). In the end, this infuriated White to such an extent that on November 27, 1978, unrecognised by security, he entered San Francisco City Hall through a side window of the building and assassinated first mayor Moscone and then Supervisor Milk (cf. Shilts 314-315). Afterwards, he surrendered to the police and confessed the deed the same day (cf. Shilts 321-322). To the surprise of Milk's friends and followers, on the evening of Milk's and Moscone's death, an unprompted candlelight vigil began "on the corner of Castro and Market Street, the place that would one day be called Harvey Milk Plaza" (Shilts 329), slowly moving towards City Hall. At the height of the walk, the "massive crowd stretched the entire district from City Hall to Castro Street, some 40.000 strong utterly silent" (Shilts 330). Even though he "served less than eleven months in office" (Shilts xiv), the intense agitation following Milk's death proves that he had made

a significant impression on the gay liberation movement in San Francisco and beyond (cf. Fejes 215).

These events emphasise that the mid-1970s saw major improvements in homosexual rights such as "the repeal of sodomy statutes and the passage of antidiscrimination legislation at the local level" (Kazin et al. 395). Nevertheless, the emergence of gay rights at the same time brought more conservative forces to the scene who were "calling on the established trope of homosexuality as subversive to American values" (Kazin et al. 395). For this reason, "[t]his diverse and growing social movement also experienced serious setbacks and barriers to social change" (Fetner xii). The political campaigns of "Anita Bryant, a former beauty queen, singer, and television star famous for promoting Florida orange juice" (Fetner xii–xiii) were a decisive force for these developments. Bryant, who was a nationwide celebrity, assumed the role of "an embodiment of the traditional American wholesomeness and values that had been so greatly challenged by the cultural and social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s" (Fejes 2). Hence, Bryant became the leader of the anti-gay countermovement in 1977 and

> claimed that gay men are child molesters trying to get jobs in schools and day care programs for easy access to young boys. As she says in her autobiography, 'homosexuals cannot reproduce - so they must recruit. And to freshen their ranks, they must recruit the youth of America.' (Fetner xiii)

As Tina Fetner carves out in her book *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (2008), "the emergence of the anti-gay countermovement that would evolve into what is known today as the religious right" (Fetner xii) made a significant impression on the gay liberation movement. Accordingly, gay rights activists began to work "in an antagonistic dialogue with the religious right" (Fetner xiii–xiv). Especially the efforts of Bryant's campaign 'Save Our Children,' which was later renamed 'Protect America's Children,' achieved large-scale support among the wider public. In Florida, Bryant's initiative was successfully passed by 69 to 31 votes (cf. Fejes 4), "keeping gay rights out of Miami – Dade County for decades" (Fetner xiii). Its rapid consequent expansion over all of the U.S. "seemed to indicate a strong national trend of opposition to legal equality for lesbians and gay men" (Fejes 4). Between 1977 and 1978, Bryant's movement performed "successful ballot initiatives [and] repealed gay rights laws in Wichita, Kansas, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Eugene, Oregon, each

accompanied with the passionate rhetoric similar to that in Dade County" (Fejes 4).

In California, state senator Josh Briggs was strongly influenced by Bryant and the evangelical Christian belief system (cf. Fetner 24). He started an initiative in 1978, which "would have made homosexuals (as well as those who expressed support of gay rights) ineligible for employment in the state's public school system, stating explicitly that any currently employed gay and lesbian teachers, counselors, and administrators must be fired" (Fetner 24). The so-called Proposition 6, later known as 'Briggs Initiative,' was on the one hand fuelled by Bryant's nationwide success and on the other "surely also responding to the state of lesbian and gay politics in California, where San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk had become the first openly gay elected official in the United States" (Fetner 25). Thus, as Fetner adduces, "[t]he Briggs Initiative was a statement of disapproval of San Francisco's acceptance of gay men and lesbians, and sought to demonstrate that the rest of California would not follow suit" (Fetner 25). However, everything turned out quite differently as the Briggs Initiative provoked strenuous opposition on the side of the gay rights activists, with Harvey Milk leading the way. Eventually, they succeeded when Proposition 6 was not passed (cf. Fetner 25).

Until today, the anti-gay countermovement remains a constant threat to LGBTQIAN+ rights. Apart from that, it had a strengthening impact on the gay movement during the 1970s. This effect mainly concerned two areas of gay activism: firstly, the anti-gay movement forged a "transformation of the meaning of coming out of the closet" (Fetner 19), since "[m]any activists felt that to be 'out and proud,' that is, to embrace homosexuality positively and publicly, was an inherent radical political act that would change negative public opinions about homosexuality" (Fetner 19–20). And secondly, gay rights activists usually found difficulties to get news coverage for their campaigns and hence in a way welcomed the media attention drawn to them by the anti-gay movement. To that effect, "Anita Bryant created new opportunities for media coverage that activists in the lesbian and gay movement could not achieve on their own" (Fetner 128). More significantly though, the nationwide success of anti-gay activism "alerted the rest of the country to the agenda of a growing conservative movement and likely caused some people to consider issues like lesbian and gay rights for the first time" (Fetner 128). In support of this argument, Fetner found that "[o]pinion poll data suggests that the overall effect of the increased attention to the issue of homosexuality was increased tolerance" (Fetner

128). Nonetheless, media coverage alone is not enough to change the representation of sexual minorities. It is also crucial to examine the ways in which they are represented, especially when considering the long tradition in US-American cinema to depict homosexuality in a derogatory way.

Depicting the historic moments outlined above, the three films that *Queer Enough?* investigates can be defined as docudramas, a genre which, as the name already indicates, is a hybrid form oscillating between the seemingly contradicting poles of documentary and drama (or feature film) (cf. Steinle 148). As a specific form of docudrama, the films further belong to the genre of biopics, i.e. biographical adaptions of a famous person's life (cf. Bordwell and Thomson 131). In contrast to *Howl* and *Milk*, *Stonewalls* central character is not modelled after the life of a famous person. However, the film makes use of the biopic genre by presenting Danny Winters as if he *was* a historic figure – namely the person who sparked the gay liberation movement. For this reason the film was included anyway.

In his seminal study *Bio/Pics – How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (1992), George F. Custen defines the conventions of the genre and its influence on the public perception of historic characters and events looking at films that were produced during the studio era, the so-called classical period of US filmmaking from 1927 to 1960 (cf. Custen 3). Nonetheless, these codes and conventions have shaped narrative cinema until today and are still relevant for Hollywood films. It is worth outlining them to carve out the affiliations of the genre with issues of truth and authenticity. According to Custen, biopics are "an enormous, engaging distortion, which after a time convinces us of its own kind of authenticity" (Custen 7) since the films are often considered as historically accurate in their "attempt to present the film as the official story of a life" (Custen 8). The fact that "events are wholly staged, and the historical agents are portrayed through actors' performances" (Bordwell and Thomson 131), however, generates a tension between documentary and fictional drama and seems to blur the lines between fact and fiction (cf. Bordwell and Thomson 132; Steinle 149). Strategies of authentication enhance this effect for example by "incorporat[ing] unstaged material" (Bordwell and Thomson 132), such as "newsreel" (Bordwell and Thomson 132) or "authentic footage" (Bordwell and Thomson 132). Thereby, the films claim authenticity, since the audience is "not merely absorbing the film as a diegetic narrative and as a piece of filmmaking, but also as a version of 'reality,' a distorted and purposefully contrived window on a biographical and historical place and time that invests the film

with special import" (Atkinson n. pag.). Accordingly, Michael Atkinson argues that

> [c]inema isn't to be trusted on its best day, and yet dramatic films fashioned from someone's biography are met with eagerness and credulity, and commonly become part of how we remember the subject, converting what is already usually legend into codified, reconceived pseudo-myth. (Atkinson 2012)

The deliberate employment of the genre in order to raise certain expectations in the audience is an important means for filmic representation to emphasise its message, but also to allege its ideological agenda, which can be ascribed mainly to what Custen calls "translatability problem – from event to its telling" (Custen 9), which means that "recorded or written history is a text that freezes the narrative in a particular, interested form" (Custen 9). Biopics are thus susceptible for myth-creation in Barthes' sense in that they simplify human complexities, generate universalism, and are mediated through narratives. Therefore, Custen describes them as being composed of a "repeated set of myths" (Custen 17) that is "ideologically self-serving" (Custen 8) to American natonalism. The "pose of accuracy, and its foregrounding of this issue as a litmus test in assessing different mediations of past events, empower some groups (and some symbolic forms) at the expense of others" (Custen 10). Not only do films decide whose lives are worth telling, then, but also suggest which lives are socially acceptable (cf. Custen 12). For most of Hollywood filmmaking this meant that biopics were "a world dominated by white males" (Custen 29). Dennis Bingham expands Custen's study and specifies the developmental stages the biopic genre passed in the course of the 20th century, starting with "the classical, celebratory form (melodrama)" (Bingham 17) during the studio era, all the way up to "minority appropriation (as in queer or feminist, African American or third world, whereby Janet Frame or Harvey Milk and Malcolm X or Patrice Lumumba own the conventional mythologizing form that once would have been used to marginalize or stigmatize them)" (Bingham 17).

As mainstream cinema opened up, LGBTQIAN+ subjects became the protagonists of contemporary biopics which appropriated and possibly transgressed the narrative conventions of the genre. Some of the films seek to establish a different view on 'real' historic events, from the perspective of the marginalised or oppressed and thus to rewrite history. As Rich suggests, they possess a certain "value in setting history straight (or better

yet, queer)" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 124). The most pervasive common feature of these films "is the idea that same-sex attraction and/ or unconventional gender attributes are central to the biopic subject's identity, significantly impacting his or her life and work" (Erhart 265). According to Julia G. Erhart, these films "supplement community historiographies, which recognize the significance of gay historical figures" (Erhart 264) in the way they "depict well-known individuals associated with more or less positive contributions to society and culture" (Erhart 265). However positive this effect may be, it can also lead to assimilation, since the negative character traits are omitted to reinforce the qualities of the good (sexual) citizen in LGBTQIAN+ characters by incorporating "the typical biopic tradition of picking the 'sexiest' moments in an author's life to contemplate their greatness or their pain in a romanticised manner, ready for public consumption" (Shachar 13). Thereby, the concentration on seemingly 'positive' character traits of the portrayed historical figure links questions of authenticity to those of identity and nationhood. Romantic plot lines are often added for a "stabilizing or 'humanizing'" (Erhart 271) effect: "Romantic love, it would seem, both domesticates the male lead and contains the more controversial issues introduced elsewhere in the films" (Erhart 271). It seems a "convention that the partnering be life-long and more or less monogamous" (Erhart 271), which is also a bedrock of heteronormative and homonormative structures and part of gay 'normality.' Moreover, historical films fail to portray a variety of visible queer personalities. Even though the representations get "increasingly broad" (Benshoff 2016 261), as Benshoff argues, "the first among them tended to be middle-class white gay men [...]. Not only do such characters hide or elide other types of queer experience, but their generic moorings [...] allow for the easy replication of pre-existing stereotypes" (Benshoff 261-262). As has been argued in the preceding chapters, this produces a hierarchy within the queer community and amongst homosexual men that favours assimilation to heteronormativity and seeks to suppress everything that does not conform to these normative standards.

Since LGBTQIAN+ characters have never been completely absent from Hollywood cinema, visibility *as such* is no palpable indicator for a non-derogatory representation. It seems, therefore, more relevant to examine the *ways* in which LGBTQIAN+ individuals are made visible. The reason for a mutual influencing of the perception of a social group on and off screen generally lies in the films' control of the audience's sympathies. The deliberate employment of narrative conventions to raise expectations in the audience is an important means for filmic representation to allege an ideo-

logical agenda. Scrutinising the ways in which LGBTQIAN+ characters are represented in contemporary LGBTQIAN+-themed cinema, *Queer Enough?* examines how they negotiate questions of homosexuality, heteronormative oppression, emancipation, and masculinity to show whether or not the films signify monolithically or if they offer a queer performativity and thus open up a discursive counterspace to the 'normal.'

Methodologically, I use Markus Kuhn's film narratology as a heuristic concept and undertake a work-immanent-descriptive analysis (Kuhn 8; "werkimmanent-deskriptive Analyse", translation mine), in order to carve out the narrative and formal-aesthetic strategies used in the films and their functions for the representation of LGBTQIAN+ characters and themes. This means I derive my analytical material from within the filmic works themselves and, for example, dispense with audience- and effect-related approaches (cf. Kuhn 8). Adopting Gerard Genette's narrative theory, Kuhn distinguishes between 'histoire,' which refers to the content, and 'discourse,' that is the formal-aesthetic composition of filmic narratives (cf. Kuhn 12). Although these two narrative levels are highly intertwined and, hence, cannot be completely separated (cf. Kuhn 12), I subdivided my analysis in two parts accordingly.

In the first part of the analysis, i.e. chapters 3.1 and 3.2, I focus on the content of the films, especially on the depiction of heteronormative oppression and the central characters' emancipation from those structures which are enacted in all three films. This content-based analysis mainly consists of close-readings of important scenes in the three films on the basis of the relevant theoretical concepts such as heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity that I have put into a meaningful context and developed further in my theoretical approach. Regarding the depiction of masculinity, it is worthwhile to look beyond the content to the formal-aesthetic components that support a particular mode of representation. Thus, in the second part, i.e.chapters 3.3 and 3.4, I move from the content level to the formal-aesthetic level. Here, I am particularly interested in the genre-specific narrative standards and cinematic mechanisms such as the camera work, image composition, coloration, i.e. the mise-en-scène of the films. Thereby, the focus lies on the narrative structure and the gaze the films establish to determine to what extent the films make use of mechanisms of assimilation that might perpetuate structures of homonormativity and reinforce hegemonic (gay) masculinity.

3. Queer Biopics?

The first two subchapters of my analysis focuses primarily on the content of the three films and examines how the films portray heteronormative structures as oppressive for the characters and how the emancipation of the main characters from these structures is enacted. The films present scenes that show the negative impact of heteronormativity and aggressive homophobia on the characters. The first subchapter is dedicated to the study of the representation of personal, institutional, and structural oppression, as well as violence. Although all three films address the different aspects of oppression, such as silencing, exclusion, legal and medical consequences, aggression, and police violence, they differ in the way they portray them. *Howl* works more on a symbolic level in this regard, commenting on more universal themes such as 1950s conformity and the oppression of sexual minorities in general than the other two films, which focus far more explicitly on the concrete effects of homophobic violence on LGBTQIAN+ characters. Thereby, the ambivalence of visibility becomes evident. On the one hand, it is often used to oppress the homosexual protagonists, but on the other, they have to 'find their voice' or 'use their own voice' to speak up against the oppressive structures they are surrounded by and render themselves audible and thus visible. These acts of emancipation will be examined more closely in the second subchapter. Comparatively, it can be noted that coming out plays a very important role for the characters. While in *Howl*, the process of writing is framed as Ginsberg's coming out, in *Stonewall*, Danny starts a revolution by finally coming out in public and Milk finds the political force of self-empowerment in urging all homosexuals to come out. Even though in all three films coming out is the deciding part of their emancipation, *Howl* focuses much more on Ginsberg's individual emancipatory moment than *Milk* and *Stonewall*, which rather emphasise the collective struggle of the LGBTQIAN+ movement. Although it is not possible to completely separate content and form, the final two chapters are more concerned with the formal-aesthetic composition of the films. The films differ greatly in their ability to offer a non-normative, ambiguous, or disruptive viewing position, which includes but is not limited to the depiction of queer desire and sex by way of the gaze, which will be analysed in chapter 3.3. To forge their assimilation to heteronormativity,

it seems that the representation of homosexuals must be disengaged from queer sexual practices. Furthermore, the gaze sets an authentic and at times even intimate tone that varies in its effect from exclusion, straightwashing, and collectivisation. Although all three films seem to criticise heteronormative structures on the content level, on a formal-aesthetic level they partly reaffirm or even enforce them, which emphasises the difficulty in breaking aesthetic conventions in mainstream Hollywood. Moreover, all three films make use of specific narrative techniques innate to the genre of traditional Hollywood biopics. This tendency is apparent in the representation of archetypical masculinities such as the genius, the rebel, or the martyr, fitting "the most popular image of masculinity in everyday consciousness [which] is that of man the hero, the hunter, the competitor, the conqueror. Certainly, it is the image celebrated in Western literature, art and in the media" (Brittan 77). Hence, chapter 3.4 analyses how the central characters negotiate their masculinities and their homosexuality and in how far this becomes manifest in the narrative structure of the films. Thereby, I especially consider how the films' adherence to traditional narrative techniques and the use of these archetypes caters to the myth of a collective American national identity. Since homosexuality was seen as un-American behaviour in the 1950s, integration into the mainstream means making the protagonists national heroes who fight for liberty.

3.1 Modes of Oppression: The Negative Depiction of Heteronormativity

Defence of the Heteronorm

When examining how *Howl* represents heteronormativity and its transgression, one aspect becomes very clear from the beginning: the film establishes the normative system in close relations to literary artistry. The poem "Howl" is omnipresent throughout the whole film. Not only is it eponymous for the title of the film, but it plays a central role in all narrative strands. Therefore, it seems vital to analyse how the film interprets and draws attention to the content of the poem which criticises psychiatric institutions, capitalism, the repressive 1950s consensus society, and heteronormativity. Moreover, all narrative strands of the film – from the depiction of Ginsberg's personal and professional development to the court proceedings to the adaption of the poem – contain elements that establish heteronormative structures as negative on the screen. However, it becomes especially

obvious when taking a closer look at how Ginsberg's poem, visualised by the animation in the film, portrays society as oppressive. The animated sequences are based on *Howl – a Graphic Novel* (2010) by Eric Drooker, who had worked in collaboration with Allen Ginsberg before and illustrated his poems in the collection *Illuminated Poems* (1996) (cf. Ginsberg and Drooker n. pag.). In this adaption of the poem the metaphors of Moloch and Rockland are central to the representation of heteronormative structures since they symbolise for both capitalism and (hetero)normativity and therefore for Ginsberg's perceived social oppression and marginalisation. Furthermore, the heteronormative system is represented by the depiction of the poem's opponents in court. The way the film draws a negative or even stultifying picture of those vindicators of the heteronorm eventually exposes their traditionally informed views as untenable and abandoned.

The following paragraphs will explore the depiction of the metaphorical figure of Moloch, "the Canaanite fire god who was worshiped by sacrifice of children" (E. Katz 193), as well as of the mental institutions symbolised by Rockland in the animated sequences. In the poem as well as the film, Moloch serves as "a metaphor [...] to identify the source of multiple social oppressions" (E. Katz 201): "Commercialism, militarism, sexual repression, technocracy, soulless industrialization, inhuman life, and the death of the spirit are the consequences of Mental Moloch" (Stephenson 55). Moloch has therefore been interpreted as a symbol for capitalism (e.g. E. Katz, Stephenson). Nevertheless, I focus on the depiction of Moloch the film employs to draw a negative picture of heteronormativity, which is, however, closely connected to the poems critique of capitalism as the reason for the oppression of homosexuality. The quoted line of the poem "Who lost their loveboys to [...] the one-eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar" (00:18:27-39), for instance, reverses the 1950s consensus practice to equate homosexuality with Communism (cf. Harris 223). The animation shows Moloch as a big factory building shaped like a giant bull, belching smoke, and looking demonically with glooming red eyes. Inside the building lives a devil-like figure that is released when the bull of steel opens its mouth. The whole scenery is kept in dark and red colours and underscored with very low-pitched and slow piano sounds, indicating the menacing potency emanating from the figure of Moloch. Allen Ginsberg, quoted in the foreword to *Howl – a Graphic Novel*, remarks that Drooker "really captured that sense of Moloch I was going for in the second section of *Howl* – 'Moloch whose buildings are judgement!'" (Ginsberg and Drooker, n. pag.).

Likewise, Moloch is established as a strong symbol for oppression in the film, representing the "cluster of forces" (A. Rich 640) that the discursive structures of heteronormativity constitute and that makes the oppressed "lose sight of the material cause of their oppression" (Wittig 104). The animation conveys this by the enormousness of Moloch in comparison to the people: "Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch. Moloch the heavy judger of men!" (00:49:07-12). When the devil-like figure demands the people's children, they fearfully but willingly sacrifice them and throw them into the fire of Moloch (00:49:12-32). It implies a strong criticism of the collective oppression in society: the heteronormative members perpetuate their own submission and thereby forward their own destruction. Their obstinate adherence to the ideology of heterosexuality and capitalism is presented as the great defect of humanity in contrast to the government's reasoning that Communism and homosexuality are to be blamed for the corruption of American values. The sacrificed children are enclosed and alienated from each other: "Moloch in whom I sit lonely. Moloch in whom I dream Angels! Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! oloch!" (00:49:12-21). Especially the homosexual subject "is either divided inside himself or divided from others" (Foucault "Power" 778), revealing that they either must suppress a part of their own identity or else become marginalised by society. Thus, when the children re-emerge from their enclosure, Moloch has "frightened [them] out of [their] natural ecstasy" (00:49:39-45), has turned them into soldiers, all looking the same, marching in lockstep which demonstrates their complete conformity to the system of society. Additionally, the affiliation of the words 'natural' and 'ecstasy' demonstrates that the adherence to heteronormativity is not the one that should be considered natural, but a variety of different forms of sexual identities. However, the capitalist and heterosexual norms have "entered [their] soul early" (00:49:32-38), which emphasises that these norms are deeply entrenched in each individual in the constant performativity of heteronormative naturalisation. Not only does the repetition of the word 'Moloch' at the beginning of every line emphasise the feeling of oppression, but it stresses the omnipresence as well as the performative and reiterative character of heteronormative structures. In their reluctance to conform to heteronormativity, Ginsberg and the characters of his poem get excluded from society. Ginsberg explains what Moloch means to him during the interview sequences: "Peter and I saw Moloch one day when we took

peyote[28] and were wandering around downtown streets. It's a god that you make fire sacrifices to. But in my mind, it was what drove my mother to madness" (00:49:13-20). The institutionalisation of Ginsberg's mother was a traumatic experience in the young poet's life. Moreover, he was in an asylum himself, where he met Carl Solomon, who was treated 'against homosexuality.' The film depicts these two characters to emphasise the oppression of people who do not conform to the heteronormative, capitalist system of Moloch. Hence, his mother's and Solomon's fate represents the oppression of Communism, on the one hand, and of homosexuality, on the other.

Rockland is the symbol Ginsberg used for the institutionalised discrimination of homosexuality, in which the oppressive structures of Moloch become manifest. While Moloch is a metaphor for an oppressive social system, which is, however, not tangible, I claim that the film depicts Rockland as a concrete tool employed by Moloch to marginalise every form of living that does not conform to the social norms. The metaphor of Rockland criticises mental institutions in general, but the film puts special emphasis on the institutional mistreatment of homosexuals. As the name 'Rockland' already suggests, the animated sequences of the film present the asylum as an enormous building made of concrete and steel, alluding to its stiff boundaries that cannot easily be undermined. Like Moloch, the "armed madhouse" (00:56:09-10), Rockland also embodies the feeling of oppression and enclosure which is additionally emphasised by showing the implementation of electroshock therapy. The film creates a desolate tone as well as an authentic touch by cutting in archival video footage showing the procedure of electroshock therapy, accompanied by low-pitched and slow piano sounds (cf. 00:26:39-55). This scene is paralleled later in the animation by the depiction of Carl Solomon's electroshock therapy which was used to 'cure' him of his homosexual desires. Having hospitalised himself to avoid a prison sentence, Ginsberg meets Solomon in a psychiatric institution. While section III of the poem is recited, the scene segues to Rockland again, where Solomon is institutionalised. As in the documentary sequence, he is put on a stretcher, screaming in horror, but ultimately, he surrenders to the doctors' treatment (00:54:09-17). When they lean over him to imple-

28 As Aldous Huxley famously expounds in his essay "The Doors of Perception" (1952), peyote is the name of a cactus endemic to Mexico and the southwest of the U.S.A. It contains mescaline, a hallucinogenic drug which strongly influences the perception of the consumer (cf. Huxley 1-2).

ment the electroshocks, the lights above the operation table turn into the menacing eyes of Moloch (00:54:14-16), suggesting that the treatment is the realisation of Moloch's oppressive will. While the lines "I'm with you in Rockland where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void" (00:54:25-35) are recited, the animated images show the electro shocks literally entering Solomon's body and flowing through him, leaving a completely prostrated figure in a white hospital gown. This depiction can be interpreted as the attempt of homonormative society to re-enter the homosexual body and subject him to norms of conformity, since Moloch has not sufficiently 'entered his soul' to make him conform to the system. Nonconformity is met by institutionalised force that tries to squash the will of the individual by entering the body and the soul with electroshocks. Consequently, electroshock therapy becomes a symbol for the dividing powers of normative structures, leading either to a division "inside himself" or "from others" (Foucault "Power" 778) and, hence, to the socially enforced alienation of the homosexual from his own sexual identity or from heteronormative society. Solomon's fate, however, also concerns the lyrical I of the poem: "Ah Carl, when you are not safe I am not safe" (00:26:36-39). Solomon therefore becomes the "martyr in whom Ginsberg symbolizes his generation of oppressed celestial pilgrims" (Stephenson 54). Moreover, the constant repetition of the line "I'm with you in Rockland" (e.g. 00:55:34-38), implies that the oppressive structures of Moloch that are materialised in the asylum Rockland stretch far beyond the walls of the building – as long as one person is enclosed in Rockland, nobody can be completely free.

Nevertheless, it is possible to overcome the oppression, even though Moloch seemingly "maintains a monopoly on reality, imposing and enforcing a single, materialist-rationalist view" (Stephenson 53). In the animation, Ginsberg's 'visionary angels' become alive and start to attack both Rockland and Moloch:

> I'm with you in Rockland where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the roof. They've come to drop angelic bombs, the hospital illuminates itself, imaginary walls collapse. O skinny legions run outside. O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here. O victory forget your underwear we're free! (00:54:55-00:55:33)

While these lines from the poem are recited, the animated sequences show how Rockland as well as Moloch are destroyed by angel-like figures ("an-

gelheaded hipsters" (00:21:42)) throwing books on them (cf. 00:55:00-33). Since the books represent the "angelic bombs" mentioned in the poem, a clear connection between literature and the transgression of boundaries is drawn by the film. Literary expression, symbolised by the books that are thrown, has the power to collapse social boundaries and thus heteronormativity. Furthermore, the passage suggests that the walls surrounding Rockland, as well as the confinements concerning heteronormativity, are not 'real' but imaginary walls, which have been naturalised to such an extent that they came to be accepted the concrete, inviolable walls of Rockland. In the animation they simply disappear into thin air, highlighting their actual fragility which was hidden by concrete walls that constitute the power relations, which are not static but always already entail means of subversion (cf. Foucault "Power" 794). Freeing Solomon means that "[c]onfinement, repression, alienation, and the dark night of the soul are ended" (Stephenson 56). As both the poem and the animation in the film suggest, the boundaries of heteronormativity can be exposed as socially constructed and can eventually be overcome.

The negative representation of heteronormativity as well as the emphasis on the power of literature to expose these structures as socially constructed, is obvious in another narrative strand of the film: the court scenes that restage the obscenity trial against the poem "Howl." Assistant District Attorney Ralph McIntosh (David Strathairn) as well as the two expert witnesses of the prosecution, Gail Potter (Mary-Louise Parker) and David Kirk (Jeff Daniels), deny the poem "Howl" any literary merit and declare it obscene. However, as Jørgen Bruhn and Anne Gjelsvik note, these characters "are unable and probably also unwilling to grasp both the form and the content of the poem" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 357). Thus, the film shows that the clear boundaries the experts draw are no longer valid in a multifaceted society. Their argumentation is presented as untenable, even ridiculous, and their traditional 1950s views as rather outdated in their strict adherence to normative ideals. Not only does their negative depiction on screen refer to the flaws in their arguments, but the film contrasts their reasoning with the much stronger arguments on the side of the defence and, thus, marks them as incompetent. Bruhn and Gjelsvik assume that the explicit references to homosexuality in the poem were "probably the main reason behind the 'obscenity trial' at a time when sodomy laws made homosexual acts a crime in all US states" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349). I would take their observations even further and argue that the court scenes in the film decisively reveal the strong connection between artistic and sexual freedom which reinforces my

suggestion that the film adapts the poem as a symbol for the transgression of heteronormativity.

To expose their vindication of the heteronorm as abandoned, the film paints the experts of the prosecution in a negative light. Gail Potter (Mary-Louise Parker), a radio personality and English teacher, is the first witness called to the stand. According to Bruhn and Gjelsvik, she is "clearly the most satirically depicted person in the trial" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 357), since she is "represented as being foolhardily sure that she is expressing universal truths about literary art and criticism" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 357). Speaking and acting in a frumpy way and dressed in a grey lady's suit and hat, suggest a rather conservative mind-set at first sight and depicts Potter as the personification of consensus society. Asked about the literary value of the book *Howl and Other Poems*, she answers confidently: "I think it has no literary merit" (00:08:40-43). In her opinion the poem lacks objectively observable features that constitutes the quality of a work of literature:

> In order to have literary style you must have form, diction, fluidity, clarity. Now, I am speaking only of style, and in content, every great piece of literature, or anything that can be really classified as literature, is of some moral greatness. And I think this fails to the n^{th} degree. (00:08:47-00:09:07)

Her evaluation of the poem's style and content shows that even though she claims to adhere to allegedly objectively observable facts, her interpretation is determined by moral categories. Moreover, she contradicts herself when naming Ginsberg's "use of language" (00:09:12-13) as another reason why the poem has no literary merit and should be banned as obscene. She argues that "he fails in rhetoric, of course, for one thing, because his figures of speech are crude, and you feel like you are going through the gutter when you have to read that. I didn't linger on it too long, I assure you" (00:09:17-29). Instead of objective facts, her subjective feeling of disgust when reading the poem strongly influences her perception of the poem. She expresses irrational feelings of disgust for homosexuality. Her irrational impression that homosexuality poses a threat to the traditional discourse and values of heteronormativity (cf. Herek 451) exposes her homophobic bias and, hence, reveals the anxiety to lose power and privileges (cf. di Blasi 8). All this gives rise to a certain irrationality in Potter's argumentation which weakens her position as an expert for literature. The way Potter is presented on screen especially elucidates her abhorrence of the disorder the

poem administers. She identifies a transgression of "the taboo against sexuality outside of marriage and other moral constraints" (Grey 39), as well as stylistic boundaries in the poem and therefore considers it as obscene. In this portrayal, the film ridicules her conservative prudishness and her own artistic pursuit. She even gets laughed at by the gallery when recounting that she rewrote both *Faust* and *Everyman* (cf. 00:08:21-27).[29] Moreover, when defence attorney Jake Ehrlich (John Hamm) refrains from cross-examining her, she seems confused that her opinion seems so unimportant for the defence that Ehrlich does not even want to hear it. Ehrlich needs to repeatedly tell her that she is supposed to step down from the witness stand (cf. 00:09:34-47). Not only does this scene serve to stultify her but fits her preposterous and seemingly outdated adherence to social norms and order.

The other witness for the prosecution, David Kirk, an assistant professor for English Literature at the University of San Francisco, agrees with Potter's opinion that great literature needs to be arranged orderly. When asked by Ehrlich how literary value is achieved, he states: "I'd have to return to my three bases of objective criticism: form, theme and opportunity" (00:57:05 – 00:57:10) and emphasises his alleged objectivity when analysing literature and explains:

> I endeavoured to arrive at my opinion on an objective basis. For example, a great literary work, or even a fairly great literary work, would obviously be exceedingly successful in form, but this poem is really just a weak imitation of a form that was used 80 to 90 years ago by Walt Whitman. […] Literary value could also reside in theme, and what little literary value there is in 'Howl,' it seems to me does come in theme. The statement of the idea of the poem was relatively clear, but it has little validity, and, therefore, the theme has a negative value. No value at all. (00:51:31-00:52:14)

He elaborates that the poem has no literary merit, because it copied the form of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*: "great literature always creates its own form for each significant occasion. […] An imitation never does have

29 This representation is, in my opinion, quite controversial, as rewriting can be seen as a subversive strategy especially for women rewriting men's texts (cf. A Rich, "Re-vision" 18). Also, she is laughed at for this, and defence attorney Ehrlich is not at all interested in what she would have to say, which can also be interpreted as misogyny, as she is not seen as a serious scholar. This topic will be resumed and discussed more critically in the chapters 3.3 and 3.4.

the value of the original" (00:52:34-59). Thereby, Kirk positions himself on the conservative edge of the long-fought debate about artistic originality. This can be transferred to the heteronormative claim that homosexuality is only a deviation, a 'copy' of the 'original,' natural form of heterosexuality (cf. Butler "Imitation" 313-314).[30] The film exposes the claim for originality and naturalness with regard to both literature and sexuality as in fact a social construct. The film facilitates this recognition when Ehrlich interposes by asking "And who did Walt Whitman copy?" (00:53:00-02). Kirk does not know whether Whitman was influenced by other poets himself, hence, rendering his line of argument untenable. His reaction shows that Ehrlich has successfully heckled him by that question: he grows more and more confused in the course of his cross-examination. When asked about his conception of 'validity in theme,' his reasoning becomes increasingly incoherent:

> [T]he poet expresses the usual Dadaist line that everything is created for man's despair, that everything must be forgotten and destroyed, and that Solomon's life apparently has had this kind of rhythm. Therefore, there is some validity of theme, in that area. (00:55:48- 00:56:04)

"So, there is validity of theme there?" (00:56:05-06) Ehrlich asks in surprise and Kirk recoils: "I am afraid I got my tongue tripped up there... this... I should have said 'clarity' instead of 'validity'" (00:56:07-14). Moreover, Kirk interprets Moloch in the poem as the expression of a "desire to wipe out all human memory of everything the human race has ever done" (00:56:41-46), which mirrors Potter's irrational fear of transgression either on the literary or sexual level. Confounding every single argument Kirk brings forward, Ehrlich forces him further into a corner until he gets completely embarrassed: "Uh... I'm... I'm confused" (00:57:27-30). Like Potter, Kirk did not reflect on the poem for a very long time, as he made up his "mind up after 5 minutes" (00:58:08-00:59:04), but still feels confident enough to express his opinion. Thus, Ehrlich eventually succeeds in confuting his criticism. Accordingly, Bruhn and Gjelsvik assume that "[t]he courtroom scenes depict the prosecutor and his witnesses as unable to

30 As Butler argues, there cannot be 'originality' when it comes to gender relations or sexuality, since according to her, sex as well as gender is always the performativity of heteronormative patterns that become naturalised through constant repetition (cf. Butler "Imitation" 313-314).

connect with contemporary culture, whereas Lawrence Ferlinghetti's lawyer clearly represents progress and modernity" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 358).

Assistant District Attorney McIntosh, the third character in the film who vindicates the heteronorm, especially embodies Bruhn's and Gjeslvik's assumption. Repeatedly, he asks the witnesses if they are able to understand the meaning of the poem (cf. 00:20:55; 00:34:16) to eventually admit in his closing argument that he is in fact unable to understand it:

> [I]t's funny in our law, we are allowed to use expert witnesses to testify as to literary merit, but we are not allowed to bring in, we will say, the average man to testify that when he reads the book, he doesn't understand it. He doesn't know what it's all about. Perhaps it's over his head. [...] I don't understand it very well. In fact, looking it all over, I think it's a lot of sensitive bullshit, using the language of Mr. Ginsberg. So then, if the sale of a book is not being limited to just modern book reviewers and experts on modern poetry, but falls into the hands of the general public, that is to say, the average reader, this court should take that into consideration in determining whether or not 'Howl' is obscene. (01:01:16 – 00:02:33)

He thereby admits that he is unable to grasp the meaning of the poem and assumes that the average reader would not be able to understand it, either. Degrading the book by calling it 'sensitive bullshit' he argues that the 'average reader' needs to be protected from such obscene material. But who, according to McIntosh, is this 'average man' supposed to be? And why should a book be banned for the reason that some people might not be able to grasp its meaning? McIntosh's inability to understand more open and experimental forms of art and literature mirrors his and consensus society's inability to understand and accept forms of lifestyle and sexuality that deviated from the 1950s family-centred model of heterosexuality, since "[t]he taboos Ginsberg violated with such force in Howl were those most entrenched in society" (Grey 39). This is the reason why McIntosh, in his opinion, quotes the most critical lines of the poem, which are, without exception, either criticising capitalism and Christianity and/or explicitly referring to sexual practices. He takes umbrage at the reference at the beginning of "Howl" saying "All these books are published in Heaven" (00:07:23-26), indicating: "I don't quite understand that, but anyway, let the record show, Your Honor, it's published by the City Lights Pocketbook Shop" (00:07:28-35). Other quotes he recites include "With dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls" (00:21:05-16), "angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly con-

nection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night" (00:21:42-49), "who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts" (00:34:23-43), and "who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love" (00:35:15-31). McIntosh seems to think that merely the use of words indicating Christian symbolism such as 'heaven,' 'angels,' and 'seraphim,' in combination with words having a sexual connotation like 'cock,' 'balls,' 'genitals,' or 'blow'/ 'to be blown' justifies to ban the poem as obscene, because they transgress "the taboo against mocking and destabilizing the traditional partition between the sacred and the profane, against treating all phenomena, high and low, spiritual and physical, as simultaneous and on an equal plane" (Grey 39). Fixated on the relevance of particular words, McIntosh fails in understanding that in art and literature all parts often complement each other to one total work. This becomes especially clear when defence witness Mark Schorer eventually notes: "Sir, you can't translate poetry into prose. That's why it is poetry" (00:21:51-56). His reliance on the meaning of often tabooed words exposes McIntosh's ignorance of a deeper meaning of the poem and additionally emphasises the connection between poetry and sexuality in the film.

Furthermore, his and the prosecution witnesses' perception is depicted as untenable by contrasting their argumentation with the defence side in court. Thereby, as Bruhn and Gjelsvik suggest,

> [t]he two adversary positions may be re-phrased in terms of formal boundaries versus freedom of form which, following the proceedings of the trial, may be translated into the conflict between a normative understanding of human existence and morals and an openness of form mirroring the contingencies of life and morality. (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 358)

Potter's prudishness, Kirk's uncertainty, and McIntosh's ignorance are revealed as preposterous and outdated compared to the reliable literary criticism expressed by the defence witnesses Mark Schorer (Treat Williams) and Luther Nichols (Alessandro Nivola), whose argumentation is presented as far more coherent and underpinned with tangible examples. Even though in the actual trial the defence called nine witnesses to the stand, the film presents only two defence witnesses. The film seemingly does not want to convey the impression that the defence simply outnumbered the prosecution in size, but that their arguments outperformed theirs.

Even though Schorer admits that "[i]t's not always easy to know that one understands exactly what a contemporary poet is saying" (00:20:59-00:21:03), he feels well-informed enough to make a proposal for interpretation: "Well, there are uprooted people wandering around the United States, dreaming, drugged. That's clear, isn't it? Even their waking hours are like nightmares, loaded with liquor and enjoying, I take it, a variety of indiscriminate sexual experience" (00:21:23-41). Schorer does not see any reason why the words the author has chosen should account for the banning of the poem. Likewise, defence witness Nichols proceeds on the assumption that he "understand[s] their significance and their general context" (00:34:18-22), when being asked: "Now do you understand most of the words in this poem?" (00:34:16-17). Making explicit that the words as such are not as important as their significance in context, he explains to McIntosh that Ginsberg plays with possible ambiguities words can have:

> *McIntosh*: Now, we all understand what 'blew' and 'blown' mean – I mean?
> *Nichols*: Well, I think they are words that have several meanings. […] It can at one level mean that they were vagabonds – that they were being blown about by natural, literal winds. On the other hand, perhaps it does have a sexual connotation.
> *McIntosh*: In reference to oral copulation, right? (00:35:33-53)

Moreover, Nichols acknowledges the poem's potential to serve as a medium to protest social and political circumstances: "I think it's a howl of pain. Figuratively speaking, his [Ginsberg's] toes have been stepped on. He's poetically putting his cry of pain and protest into this book, 'Howl'" (00:33:46 – 00:33:57). According to Nichols, the trial will probably emphasise the subversive potential of the poem rather than possibly banning it as "'Howl' will have a wider readership than it might otherwise have had and may go down in history as a stepping-stone along the way to greater or lesser liberality in the permitting of poems of its type" (00:37:59-00:38:15). Thereby, Nichols shows the vindicators of the heteronorm that their own weapons can easily be turned against them.

Just as Schorer and Nichols, defence attorney Ehrlich "supports and follows Ginsberg's poems in insisting on bridging and perhaps even destroying the conventional boundaries of literature and obscenity, cursing and non-provocative vocabularies, heterosexuality and homosexuality" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 358). In his summation, he acknowledges the intensive effect

literature and social and political reality have on each other and demands for greater liberty concerning both artistic expression and sexual freedom:

> There are books that have the power to change men's minds, and call attention to situations that are visible but unseen. [...] the problem of what is legally permissible in the description of sexual acts or feelings in arts and literature is of the greatest importance to a free society. [...] The battle of censorship will not be finally settled by Your Honor's decision, but you will either add to liberal, educated thinking, or by your decision, you will add fuel to the fire of ignorance. Let there be light! Let there be honesty! Let there be no running from non-existent destroyers of morals. Let there be honest understanding! (1:04:41-1:06:20)

Although Judge Clayton W. Horn (Bob Balaban) is considered a rather conservative judge, which the film highlights by including authentic newspaper articles that declare him as conservative, he seems not as bigoted or hidebound as Potter, Kirk, and McIntosh. To the great surprise of the gallery, he concludes in his verdict that "the book *Howl and Other Poems* does have some redeeming social importance, and [...] is not obscene. The defendant is found not guilty" (01:08:39-51). He explains: "The freedoms of speech and press are inherent in a nation of free people. These freedoms must be protected if we are to remain free, both individually and as a nation" (01:08:27 – 01:08:38). His verdict proves that conservativism and the interest to protect society from dangers such as obscene material does not necessarily indicate a strict adherence to oppressive heteronormative structures. He argues for freedom of form concerning literature but simultaneously connects his argument to the human body: "[L]ife is not encased in one formula whereby everyone acts the same and conforms to a particular pattern. No two persons think alike. We were all made from the same form but in different patterns" (01:07:46-01:08:03). Judge Horn is thereby presented as indeed able to see the different nuances that both art and sexuality entail instead of narrow-mindedly searching for clear boundaries. His perspective emphasises the view that clinging to old norms and rigid structures hampers mutual understanding. Therefore, the film celebrates freedom of form as well as sexuality in a merging of form and content itself and thereby perpetuates the claim for more liberality that Ginsberg expresses in his poem "Howl." In the logic of the film, the triumph of the poem in court as well as the 'angleheaded hipsters' against Moloch and Rockland in the animation constitutes a triumph to claim a position in the

ranks of high-quality literature and indicates the possibility to transgress socially constructed boundaries.

Institutional and Paternal Violence

Unlike Ginsberg, Danny, the protagonist in *Stonewall*, is portrayed as the 'normal' everyday white American high school boy – except that he is gay. Even though the film has been criticised for centralising a white perspective, by showing Danny's experiences as universal, it raises awareness for the devastating conditions for a homosexual in the still widely conformist U.S. of the 1960s. The representation of institutional discrimination ranges from domestic and religious oppression implemented by Danny's father Mr. Winters as well as blatant police violence against Danny and other members of the LGBTQIAN+ community. Moreover, personal discrimination plays a role in the film, as Danny is rejected by his classmates as well as his high school lover Joe, who cannot admit his homosexuality. All cases of discrimination depicted in the film involve hegemonic masculinity. As the following analysis will show, the protagonist Danny is oppressed and constantly threatened by men who claim and/ or defend their hegemonic position. By offering an insight to the structure of institutional and personal discrimination implemented by hegemonic masculinity, the film draws a negative picture of heteronormative oppression of homosexuals. The main forms of discrimination – domestic and police violence – are symbolised by the juxtaposed spaces they are happening in: Danny's hometown in the countryside of Indiana and the urban neighbourhood of Greenwich Village in New York City. Combining and at the same time contrasting these two spaces, the film cuts back and forth between flashbacks of the last days before Danny had to leave home and the timeframe of his first experiences in New York. Having been rejected by his family and friends at home, Danny has to fend for himself in New York. In stark contrast to the bright and yellow house he grew up in, one of the first scenes in New York shows him huddled up on a park bench in the dark streets of Greenwich Village. To uphold the tone of the scene and connect it with the previous one showing his home, melancholic music is continued in an overlapping sound effect while a man in ragged clothes is looking for something eatable in a dustbin, finds a half-empty bottle of beer and drinks from it. Then he sees Danny, approaches him and tries to steal money from his pocket, thus, initialising the ongoing atmosphere of insecurity the film creates in

the scenes showing the tough life on the streets of New York by night. The narrative method conflates the different forms of discrimination while creating a contrast between the seemingly safe yet oppressive places of his childhood, in which his sexuality is completely silenced, and the dangers of more outspoken and direct physical violence in the city.

The way the film portrays the aggressive behaviour of the New York City police against LGBTQIAN+ people[31] is evocative of the psychoanalytic explanation of homophobia which is found in 'latent homosexuality,' that is the "anxiety about the possibility of being or becoming a homosexual" (Adams et al. 440), as well as a more general take on homophobia as a conflict of masculinity. Especially the two police officers who attack Danny during his first days in New York seem to be stereotypical representations of homophobic masculinity. Danny's first encounter with the police occurs when he accidentally ends up at the piers, an infamous gay cruising spot in Greenwich Village during the time. Not aware of where he is, he stumbles around looking for his newly found friend Ray (Jonny Beauchamp), but the latter, who does not seem to notice, gets in a car with another man, probably a trick, and drives off. The moment he realises what is happening around him (gay men having sex with each other between trucks and cargo containers), the police arrive, and the officers start to randomly beat people up (cf. 00:16:57-00:17:07). Unlike most of the others, Danny seems too nervous and confused to run away and gets into the sight of an officers who immediately addresses him aggressively: "What are you looking at, faggot?" (00:17:09-11). Danny apologises and stumbles backwards, but the police officer hits him with his truncheon and Danny falls from the loading dock they are standing on while his assailant looks down on him. Showing the officer from this low camera angle that suggests Danny's perspective, illustrates the hierarchy of masculinities and the concomitant imbalance of power that is at work here (cf. 00:17:19). The officer jumps down from the landing and obtains help from a second officer, who keeps Danny from escaping by enclosing him between the trucks from the other side. The first officer keeps on assaulting Danny: "Oh, you're a pretty one, huh? You want to suck my dick?" (00:17:31-36), pushing him down towards his crotch in a bid of forced oral sex. All the while, the second officer contains Danny

31 Even though the film vividly shows the police's homophobic violence, it does not mention the racist tendencies within the US police force and thus fails to accord with an intersectional approach towards discrimination. This will be argued more thoroughly in chapter 3.4.

by pushing his truncheon to his head, shouting: "Come on, suck his dick! Suck his fucking dick!" (00:17:38-43). Given their homophobic attitude, the representation does not admit doubt that the two police officers use sexual violence to demonstrate their masculine power. As Kimmel emphasises, the constant struggle for men is always having to prove their manhood to other men, a negotiation in which the "overriding emotion is fear" (Kimmel 276). While he pushes Danny down, the first officer constantly looks back and forth from his victim to his colleague, making sure that the latter does not mistake this act for homosexual lust or affection. Thus, he assaults Danny in order to prove his masculinity – albeit not to Danny, but to his colleague who for him is a representative of the system of hegemonic masculinity. As has been pointed out in the theoretical examination, violence is not only a means of oppression and marginalisation in the system of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Connell 'Social Organization' 44), "but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection" (Connell *Masculinities* 84). The officers' recourse to aggression as a means to suppress homosexuality might thus point to insecurities in their self-perception as heterosexual men and lastly to an instability of the system as such. Thereby, the film emphasises the notion that the officers sexually assault Danny in order to stabilise their own masculinity and to uphold the hierarchical order of hegemonic masculinity. Danny becomes the 'other' against which they "project their gendered identities, […] to compete in a situation in which they will always win" (Kimmel 280). Moreover, Danny's degradation works on another level, namely by putting him in a 'female' position. This shows that homosexuality is "assimilated with femininity" (Connell 'Social Organisation' 40) to emasculate and oppress gay men. Trying to wriggle himself out of their grip, Danny eventually pushes away the first officer who tried to enforce oral intercourse. He immediately realises that this was a mistake as the second officer grabs hold of him, pulls his arms back, and detains him while the other one strikes his face with his truncheon, shouting: "She's got a temper, huh? Still got a temper, faggot?" (00:17:46-52). The sudden change to the female pronoun thereby marks Danny as a feminine subject. While making the sexual act thereby more acceptable for the police officer, the threat of rape or other forced sexual acts, which is one of the means of female oppression, is deployed as a mechanism of hegemonic masculinity to uphold power. Nevertheless, this act of sexual violence reveals the officers' latent homosexuality: they externalise their fear and hatred of any possible homosexual feeling they perceive in themselves onto the homosexual they encounter (cf. Wickberg 56), which results in extremely aggressive beha-

viour towards Danny. This becomes palpable when they refrain from sexual harassment and start beating him again. When he falls to the ground and tries to escape by crawling under one of the trucks, they grab him, pull him back and continue to beat him until he lies on his side spitting blood. They leave him there and, in a final demonstration of his power over Danny, the first officer explains to his colleague: "You know what, I don't even want him to suck my dick no more. Look at his mouth. It's full of blood and shit. That's disgusting" (00:18:14-00:18:27). To keep his position in the system of hegemonic masculinity, he makes sure that he is the one to reject Danny, not the other way around. As they leave, the camera closes in on Danny's face while a sound advance already introduces the upcoming flashback to his parents' house and the family saying their prayers before dinner. Then the scene changes to the dining room in Danny's home.

Danny's family and high school mates' homophobic mindset seems to be informed by religious belief and traditional gender roles, which is a typical co-relation (cf. Herek 451). The stereotypical representation of the small-town American scenery depicts his hometown as a supposedly safe and happy place; however, a sad and stifling tone is added by combining the frames showing the rural scenery with melancholic music. Unlike the dark streets of New York, Danny's hometown is mainly portrayed in bright and soft colours. The house he grew up in has a yellow façade, white lattice windows, and a big garden with a white swing hanging from the branch of an enormous tree. It looks like the home of a typical mid-western middle-class white family and a safe place to raise children. However, the brightness and softness of the colour scheme in these frames is indeed only a façade. The film creates a contrast between spaces inside and outside the house to emphasise the oppression that accompanies these seemingly safe spaces. Coming from a religious background and a strict up-bringing, Danny cannot freely act out on his homosexual desires in his hometown, making his home restrictive rather than well-protected. Inside, the brightness of the house's façade dissolves into the dark, stifling, almost misty optics of the house's interior spaces.

Thereby, Danny's home comes to stand for a form of oppression that works along the lines of an outward appearance that denies his homosexuality and inward repression that is enforced through emotional violence. Unlike in New York, where the two police officers made his homosexuality hyper-visible by calling him "faggot" and used the threat of rape and direct physical force, the oppression in his hometown hinges mostly on a powerful covenant of silence. This is emphasised by showing the negative

relationship between Danny and his father Mr. Winters (David Cubitt), who is stereotypically masculine, aggressive, and demands an adherence to the masculine gender role from his son while silencing his homosexuality. In the family, he is the one to impose norms and religious rules, which is alluded to in the beginning of the film when Ray assumes that Danny's father "was the preacher" (00:05:31-32) – which is in fact not true. Nevertheless, not only is his father the head of the family, but also the coach of Danny's high school football team and thereby stereotypically unites the homophobic views that are enforced by the institutions of religion, family, school, and sports club. Thus, he also bridges personal and institutional discrimination and is presented as the personification of small-town homophobic views. In contrast to the depiction of the police officers' homophobia, which is also connected to their own repressed desires, hinting at their latent homosexuality, the culturally engrained anxiety about his own status in society is emphasised in Mr. Winter's approach to his son's homosexuality. He seems to "equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" (Kimmel 272) and any aberrations from these standards of hegemonic masculinity evoke anxieties in his definition of his own masculinity (cf. Kimmel 274-276), which "is met with efforts to silence, change, or destroy the differences" (Gutterman 62). Mr. Winters perceives Danny's homosexuality as a threat to himself, his family, his football team and, hence, to the system of hegemonic masculinity and the discursive structure of heteronormative society as such. In a scene depicting Danny and his peers during football practice, his father degrades him in front of the other players while they have to do press-ups: "Come on, Danny, you going to join us sometime before 1970 rolls around?" (00:12:24-28), while clearly favouring his classmate Joe: "That's right, Joe. You set the pace here" (00:12:19-21). The scene is overbearingly masculine: the boys being lined up and whistled and shouted at during the practice is strongly reminiscent of military training. Even more so, doing press-ups is a cliché proof of masculinity and if a man fails to keep up, he is seen as unmanly and needs to 'toughen up.' Even though he does not seem to be the weakest football player of the team and his look and body adhere to normative masculine standards, Danny is especially nagged at by his father, who seems to question his masculinity. The supposition that Danny's masculinity is doubted by his father is accentuated in a scene following the football practice. While he waits for his father, Danny leans against his car reading a book (cf. 00:12:58-00:13:04). This representation feeds the cliché of the homosexual being more interested in intellectual or affective stimulation

found in reading than in the physical fitness football offers. While they are driving home, his father explains that he must demand more strength from Danny to make him 'a real man' in the sense of hegemonic masculinity: "I can't be any easier on you, Danny. I just can't. You understand that, right?" (00:13:08-16). Mr. Winters seems to be subject to the structures of heteronormativity, too. These first scenes already introduce the two main characteristics of the father's form of oppression: he tries to enforce his adherence to a stereotypically masculine gender role while at the same time supressing any behaviour that is perceived as feminine and most importantly marginalising and silencing homosexuality.

Mr. Winters even invites a police officer to Danny's high school who shows all senior students a documentary on homosexuality, which seems contrary to his covenant of silence at first. The scene starts with the spokesperson of the documentary stating: "But all homosexuals are not passive" (00:10:07-10) while the students are shown sitting in their classroom. Danny's father observes Danny closely while the latter is watching the documentary and sees how he moves restlessly in his chair and looks around at his classmates. When one of his classmates makes a discriminatory joke about the homosexual shown on screen, the other students laugh and Danny laughs with them, albeit seemingly nervous. This emphasises the homophobic atmosphere and the general public's discriminatory view of homosexuality, but it also shows the father's presumption that Danny might be homosexual. Later in the film he even mentions to his wife who doesn't "think it is true" (00:19:54-55) that "there are signs, and if you don't want to see them that's fine, but I do" (00:19:57-00:20:00). His greatest fear seems to be that Danny, who in his eyes is still a 'passive homosexual,' becomes active sooner or later and thereby dangerous, as the in-film documentary indicates. This seems to be the reason why Mr. Winter sees the need to take action himself, appropriate to his masculine role in the family. The action he takes is to work together with the most obvious representatives of institutional discrimination against homosexuals: religion and the small-town police. Significantly, Mr. Winters never utters the word homosexual during the whole film. Thus, his oppression is enforced through silence, which becomes performative as a complete denial of Danny's sexuality, feeding to the cliché of homosexuality as 'the love that dare not speak its name.' At dinner, Danny's younger sister Phoebe (Joey King) asks about the aforementioned documentary she and the other "younger kids were not allowed to see" (00:18:55-57) and supposes: "Mr. Truman Capote, who wrote *In Cold Blood*, is also a homosexual. Maybe that's why I wasn't

allowed to see that movie either" (00:19:01-13). Their father reacts harshly: "Phoebe, we're having dinner. Thank you" (00:19:13-16), making clear that mentioning the topic is a distasteful affront to the abidance with good manners at dinner and demands obedience to this rule. Nonetheless, his sister does not experience the same oppression as Danny within the family. When Danny chuckles at a joke his sister directs at their father, instead of scolding Phoebe for being disrespectful towards him, Mr. Winter asks Danny aggressively: "You finding [sic] this amusing, Danny?" (00:19:31-33) to which Danny replies "No, Sir!" (00:19:33-34) and humbly looks down to his plate. To change the focus of attention and get out of this uncomfortable situation, Danny asks if he is allowed to borrow his mother's car to meet up with Joe later that evening. His father's face immediately lightens up when he hears Joe's name, and he approves of them hanging out. He seems to assume that Joe, who is the showcase quarterback of their football team and hence doing his gender 'right,' will have a positive influence on Danny regarding his sense of masculinity. This high regard of Joe's masculinity does not even drop after Danny's and Joe's affair has been found out. Instead of protecting his own son, Mr. Winters decides to protect the system of hegemonic masculinity which is symbolised by Joe. Before calling Danny to his office, Mr. Winter talks to Joe first. When Danny enters, he looks at him disappointedly and explains: "I know everything. Don't bother denying it. Joe told me. And I seen [sic] it coming, too. The sickness – you – seducing him. Taking the lead. [...] You got him drunk so he wouldn't even realise what was going on" (00:30:46-58). Even though the word 'faggot' appeared on Danny's locker, his father still refrains from uttering it. He transcribes his son's homosexuality by using words like 'sickness' or phrases like 'knowing everything.' Being the lonesome outsider in his school, Danny is falsely blamed for having been encroaching, even though the sex was consensual. It was Joe who asked Danny to meet up and who took the lead in the sexual encounter. But Joe, being the popular football star of their high school with a nice girlfriend, gets the benefit of passing as heterosexual and adhering to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Mr. Winters perceives their affair as the dangerous moment that the documentary warned of, when the villainous homosexual becomes active. From his homophobic perspective, Danny fits the role of the villain and Joe becomes a victim. Moreover, Mr. Winters even interprets the presumed abuse of Joe – the best player on the football team of all people – as a direct attack on himself, his morals and his masculinity: "Oh, it's such a great way to attack me and ruin my quarterback" (00:30:58-00:31:04). Nonetheless, in line

with the Christian belief system, he thinks that it is his duty to 'heal' Danny from his homosexual desires: "I want to do the right thing, Danny. You need help, son. And we're going to get you that help" (00:31:04-00:31:07). In order to get that help, Danny must subordinate himself to his father's rules and disavow his homosexuality in accordance with the covenant of silence. Even more so, he has to actively bid him for help in an act of symbolic denial. Continuously raising his voice as he speaks, his father shouts at him: "I need you to look me in the eye, Danny. And tell me you need help. This is a one time [sic] thing, Danny. Look at me. Say it! This is a one time [sic] thing, Danny. Say it! Say it!" (00:31:07-00:31:11). Danny, however, looks his father in the eye but does not say anything. They stare at each other in contempt for a moment until Danny storms out of the office and slams the door behind him. Ironically, the person who uses emotional violence by way of performative silence tries to force the oppressed Danny to speak – not to speak up for himself, but to utter the denial of his own feelings and lately his own identity. This scene makes clear that silence is a forceful power that is used to oppress homosexuality. By refusing to follow this performative act of naming himself and subordinating himself to his father's homophobic oppression, Danny uses the power of silence for his own ends. He thereby appropriates the performative of silence and exposes its dependence on the complicity of the suppressed in their own oppression. Of course, Danny's silence is not as powerful as the performative silence of hegemonic masculinity. His father's oppression through silence follows him to New York as well. This becomes obvious when he tries calling his father to get him to sign his scholarship papers which he needs to enrol at Columbia University, but his father refuses to talk to him and hangs up the phone without saying a word. This has severe consequences for Danny, since he has to live on the streets until he has submitted his paperwork – which luckily his mother helps him with later in the plot. Thereby the film emphasises that to subvert hegemonic masculinity and the rules of heteronormativity is a strenuous battle homosexuals have to fight – simply appropriating the normative performatives is just the first step to evade the system of hegemonic masculinity.

In contrast to Danny, Joe does not want to take on this battle. As his deception of Danny shows, he is complicit with Mr. Winters covenant of silence and therefore ultimately also with the system of hegemonic masculinity. Like Danny, he generally seems to be a 'normal' American high school boy but even better integrated into the heteronormative system, and he does everything to maintain this appearance. When Danny avows his love

for him, Joe gets angry and makes unequivocally clear: "We're not faggots!" (00:23:01-03). Danny and Joe handle their sexual affair quite differently, even though both approaches seem to be highly informed by heteronormative rules and conventions as well as homophobic strategies of subordination and marginalisation by hegemonic masculinity. While Danny is anxious that they might be 'sick,' since he has genuine feelings for Joe, the latter takes their affair for a phase of juvenile sexual experimentation. His anger at Danny's revelation makes very clear that he is eager not to describe himself as homosexual and even insults homosexual men as 'creepy looking' and 'faggots.' Thus, Joe denies any homosexual feelings within himself as a reaction to the discrepancy between his sexual desires and the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, the scene reveals that he also silences homosexuality even within himself, indicating that compulsory heterosexuality constitutes "an enormous potential counterforce" (A. Rich 640) within his self-awareness. Joe's self-denial reaches its final peak when he rejects Danny after having been exposed and they are both called to Mr. Winters' office. When Danny arrives, he sees from the corridor that Joe is already inside the office talking to his father. And as he comes out of the office, Danny whispers Joe's name, but he passes by and avoids to even look at him. As has already been discussed in the paragraph above, it seems like Joe has lied about them and told Mr. Winters that Danny had seduced and abused him. Not only has Joe wrongly accused Danny and imposed his shameful feelings onto him, but it seems that he has subordinated himself to Mr. Winters' rules; passing Danny without a word denotes Joe's passing as heterosexual, his complicity is indicated by him turning silent from then on. He even refuses to talk to Danny when he visits him before Danny leaves town, after he has been thrown out of his parents' house. He comes ringing the doorbell and Joe opens slowly and asks: "What do you want?" (00:34:40-41). Danny seems confused about his lover's behaviour and replies: "Joe, it's me! Why did you lie about us?" (00:34:44-50). But Joe just tells him "You should go Danny" (00:34:50-52) and closes the door on him. While Danny is still standing outside and looks at the door in disbelief, Joe leans his forehead to the wall in his home's hallway, then punches the wall forcefully and starts to cry. When his mother enters, he quickly turns around and pulls himself together. The scene shows that Joe seems to feel bad about what he did to Danny and equally suffers from the heteronormative oppression that detains their affair. However, he is too repressed and ashamed to allow the feelings he might have for Danny and, thus, adheres to silencing homosexuality altogether. Especially in front of

others, even his mother, he keeps up appearances. Consequently, he has become complicit in the system of hegemonic masculinity that seeks to subordinate and marginalise homosexuality at all costs.

And even at the end of the film, one year after the Stonewall Riots when Danny visits his hometown, neither his father nor Joe are able to talk to him openly. On his way to get the bus back to New York after visiting his mother and sister, Danny sees his father drive by in his car. He seems to have noticed Danny and stops the car in close distance to Danny who starts approaching the car. However, when he is almost there, his father changes his mind and drives off without talking to him. Thus, his father cannot or is not willing to let their dispute go. He still cannot accept or even tolerate his son's homosexuality, not to mention having an open conversation about it. Similarly, Joe stays repressed and silent and cannot emancipate himself from the oppressive structures of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. Danny goes over to see him and, as in the goodbye scene discussed above, Joe asks: "Why'd you come here, Danny?" (01:49:49-53). Danny explains: "I don't know. Just – Guess I just wanted you to know that – I really did love you. Maybe I still do." (01:49:54-01:50:09). But Joe has moved on as well: "Danny, I'm married. […] I'm going to have a baby. I don't know what it was that we had. […] Danny, whatever we – I'm not like you. If I'd known that you'd hold onto it like this, I – I just think you should leave" (01:50:10-56). Even though Danny points to the fact that their affair "maybe […] was kind of like love" (01:50:30-32) and Joe is at the verge of tears while he rejects Danny again, he is still not able to break the covenant of silence. When they shake hands, however, Joe suddenly pulls Danny towards him and hugs him passionately and they both cry in their embrace. Despite the fact that Joe cannot and will not freely live out his homosexual desires, this small sign of returned affection attests the feelings Joe might have had for Danny and, even if in silence, acknowledges their connection. At least, he thereby offers Danny closure in the aftermath of their abruptly ended relationship. Yet again, their encounter emphasises the contrast between rural and urban spaces. While Joe is concerned about his reputation, his career, and family, for Danny exploring his homosexuality opened new possibilities to shape his identity. The depiction of Danny's relationship with Joe and his father as well as the police violence in New York shows how deeply engrained the institutionalised and personal discrimination, rampant homophobia and violent oppression of homosexuals was into all social structures during that time. In contrast to Joe, however, who does not emancipate himself from the oppressive structures, and in opposition to his

father, Danny is no longer willing to be silent and subordinate himself to the rules of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity.

Homophobia and the Religious Right

Much like Danny, Harvey Milk and other LGBTQIAN+ characters in *Milk* experience institutional and personal discrimination. Even though some heterosexual characters, especially Mayor George Moscone (Victor Garber), are depicted as important supportive allies of gay rights activism, the film emphasises the different levels of discrimination against homosexuals. Enhancing the ways in which heteronormative oppression is connected to homophobia, the film draws an almost exclusively negative picture of heteronormative society. Next to the main plot of the film depicting Harvey Milk's activism, the film covers the fate of several other homosexuals that cannot escape the repression they have to live in. They are discriminated against by friends, neighbours, and even members of their own families and suffer from the institutional oppression emanating from the police who is at times violent and at others ignorant. Moreover, the impact of the initiatives to repeal gay rights taken by Anita Bryant (not represented by an actress) and John Briggs (Denis O'Hare) of the religious right is shown. Thus, the portrayal of these individuals serves to expose how repressive the heteronormative society of the 1970s in America acted upon all levels of the homosexual characters' lives and thereby highlights the intractability of the situation for many homosexuals.

Despite the fact that San Francisco was to become "'the international gay Mecca'" (Shilts 57) at the time, the homosexuals living there were by far not free from discrimination and resentment. On screen, Milk recounts: "Even though the Castro was firmly our area by 1973, it wasn't safe for us" (00:17:30-35). Being a former Irish Catholic working-class neighbourhood, many of the original residents of the Castro highly disapproved of the migration of homosexuals from across the country to the area. This is made explicit by a scene in which Milk and Smith meet their neighbour, liquor shop-owner Mr. McConnely (Steven Wiig). He presumably belongs to the Catholic residents of the Castro and his facial expression shows that he obviously disapproves of Milk and his partner standing arm in arm and kissing in front of the camera shop they had just opened. He even retrieves a handkerchief from his pocket and starts wiping his hands thoroughly

with a disgusted expression on his face after having shaken Milk's hand. When the latter asks him about the possibility to join the merchants' association constituted by the shops around the Castro, he warns them: "If you open those doors, the Merchants Association will have the police pull your license" (00:10:36-41) and explains to his baffled neighbours: "There's man's law and there's God's law in this neighbourhood and in this city" (00:10:44-49). Their neighbour's remark infuriates Milk and he exclaims: "For God's sake, it's San Francisco!" (00:12:16-18), to which Smith simply answers: "Yeah. Well, it's just like any other city in the country. They hate us. Real surprise" (00:12:18-22). Thus, the scene accentuates the homophobic social atmosphere prevailing in the US during that time. Not only was homosexuality socially frowned upon, but could also have severe consequences for some individuals, as other incidences of homophobia and personal discrimination against homosexuals in the film show. Often, homophobic acts are executed by direct family members of the homosexual. One example is the fate of Paul from Minnesota (Daniel Landroche) who calls Milk shortly after the latter has lost his third election. Even though he calls at an unpropitious moment, he catches Milk's attention by telling him: "Sir, I think I'm gonna kill myself" (00:39:19-20) and explains: "My folks are gonna take me to this place tomorrow. A hospital. To fix me" (00:39:34-40). Milk advises him to "just get on a bus to the nearest biggest city. Los Angeles or New York or San Francisco, it doesn't matter, you just leave. And you are not sick, and you are not wrong, and God does not hate you. Just leave" (00:39:45-59). While Milk still speaks to Paul, dramatic music sets in and the camera zooms out from a close-up of the boy's face to a medium long shot, revealing that he is confined to a wheelchair. "I can't. I can't walk, sir" (00:40:02-05), Paul answers with a trembling voice. Thereupon, the connection is disrupted, and Milk runs out to prevent a riot in the streets of the Castro. Even though it is a rather short scene, it has a highly symbolic character for the whole film. In general, Paul's character serves to demonstrate the tragedy as well as the hopelessness for many homosexuals in the U.S. during the 1970s. And more specifically, the example of Paul from Minnesota foreshadows a later event that is depicted in the film: in 1978 the religious right succeeded in overturning an ordinance that banned discrimination against homosexuals in St. Paul, Minnesota (cf. 01:28:59-01:29:02). Thus, Paul becomes a symbol for all LGBTQIAN+ individuals that were severely threatened by the new laws and regulations

enforced by the religious right, while his inability to walk represents the intractability of the situation for many homosexuals.[32]

Furthermore, Paul's fate emphasises that homosexuals do not simply "have an issue" (01:27:54-55), as Milk's colleague and later assassin Dan White (Josh Brolin) calls it in a dispute with Milk, but that the discrimination against them seriously interferes with all levels of their lives. Obviously very drunk, White explains to Milk: "I've realized you just gotta get out there. You gotta be noticed, 'cause that's how it all works. You have an issue. See, that's your advantage. That's an advantage" (01:27:47-01:28:01). This infuriates Milk and he tries to explain to White that homosexuals do not simply 'have an issue,' but are severely threatened by heteronormative society and homophobia:

> Dan, it's more than an issue. [...] I have had four relationships in my life. And three of them have tried to commit suicide. And that's my fault, because I kept them hidden and quiet, because I was closeted and weak. [...] This is not just jobs or issues; this is our lives we're fighting for! (01:28:01-28)

Seemingly oblivious if not ignorant of what Milk has just said, White adds: "I've learned a lot from you, Harvey. [...] I'm going to get my picture in the papers, too. [...] I've got my own issues" (01:28:30-42), thereby hinting at his own precarious financial situation due to the fact that he holds the office as City Supervisor. While White is still slurring incoherently, their argument is interrupted by Milk's new boyfriend Jack Lira (Diego Luna). Having Lira appear at this moment in the film serves as another important foreshadowing device for the plot, hinting at the fact that Lira will commit suicide later in the film.

Lira's suicide has been linked to his inability to accept Milk's tight work schedule. According to film critic Roger Ebert, he is "neurotically jealous of Milk's political life" (Ebert n. pag.) and "what ultimately kills the fragile Lira is not leaving the closet but being neglected by the workaholic Milk, on whom he is too dependent for his self-esteem" (Alegre 189). However,

32 Screenwriter Black claims that the scene with Paul is based on a true story and he "felt not showing how dramatically Harvey was affecting kids outside of San Francisco seemed grossly negligent" (Black and van Sant 107). However, the representation of Paul as hopeless in his wheelchair then saved by Milk's message and inspired to achieve previously unimagined mobility (migration to LA) is a common trope in representations of people with disabilities in film that has been critisised by disability studies.

this interpretation does not do justice to Lira's fate and reflects only one part of his personality. Rather, quite similar to Paul, Lira was rejected by his own family: "My father beat me when he found out. So, that's why I came here" (00:53:11-16). This traumatic experience affected his whole life and accounts for his unstable psyche. Thus, the "missing love from an abusive father was an early clue to unravelling Lira's inner life" (Lamble n. pag.). His portrayal in the film represents the prevalent struggle of many homosexuals to come to terms with the discrepancy between their own homosexual identity and the heteronormative structures their social reality predetermines – not only in public but also in the most private realm, in front of their families. The filmic representation of shame for not fitting into the heteronormative world indicates that Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' also works within the homosexual and constitutes "an enormous potential counterforce […] having to be restrained" (A. Rich 640). The social shaming and marginalisation, especially by close associates such as family members, can have serious effects on the homosexual's mental health, which was the case for Lira and is, as the film suggests, the main reason for his suicide.

Furthermore, the marginalisation and shaming of homosexuals on the personal level is closely connected to the structural level of heteronormativity. Homophobia was still firmly integrated into the political environment of the 1970s, which led to the persistence of institutional discrimination against homosexuals. The depiction of police harassment against LGBTQIAN+ characters and the religious right's success in repealing anti-discrimination laws in many U.S. states at the end of the 1970s emphasises "that even America's largest and most vocal gay community was being systematically persecuted by homophobic police" (Ebert n. pag.). Authentic footage of police officers violently fighting back protesting activists in gay rights marches, spontaneous resistances, or bar raids, are interwoven into to the plot, drawing a bleak but simultaneously authentic picture of the situation at the time. In one of these clips a man recounts in an interview just after a police raid on a gay bar:

> Through the door there, the front door there, was just an explosion of police charging in here. I ran into the bathroom to hide with some other people. All we could hear was screaming and crunching and smashing. It was frankly the most terrifying experience I've had in my life. (00:16:27-49)

Serving as an authenticity device, these scenes intensify the credibility of the homophobic atmosphere surrounding gays living in San Francisco. This is also conveyed by re-enacted scenes that show police brutality in the film. Milk describes the random harassments by police officers as follows: "The police hated us. […] They would come in and attack us and beat us just for fun" (00:13:16-23). He also mentions their unfounded charges when announcing his first candidacy for City Supervisor: "A week ago, police officers came into our area with badges covered. They sent 14 of our people to hospitals and to jail. The charges, 'Blocking the sidewalk.' Let's let our tax money go to our protection, not our persecution" (00:18:45-00:19:10). Thus, he criticises the extensive issue that, instead of protecting the LGBTQIAN+ community from discrimination, the police were often the source of harassment. This is unveiled when Milk receives an anonymous death note during the registration period of his first candidacy: "Harvey Milk will have a dream journey and nightmare to hell, a night of horror. You will be stabbed and have your genitals, cock, balls and prick cut off" (00:22:55-00:23:06). Seemingly anxious, Smith immediately wants to call the police (cf. 00:23:07-09), but Milk discourages him from doing so by saying: "They probably wrote it" (00:23:09-12) and pins the death note to the fridge door as a reminder of institutional discrimination and the importance of their political action.

Next to police harassment, Milk finds fault with the lack of protection gays obtain from police authorities. Since the police refused to help them when getting attacked, they had to develop their own system of protection: "We would have to wear whistles on our necks or in our pockets. And if you ever heard a whistle, you would run to help" (00:17:35-42). However, this system does not always work. Having received the message of a young man having been murdered, Milk rushes to the crime scene to find out what had happened. A police officer tells Milk that the victim was stabbed in the streets when walking home with his lover:

> *Officer:* 'Fruit was walking home with his trick when he got jumped. Name's Robert Hillsborough. Did you know him?'
> *Milk:* 'He used to come into my shop. Are there any witnesses?'
> *Officer:* 'Yeah, just the trick, Jerry Taylor.'
> *Milk:* 'Jerry's not his trick, he's his lover.'
> *Officer:* 'Hey, call it what you will. All we know is he's our only witness and he said he can't identify the attackers.'

> *Milk:* 'Oh, you'd have a dozen witnesses if they thought you boys had any real interest in protecting them.' (00:17:43-00:18:08)

Not only is the police officer apparently indifferent to the crime, but he also talks disrespectfully about the dead, using the derogatory term 'fruit.' He even wrongfully accuses Hillsborough of having prostituted himself by assuming that his boyfriend was his trick. Deputizing for the homophobic perspective prevalent within the police forces during that time, the officer seems to regard homosexuals as criminals whose murderers are not liable to prosecution. The composition of the scene emphasises the feeling of oppression and defencelessness Milk experiences. When he arrives at the crime scene, the camera zooms in on a silver whistle lying on the street, besmeared with blood. The body of the whistle functions like a mirror in which the reflection of Milk and the officer is shown while they talk about the crime. By focusing on the whistle, the film uses it as a symbol for the feeling of insecurity and for the fact that no one, not even the police, helped them when in danger. The film stages the scene as the crucial moment for Milk to eventually decide to run for the candidacy as City Supervisor. He uses the incidence to raise awareness for the prevailing discriminatory legal situation for homosexuals in his first speech: "Robert Hillsborough was murdered for walking home with his long-time partner. He was stabbed 15 times. The last words he heard were: 'Faggot, faggot, faggot.' [...] Why do they not bring these murderers to justice?" (00:27:51-00:28:17).

Besides the systematic persecution and institutional discrimination by homophobic police, homosexuals were seriously threatened by a strong political opposition to their legal equality during the 1970s. A group that steadily gained popularity at the time was the religious right, which succeeded to repeal gay rights ordinances and thereby reinforced institutionalised discrimination against homosexuals. Emphasising their blatant homophobia, *Milk* draws a negative picture of the religious right movement and its infamous leaders Anita Bryant and Josh Briggs. This effect is achieved by showing the dramatic scale their action has for those affected by the rescindment of gay rights and by negatively portraying Bryant and Briggs, exposing their argumentation as preposterous and strongly informed by homophobia, and finally by celebrating the victory of forestalling the introduction of Proposition 6. Unveiling the massive impact the repeal of anti-discriminatory laws had on the homosexuals' lives, the film shows the gay community being anxious about the outcome of the campaigns the religious right initiated. Milk recounts: "We were really, genuinely

frightened by Proposition 6. And with Anita and Briggs gaining strength, we were very pessimistic. We didn't think that there was any chance that we could beat it" (01:35:42-56). The campaigns of the religious rights are almost exclusively represented by authentic video material of news reports, making the threat for homosexuals seem very authentic and realistic. Since the historical documents show how bleak the situation for homosexuals in fact was, the film does not have to exaggerate the situation by restaging it. Additionally, the news coverage about Bryant's campaigns is often framed by scenes of protest, showing people who are outraged by the repeal of anti-discriminatory laws. The news that her first campaign in Dade County, Florida was overwhelmingly successful, for instance, is presented by cutting in a TV report. The report shows a diagram with the preliminary statistics of the referendum, revealing that "[t]he vote is going now 18,930 for repeal. 8,869 against repeal" (00:38:25-33) and, as the reporter explains, thereby making it "very definitely that the ordinance is going to be repealed. With this margin, it's over" (00:38:36-48). Celebrating her victory, Bryant explains in an interview: "Tonight, the laws of God and the cultural values of men have been vindicated. The people of Dade County, the normal majority, have said, 'Enough, enough, enough'" (00:38:44-00:39:01). In stark contrast to that, a group supporting the LGBTQIAN+ community is shown marching the streets of the Castro and shouting angry paroles including "Civil rights or civil war! Gay rights now!" (01:18:57-01:19:04) and "Anita, you're a liar! We'll set your hair on fire!" (01:19:33 – 01:19:40). The film shows the anti-gay movement gaining more and more strength, as more cities and counties across the country follow Bryant's lead. Again, news coverage is cut in to inform the viewers that also voters in St. Paul, Minnesota (cf. 01:15:13-25), Eugene, Oregon (cf. 01:15:25-33), and Wichita, Kansas (cf. 01:15:45-01:16:01) have repealed laws protecting homosexuals against discrimination, and again the film frames these news reports with LGBTQIAN+ communities fiercely protesting the campaigns. Emphasising that anti-discriminatory laws are protecting civil rights that should not be liable to repeal, Cleve Jones (Emile Hirsch) makes clear to his fellow protestors that "Anita Bryant's coming for you!" (00:40:57-00:41:02). In his opinion, Bryant's campaigns are direct attacks on their community: "Tomorrow morning, the gay citizens of Wichita will also awaken to find that they too have lost their civil rights! You have whistles. You use them when we have been attacked. Tonight, we have been attacked" (01:17:43-59). Yet again, the film thereby also emphasises the whistle in its symbolism for the threat to LGBTQIAN+ individuals.

Eventually, the anxiety portrayed by the film gains its peak when Briggs starts Proposition 6 in California. The campaign is directed against Milk's newly passed gay rights ordinance. Milk's campaign manager Anne Kronenberg (Alison Pill) explains: "State Senator John Briggs is Anita Bryant's go-to guy in California for sure. He filed a petition for a state-wide referendum to fire all gay teachers and anyone who supports them" (01:05:02-13). As in other incidences, the film has Milk comment on the so called 'Briggs Initiative,' highlighting the fact that those laws the religious right calls for are seriously impairing homosexual lives:

> Well, I think what you saw, you saw some very committed opposition to his proposition. And I think that's only going to continue. People have very emotional reactions to this. This is their lives that are on the line. (01:06:44-55)

By showing the gays' outrage as well as their anxiety, the film justifies the fight against Bryant, Briggs, and the religious right, since they are directly attacking the gays' civil rights by reinstalling institutionalised discrimination against them.

Another mechanism to foster a negative perception of the religious right is the depiction of the campaign leaders Bryant and Briggs as the evil antagonists of the gay rights activists, while at the same time stultifying their arguments and exposing the irrationality of their homophobia. The first impression the viewer gets of Anita Bryant is a news report in which she is shown singing "Yes, Jesus Loves me" (00:34:53-00:35:01). While a slow melody is playing, the camera zooms from a close up of her face to a long shot, revealing that she is in a church, singing with a choir of ministrants. Thereby, the film highlights her religious affiliations. While the following clips present Bryant in several TV appearances, a voiceover introduces her as having become "America's most controversial woman overnight" (00:35:01-21). Already in the first clip, she makes her opinion on homosexuality very clear:

> *News reporter:* 'There are those people who say that it is kind of an eye for an eye law that is at work here, that you're denying homosexuals many of their rights as well.'
> *Bryant:* 'You see, if homosexuals are allowed their civil rights, then so would prostitutes or thieves or anyone else. God puts it in a category of morality.'

> *News reporter:* 'Doesn't that necessarily follow that you believe that homosexuality ought to be illegal?'
> *Bryant:* 'I do believe that it should be illegal.' (00:35:43-00:36:05)

While Bryant is speaking, the camera slowly zooms out, showing the TV set running the news report and then tilts to the left to capture Milk who is watching the interview with concern. The extract from the interview shows that Bryant puts homosexuals on the same moral level as criminals, thus exposing her narrow-minded belief system grounded in the untenable assumption that LGBTQIAN+ rights threaten the morals and values of America's society. Likewise, Briggs is presented as drawing clear connections between criminals and homosexuals. In his first appearance on screen, he explains the aim of his campaign as follows:

> My proposition promises to protect our children from these gay perverts and – these gay perverts and paedophiles who recruit our children to participate in their deviant lifestyle, including the ones who do it in our public schools. The time has come for us to root them out. (01:05:48-01:06:09)

Their negative portrayal will be kept up throughout the rest of the film. Without mentioning the reasons for their uncompromising crusade against homosexuals, the film offers only a rather one-dimensional portrayal of them, thereby emphasising the absurdity of their argumentation that homosexuality can be objectively considered degenerate and unnatural. Since the film does not exaggerate Bryant's character by restaging her actions, the viewer gets the impression of having direct access to her preposterous reasoning. Not only does this serve as another authenticity device but exposes both Bryant's and Briggs' arguments as reflecting "the irrational fear of difference, the narrow, intolerant, and bigoted outlook, the commitment to tradition rather than growth and maturity" (Wickberg 55) residing in homophobia. They are presented as untenable, even ridiculous at times. For instance, the absurdity of Bryant's views become obvious in the following quote: "I love homosexuals, if you can believe that. I love them enough to tell them the truth" (01:42:02-07). As the film shows, her sole aim is to fan fears about the deteriorating state of morals in U.S. society: "I believe that more than ever before, that there are evil forces round about us, even perhaps disguised as something good, that would want to tear down the very foundation, the family unit, that holds America together" (00:35:21-43). Both statements show how irrational her argument is, since

the reason that two men cannot (biologically) reproduce does of course not mean that they plan to destroy the traditional family model of heterosexual marriage. Alluding to this view, however, Bryant exposes her campaigns as premised on homophobia, revealing that she cannot explain her fears rationally and therefore needs to find reasons why homosexuals seek to destroy American society. Whenever their arguments fail in credibility, both Bryant and Briggs use God as their last resort. On a campaign visit to San Francisco, Briggs is confronted by an angry mob of teachers in fear of losing their jobs. To escape the situation, he deflects: "You know what, you can argue with me; you cannot argue with God" (01:06:22-28).

In contrast to Bryant, Briggs is played by an actor. In the TV appearances and political debates that are restaged in the film, Milk constantly succeeds in stultifying him by overriding his arguments. In a public debate between the two taking place in a school in San Francisco, Briggs claims:

> You know, Mr. Milk, we don't allow people who practice bestiality to teach our children [...] gay people don't have any children of their own. And if they don't recruit our children, they'd all just die away. You know? And that's why they're all so interested in becoming teachers, because they want to encourage our children to join them. (01:34:38-01:35:10)

Fully aware of the absurd homophobic view this statement displays, Milk easily responds:

> And how do you teach homosexuality? Is it like French? I was born of heterosexual parents, taught by heterosexual teachers in a fiercely heterosexual society. So why then am I homosexual? And no offense meant, but if it were true that children mimicked their teachers, we'd have a hell of a lot more nuns running around. (01:35:12-34)

While the homophile audience applauds Milk for this witty remark, Briggs is booed for his statements which are equally informed by the irrationality of homophobia as Bryant's. In a debate in front of a highly homophobic audience, however, Milk does not have such an easy game. He is even warned not to go there. Nevertheless, he is presented as much more confident while Briggs becomes more and more startled and even flounders when talking:

> *Milk:* In your statements here and all these newspapers and tonight, you say that child molestation is not an issue. If it's not an issue, why do you put out literature that hammers it home? Why do you play on this myth

> and fear? [...] You yourself had said that there's more molestation in the heterosexual group, so why not get rid of the heterosexual teachers?
> *Briggs:* We are not talking about homosex – About child molestation. Nearly – The fact is, nearly 95 percent of the people are heterosexual, so, if we took the heterosexuals out and the homosexuals out, you know what, we'd have no teachers.
> *Milk:* We'd have no teachers, no more molestation. So, you're saying that the percentage of the population is equal to the percentage of child molestation?
> *Briggs:* No, no, no, I'm not saying that, no.
> *Milk:* That's what you just said.
> *Briggs:* No, no, no. I'm not saying that at all. I am saying that we can't prevent child molestation, so let's just cut our odds down by taking out the homosexuals and keeping in the heterosexual groups. (01:36:22-01:37:31)

Albeit Briggs' reasoning does not make much sense, the audience is on his side. Instead of stultifying Milk, the scene emphasises the irrationality of homophobia. The followers of the religious right do not seem to care about the integrity of their leaders' statements as long as they are taking radical steps against homosexual equality.

Eventually, the gay rights activists successfully fight back Proposition 6 in a notable victory, even though preliminary opinion polls had predicted "75% for approval state-wide" (01:08:13-15). During the count of votes after the referendum, the young boy Paul who wanted to commit suicide earlier in the film, surprisingly calls Milk from Los Angeles:

> *Paul:* When I saw that you won the Supervisor seat, I got a friend to put me on a bus to LA.
> *Milk:* Who do you know in Los Angeles?
> *Paul:* Nobody. [...] I just didn't want to die anymore. I met your friend Don down here. I turned 18 and I voted today against Prop 6. I don't think I'd be alive right now if it weren't for you.
> *Milk:* No, you did that all by yourself, Paul.
> *Paul:* Don wanted me to congratulate you on what he says looks like a big win for us tonight. Congratulations, Mr. Milk. (01:43:31-01:44:03).

It is not before Paul's last remark that Milk realises that Proposition 6, against all odds, hasn't come through. The symbolism of this scene ties in with the earlier scene about Paul. He and his wheelchair came to stand for

the hopelessness and intractability of the discriminating legal situation for homosexuals which the religious right had re-established in many states. The fact that Paul is still alive and managed to get to L.A. despite being confined to a wheelchair, symbolises that there is a reason for hope for all the LGBTQIAN+ individuals still suffering from discrimination and inequality. Milk, noticeably touched by Paul's call and exhilarated by the enormous victory they just achieved, tries to communicate this notion of hopefulness and inspiration in his victory speech after the referendum:

> Tonight, it's become clear to everyone out there that they do know one of us, and now that they do, they can see that we're not sick. They can feel that we are not wrong. And they know that there must be, that there should be a place for us in this great country, in this world. A message of hope has been sent to all those young people, to all of those who've been afraid by this wave of hate, to all of those who have lost their homes, lost their hometowns. Tonight, we are clear that there is a place for us! My brothers and sisters, we can come home again! (01:45:31-01:46:22)

At least in California, Bryant and Briggs have lost their ruthless battle against equality for homosexuals. The negative depiction of the personal discrimination, police harassment, and the political activism of the religious right and its followers, the insidious dangers for homosexuals on all levels of their lives are emphasised, and homophobia is exposed as irrational, untenable, absurd, and even ridiculous at times.

3.2 Coming Out: The Emancipation of the Central Characters

Ginsberg's Artistic Breakthrough

This chapter seeks to analyse in how far *Howl* enacts Ginsberg's emancipation from the heteronormative structures that have been examined in chapter 3.1. As has been argued before, the film draws a close connection between literature and sexuality, and I will delineate what mechanisms it applies to stage the liberating process of transgressing moral and artistic boundaries. Thereby, the poem "Howl" gains special importance in structuring the narrative of the film. Not only does it serve as a connecting device for the historic figures and events the film portrays and the film as a work of art, but it is accredited a deeper metaphorical meaning: it symbolises Ginsberg's fight for the social acceptance of homosexuality. Thereby, it

is central for his struggle with his sexuality and with the heteronormative structures that strongly suppress him and eventually the poem becomes a symbol for the transgression of heteronormativity. Thus, I will examine the individual process by which Ginsberg finally reaches a stage of affirmation, no longer feeling ashamed for his homosexuality and making his sexuality visible through the performance of the poem.

Ginsberg's acceptance and affirmation of his homosexuality is expressed in the way the poem "Howl" is depicted by his recounts in the interview sequence and flashbacks shot in black-and-white that intersperse his narration. In the film, the people who influence his poetic work and thus also the process to accept his sexuality, especially his father (not represented by an actor), Jack Kerouac (Todd Rotondi), Neil Cassady (Jon Prescott), and Carl Solomon (not represented by an actor), each symbolising a different form of repression that Ginsberg must overcome. Apart from his father and Solomon, Kerouac and Cassady shaped both his identity as a poet and a homosexual, as they taught him a more open approach to his own feelings. After years of struggling, Ginsberg meets Peter Orlovsky (Aaron Tveit) who initiates the final step of self-acceptance and with whom he is eventually able to live out his homosexuality. The film connects Ginsberg's emancipation to the process of writing and performing "Howl," highlighting the poems symbolism for the transgression of heteronormativity and eventually also Ginsberg's coming out.

To begin with, Allen Ginsberg's father Louis Ginsberg, being a poet himself, strongly influenced his son's writing. Ginsberg recalls his own writing merely as a mimicry of his father's: "I started writing poetry because I was a dope and because my father wrote poetry. So, I began writing rhymes like him" (00:09:56-00:10:07). The imitation of his father's writing, however, soon began to put pressure on the young poet and he remembers feeling ashamed for his writing, even anxious:

> The beginning of the fear for me was: what would my father think of something that I would write? At the time writing 'Howl' I assumed that when writing it that it was not something that would be published because I didn't want my daddy to see what was in there. So, I assumed, it wouldn't be published therefore I could write anything that I wanted to. (00:03:43-00:04:05)

This means that Ginsberg could only write "Howl" once he felt that he was unattainable from his father's judgement.[33] Ginsberg had to emancipate himself from his predecessor who predetermines the normative structures of the surrounding influencing the young poet's identity. These structures are supposedly heteronormative, as he seems to be struggling with his sexual interests within his family. He explains: "Until I was 18, I was a virgin. I was unable to reach out to anybody's body, to reach out to desire. I just felt chained" (00:10:29-42). Thus, he felt ashamed for his homosexuality in front of his parents and did not admit his homosexual identity to anyone before going to Columbia College.

It is at the university where he meets Jack Kerouac, "the first person [he] really opened up to and said: 'I'm a homosexual'" (00:12:17-29). Through the friendship with Kerouac, Ginsberg takes the first step towards accepting and affirming his sexuality, that is rejecting his father's poetic form: "And then I realised that if I actually admitted and confessed the secret tenderness of my soul, he [Jack] would understand nakedly who I was. So that sincere talk replaced the earlier imitative rhyming that I was doing for my father" (00:11:55-00:12:16). Moreover, it implies the refusal to imitate his father's heterosexuality. The connection between poetry and sexuality that the film plays with becomes very clear, as his father symbolises a traditional adherence to norms concerning both poetic form and sexuality. In contrast, Kerouac teaches him that, to become a good poet, he has to be honest and express his feelings: "Jack gave me permission to open up. He is a romantic poet and he taught me that writing is personal, that it comes from the writer's own person, his body, his breathing rhythm, his actual talk" (00:10:52-00:11:12). Nevertheless, even though Kerouac showed him "that people would never really be shocked by an expression of feeling" (00:12:34-41), he can only turn to him in terms of poetic expression. Ginsberg feels that he "needed to express [his] feelings to him, but he [Kerouac] didn't want to hear them" (00:11:19-24). Ultimately, Kerouac is not sexually interested in Ginsberg and their relationship remains platonic.

Kerouac's and Ginsberg's mutual friend Neil Cassady, in contrast, is presented as being less interested in Ginsberg's poetry than in a physical connection. While Kerouac influences his intellectual development, Cas-

33 His experiences can be described with Harold Bloom's notion of 'anxiety of influence.' To examine Bloom's rather complex argument in *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry* (1973) in great detail would take me too far afield at this point, but, to become a 'strong poet' in Bloom's sense, the succeeding poet hast to 'kill,' i.e. abandon, his predecessor to emancipate himself from his influence (cf. Bloom 8-10).

sady, who celebrates a hobo lifestyle and enjoys unconventional sexual encounters, influences Ginsberg's physical development in the process of accepting his homosexuality. While traveling throughout the U.S., they begin a love affair, even though Cassady "had 6000 girls around the country keeping him very busy" (00:28:52-57). Ginsberg remembers it as the first time for him to have sexual contact with another person:

> One day Neil and I were thrown together in bed at four a.m., by circumstance, with no place else to go and no place else to sleep. And I remember being a little scared and not quite sure what to do. I sort of like turned over, stiff in my body and got to the edge of the bed. And he saw that I was shy. At the time I was still scared of feelings in other persons. So he put his arm around me and pulled me and put my head on his breast and gave me love, actually. (00:29:32-00:30:21)

The journey with Cassady is a time of utopian enjoyment of their homosexuality and they manage to ignore the heteronormative structures. The literal freedom experienced by travelling mirrors their sexual liberation. When their journey ends, however, they bitterly realise that they cannot escape the oppressive structures of conformity that soon afflict them again. Cassady ends their relationship in a letter:

> I really don't know how much I can be satisfied to love you, I mean bodily. You know, I sometimes dislike pricks and men and before you had consciously forced myself to be homosexual. You meant so much to me. And now I feel I was forcing a desire for you bodily as a compensation to you, for all you were giving me. Allen, this is straight. What I truly want is to live with you from September to June, have an apartment, a girl, go to college, see all and do all and become truly straight. (00:31:32-00:32:23)

Even though Cassady seems to be very experimental with his sexuality, he eventually wants to lead a 'normal,' 'truly straight' life and, thus, cannot or does not want to entirely break out of the oppressive heteronormative structures.

Another character that influences Ginsberg's development and reveals the repressive heteronormative structures is his friend Carl Solomon. While in the asylum where they met, they "spent months sitting around and asking [them]selves whether the authority of the doctors and their sense of reality was right for [them] or whether [they] were right or, you know, what was happening" (00:24:04-19). They try to challenge the structures

that oppress them which are so firmly embedded into society that even they are uncertain who is in fact right or wrong. Moreover, Ginsberg explains that "Carl was having problems because he was receiving shock therapy" (00:24:20-25). Hence, the oppression takes place on a physical level. Fortunately, Ginsberg was spared this treatment: "I didn't have any of that, no medication, no shock, 'cause I promised the doctor that I would be heterosexual and that's how I got out" (00:24:25-31). Leaving behind Solomon, Ginsberg manages to escape the asylum but only because he promises to conform to the heteronorm. Solomon, in contrast, is further oppressed, thereby becoming the character that symbolises the sad peak of heteronormative oppression.

Even though Ginsberg eventually gets out, the time in the asylum also constitutes a deep cut in his life:

> After I got out, I had a period of fear, […] I was questioning my sense of reality versus the social sense that was being imposed on me. It was a position that many people in the hospital came out with, a total self-rejection, a rejection of their own universe – lip service, actually, to supposedly acceptable social patterns. (00:27:53-00:28:31)

The heteronormative mechanisms of shaming work within Ginsberg, who calls his own identity into question since his homosexuality either alienates him from himself or marginalises him from society. By depicting the influence of the people in his life, Ginsberg's self-liberation only glimmers through in the film. It is not before he meets his lifelong partner Peter Orlovsky that the final step of his self-acceptance, symbolised by the poem "Howl," is eventually initiated: "It was when I met Peter that everything changed for me. It was as if the heavens showered with gold. Finally, somebody loved me like I loved them. The first time, I felt accepted in my life, completely" (00:44:46-00:45:11). Thus, Orlovsky is presented as the final piece in the puzzle constituting Ginsberg's acceptance of his identity. With him, Ginsberg gradually realises that he no longer wants to hide his homosexuality in public either. Despite having finally found love and acceptance in his relationship and being able to live out his homosexuality in private, he is unhappy about the public repression of their happiness through the omnipresent structures of heteronormativity. While working for an advertising company, he designs an advertisement billboard for a toothpaste called *Pepsodent* (cf. 00:43:43-00:44:10). For an advertisement poster, he arranges a picture which shows a happy family of mother, father, and children with cards showing the words "Bright!",

"White!", "Wholesome!" and "Alluring!". Through the combination of these words with the picture of the family, the scene suggests that being heterosexual, implying being married and having children, is perceived as the normal and thus only way to be wholesome and alluring. This scene is intermitted by a scene that depicts Ginsberg and Orlovsky at home (cf. 00:44:20-00:45:22), directly contrasting the heteronormative family with their homosexual partnership. While there is in fact no difference between the family life and the homosexual couple, the latter is not allowed to live out their relationship in public. At this point, Ginsberg still cannot dislodge the influence of the heteronormative structures: "I was still trying to act normal. I was afraid I was crazy. I was sure that I was supposed to be heterosexual and that something was wrong with me" (00:45:25-38). The incongruence of his public and his private life causes a fragmentation of his identity that leads to a writer's block. For this reason, he seeks advice from his psychiatrist Dr. Hicks (not represented by an actor) who finally induces the watershed moment in Ginsberg's life when he asks him what he really desires to do. Ginsberg answers honestly: "All I would really like to do is just quit all this and get a small room with Peter and devote myself to my writing. Contemplation, and fucking, and smoking pot. And doing whatever I wanted" (00:45:43- 00:46:08). Dr. Hicks gets him thinking by simply asking: "And why don't you do it then?" (00:46:09-12). This dialogue segues into a scene showing Ginsberg and Orlovsky howling in the streets of San Francisco (cf. 00:47:31-35). This represents the final act of shamelessly making their sexuality visible and also audible – they are howling themselves free, which figuratively connects the sexual liberation back to the literary expression in "Howl." Thus, having been influenced in various ways, Ginsberg finally realises that the heteronormative structures oppressing him constituted "a fear trap – illusory!" (00:46:39-45) and is finally able to overcome his shame to make his sexuality visible.

The film suggests that the way leading out of oppression for Ginsberg is his literary expression. He realises that he cannot exclude parts of his identity from his creativity:

> The problem when it comes to literature is that there are many writers who have pre-conceived ideas about what literature is supposed to be. But their ideas seem to preclude everything that makes the most interesting in conversation. Their faggishness, their solitude, their neuroses, their goofiness, their campiness, or, even their masculinity at times. (00:15:26-52)

The final step of affirmation is pursued through the writing and the performance of the poem "Howl." Ginsberg speaks about poetry almost as if it was a sexual orgasm:

> Poetry generally is a rhythmic articulation of feeling. And the feeling is an impulse that begins inside, like a sexual impulse, you know. Almost as definite as that. It's a feeling that begins in your stomach and rises up through the breast and out of the mouth and ears, right. And it comes forth as a croon or a groan or sigh. So, if you're trying to put words to that by looking around you and trying to describe what's making you sigh, just sigh in words. You simply articulate what you're feeling. (00:38:28-00:39:11)

Poetry is described here as an expression of one's emotions that slowly builds up, similar to a sexual act, and finally ends in an orgasm-like literary release that reveals the poet's innermost being. The ability to express his feelings in his poems and thus reveal his homosexuality becomes a liberating act of self-acceptance for Ginsberg. Expressing his homosexuality through literature, hence, constitutes Ginsberg's statute of being absolutely frank with his feelings. He is convinced that poets will achieve total truth once they behave and write the same way in public as in private: "The trick is to break down that distinction, […] to write the same way that you are" (00:16:48-00:17:10). Therefore, he argues that the "poem is misinterpreted as a promotion of homosexuality. Actually, it's more like a promotion of frankness, about any subject" (01:10:30-42). He goes on to explain:

> When a few people are frank about homosexuality in public, it breaks the ice. Then people are free to be frank about anything and that's socially useful. Homosexuality is a condition, and because it alienated me, or set me apart from the beginning, it served as a catalyst for self-examination, or a detailed realization of my environment and the reasons why everyone else is different and why I am different. (01:10:56-00:11:46)

Making homosexuality visible becomes a social practice to challenge and eventually also subvert heteronormativity, and it even serves as a role model for all kinds of social transgressions. This highlights the enormous impact the poem had on American culture. The Beat poets' "open speech – in an age of denial! – has something to do with the fact that today national debate includes, as legitimate topics for discussion, things such as homosexuality […] Unashamed personal revelation in literature, particularly in the 1950s, risked violating not only critical canons, but legal statutes" (Ball 97). Con-

sequently, "'Howl' has emerged into the mainstream of literature as an agent of change" (Shinder xviii) that "queers gay masculinity of the American 1940s and 50s and prompts us to a more complex public discourse today" (van Engen 13). In the film, Ginsberg's frankness as well as his shamelessness is depicted as a mechanism to challenge heteronormativity:

> The crucial moment of breakthrough came when I realized how funny it would be, in the middle of a long poem, if I said: 'Who let themselves be fucked in the ass and screamed with joy!' instead of 'and screamed with pain.' That's the contradiction in that line. American audience would expect it to be pain and, instead, it's 'screamed with joy!' Which is really true. Absolutely, 100%. And, again, I have a line, like 'Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love.' It was an acknowledgement of the basic reality of homosexual joy. That was a breakthrough in the sense of public statements about feelings, emotions, attitudes, you know, that I wouldn't have wanted my father or my family to see, and that I even hesitated to make public. (01:09:18-01:10:22)

These are also lines that were recited in court in order to argue for the ban of the poem. Thus, Ginsberg realises that he is truer to himself when he is not conforming to the norm and does not answer the expectations of the 1950s American belief system. Referring to the line about the motorcyclists, too, Dagmar van Engen usefully points out, that "[b]y taking delight in what was at that time a disgusting, painful, and punishable sex act, this line twists and reinterprets the gay male identities available at the time" (van Engen 8). She explains that the characters of the poem aim to

> reiterate a perverse image of gay masculinity in a way that is no longer painful and perverse but can provide delight. They queer homophobic constructions of gay identity through refiguring the painful and perverse as an instance of pleasure. If men can find pleasure in anal sex, then the normative claims of the 'old' masculinity lose their grip and gender can change. (van Engen 8)

Furthermore, the "various modes of Epstein's and Friedman's *Howl* [...] become multiple ways of interpreting the 'bookmovie' that is Ginsberg's poem" (Marcus 46). The film emphasises freedom of speech as an important American value yet again and suggests that there is never just one perspective on any topic by showing various interpretations of the poem. These range from the assessment of conservative literary critics who deny

the poem any literary merit, to comments of the author himself and the adaption of the poem in form of animation and staged reading. The variety of possible interpretations that the film presents might be interpreted as symbolising the variety of possible forms of living, or in short as a variety of sexualities that do not conform to heteronormative structures. Through the way it presents Ginsberg's individual negotiation of his sexual identity, the film becomes an homage to "Howl," seeking to perpetuate the poem's subversive potential.

Danny's Coming Of Age

Danny's story of emancipation is a story of coming of age – the whole plot of the film revolves around this topic in a Bildungsroman-like fashion.[34] From defying his parents, struggling with unrequited love to finding his place in his peer group, Danny traverses the typical stages of coming-of-age: "friends, fitting in, and finding love" (Uytdewilligen 1). Moreover, the film explicitly references other typical coming of age films, especially *The Wizard of Oz*. This could be seen as a metafictional note to the coming-of-age theme of *Stonewall*. Ryan Uytdewilligen summarises the plot of *The Wizard of Oz* as follows:

> The fantastical journey follows young Kansas girl Dorothy getting whisked away by a cyclone into a magical land full of munchkins and witches. But poor Dorothy just yearns to go home and sets off to see the one person who can make it so, the wonderful Wizard of Oz. Along the way, she meets a variety of friends who help her and each other achieve an inner goal they never knew they had all along. If you look at the lessons (Courage, compassion, knowledge, even homesickness), they are all stereotypical desires, troubles and tribulations of youth during the coming-of-age period. (Uytdewilligen 30)

Not only was *The Wizard of Oz* a typical coming of age film, but the quintessential cult film for the LGBTQIAN+ youth. Due to its camp style, the film was popularly queered and turned Judy Garland into an icon of LGBTQIAN+

34 In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, the Bildungsroman is defined as follows: "The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity; this process usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (Abrams & Harpham 255).

youth culture. Since the protagonist Dorothy accepted those who are different, the expression 'friend of Dorothy' "has long been a code for being gay" (Frank n. pag.) and her "journey from Kansas to Oz mirrored many gay men's desires to escape the black-and-white limitations of small town life [...] for big, colorful cities filled with quirky, gender-bending characters who would welcome them" (Frank n. pag.). The same holds true for Danny, who is also suddenly uprooted from his home and transferred to a different world where he meets a variety of characters that help him on his way. Moreover, Ray assumes that Danny is from Kansas as well. Thus, *The Wizard of Oz* seems like the fantasy version of Danny's journey to emancipation and, by interspersing references to this film, *Stonewall* connects the coming-of-age theme with coming out. Analysing Danny's "recognition of [his] identity and role in the world" (Abrams & Harpham 255), this chapter seeks to outline how the film enacts the young protagonist's coming of age as his coming out. Accordingly, the following paragraphs will focus on the traditional themes of coming of age: the defiance of the parents' rules, unrequited teenage love, and peer group affiliation. Not only does Danny get expelled from high school after his love affair with a classmate is found out, but is also socially frowned upon and dismissed by his parents. Because of that he flees to New York – a place where he finds his peers and is finally able to emancipate himself from the oppressive structures upheld by heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. This is portrayed along the lines of Danny straddling of gay liberation: he is torn between rebellion and assimilation and negotiates his coming-of-age in between these dichotomous scale points. These are symbolised by Ray and his gang of street kids versus Trevor (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a member of the Mattachine Society and Danny's lover for a short period of time. While Ray and the others often disobey laws and regulations, Trevor tries to keep Danny out of trouble and holds the assimilationist opinion that homosexual rights should be fought for by blending into the heterosexual norm.

The plot sets in, similar to other coming of age narratives, when Danny gets thrown out of his parents' house, after his father discovers Danny's affair with his class-mate. Therefore, the connection of coming-of-age and coming out is made explicit from the beginning of the film. Being the main representative of hegemonic masculinity, his father and his rules are the first authorities that Danny has to emancipate himself from. On the one hand, the scene when he defies his father's rules by being silent and not letting degrade him further is also the moment when the process of emancipation sets in. On the other hand, this moment is initiated by his

classmates, who outed Danny.Therefore it is not started by himself but rather by the repressive social structures surrounding him. One of the first flashbacks shows his outing and thus the moment that sets the whole plot of the film in motion. When he is in the car having oral sex with his lover Joe, two of Joe's friends sneak up to them, thinking Joe is in the car with his girlfriend. When they open the driver's door to spring a trick on Joe, they catch Danny in the act of fellatio. Completely taken off guard, Joe slams the door and drives off with screeching tires. His friends remain behind, looking at each other in shock: "What was that?" (00:25:01-02). The next day, Danny encounters them at school. They stare at him contemptuously while he is walking down the corridor, eventually finding the word 'faggot' sprayed on his locker – the truth has been revealed (cf. 00:29:01-52). The whole scene is very suspenseful with slow piano music emphasising the menacing scenario for Danny. Even though this part is missing from the plot, they must have reported the sexual encounter between Danny and Joe. Not showing how and who they told what they saw emphasises the fact that the oppression of homosexuals is not an individual act of discrimination but structurally engrained into heteronormative society. The stereotypical slur Danny finds on his locker is an insult that operates as a mechanism of heteronormative control. Besides silencing, making his homosexuality hyper-visible is used to keep Danny in his place. This shows that it is not safe for Danny to be outed here and since he did not initiate the outing himself, it is not an act of emancipation but rather another form of oppression by heteronormative society. Thus, the real process of emancipation does not set in until he leaves home.

As has already been discussed at length, Danny refuses to follow his father's rules since this would mean to bid for his father's help. Danny is not willing to do that and rather leaves home than accepting the disgrace of asking the oppressor for help and thereby having a part of his identity taken away from him. This depiction is also typical for coming-of-age plotlines: Danny dissociates himself from his parents, his hometown, and his friends and, hence, from the heteronormative and religious background he came from to find his own place and his role in the world. Danny's leave is depicted as devastating for his mother (Andrea Frankle) and sister, since especially the latter does not want Danny to go (00:32:22-00:33:44). After the dispute with his father, his mother awaits him with tears in her eyes (cf. 00:32:43-46). He storms upstairs to find his suitcase packed, assumingly by his mother. The depiction of his mother and sister stresses the point that the oppression of homosexuality is deeply inscribed in the heteronormative

system that is upheld by patriarchy. Stereotypically, it is the father that symbolises this form of oppression while women are oppressed just as much and incapable of acting against heteronormativity. Thus, his mother and sister are forced to be complicit with heteronormativity and cannot protect him from the rule of hegemonic masculinity. Even if Danny's individual act of dissociation is still quite passive, not accepting the oppression anymore is the first step in his journey to emancipation.

Another typical part of coming-of-age plots and, thus, relevant for Danny's coming out, is unrequited teenage love. During the plot of the film, Danny gathers several experiences with unrequited love. The first one is of course the affair with his classmate Joe. While Danny is more of a loner, who is perceived as "just weird" (00:21:12-13) by their other classmates, Joe is popular at school and in his football team, has a girlfriend and seems to get along with everybody. He is Mr. Winters' favourite player on the football team. No one is suspicious of him not being 'normal' – he is credibly passing as heterosexual. Moreover, Joe refuses to accept his homosexuality as an identity. When he and Danny meet on an empty farm to have sex in Joe's car, Danny addresses the documentary on homosexuality they were shown at school earlier the same day: "That fucking film!" (00:21:58-00:22:01). To cheer up the mood, Joe tries to make a joke about it: "Yep, they were creepy looking men. Half the fucking faculty look like those guys" (00:22:02-07). Thereby, he degrades homosexuals to the cliché of older paedophile men who would assault high school boys like them. Even more so, the way he uses the pronoun 'they' others them and makes clear that Joe himself does not belong to this group of 'creeps.' Danny, on the contrary, is more concerned by the assertions the film made about homosexuality, since he thinks he and Joe belong to the group of homosexuals: "Joe, don't be stupid. They meant it for us. At least, he [Mr. Winters] meant it for me. He even dragged poor Sheriff Goodwin along. I'm telling you, he's on to us" (00:22:08-18). Joe does not seem interested in this kind of conversation with Danny and starts kissing him and initiating oral sex, when Danny asks him: "Do you think we're sick?" (00:22:36-38). Again, Joe is not willing to discuss his feelings and tries to downplay their affair: "It's just nothing. It's not anything. Cool it. We're just fooling around. Sarah won't do anything, and you don't even have a girlfriend" (00:22:38-51). But Danny does not want to give in yet and even reveals his true feelings for Joe: "It's more than that. I just – I really like you, Joe" (00:22:52-55). This, however, infuriates Joe: "Don't fucking say that. This is just for now. We're not faggots" (00:22:59-00:23:03). Joe, who wants to fit

in with heteronormativity and thus acts according to the gender role hegemonic masculinity assigns him, rejects Danny's expression of his emotions and thereby their homosexuality. In contrast, Danny starts to see his homosexuality as an identity and not as an act of normative transgression. In line with Foucault's theory about the "implantation of perversions" (Foucault *Sexuality* 37), both Danny and Joe have internalised the oppressive structures of heteronormativity. However, these structures induce different emotions in them. Drawing on Sedgwick's definition of shame, I submit that Joe feels guilty for what he does; Danny, in contrast, feels ashamed for what he is (Sedgwick 'Queer Performativity' 51). This difference leads Joe to detach himself from his homosexuality, while Danny can no longer accept the oppression, because he perceives his sexuality as an identity trait. Thereby, as Sedgwick has pointed out, shame is on the one hand "a permanent, structuring fact of identity" (Sedgwick 'Queer Performativity' 61), but on the other hand "has its own powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities" (Sedgwick 'Queer Performativity' 61). Thus, this also marks the possibility for subversion: once Danny has defined his identity in connection to his shame, he is now able to fight for his rights by way of no longer accepting the shaming. Joe's denial of his homosexuality moreover leads to a denial of their relationship. In the act of betraying Danny by lying about their affair and blaming Danny for having taken advantage of him, Joe has pushed Danny further into the direction of emancipation. In contrast to Mr. Winters, who symbolises the oppression that is put on Danny from without, Joe comes to stand for the oppression that works inside the homosexual himself. Since Joe has turned against him, also this form of oppression has turned against Danny and he can no longer maintain his self-delusion. He thus needs to break with Joe and leave his home, because his emancipation would not be possible without disposing of his internalised oppression.

After he has left his hometown, Danny needs to find his group of peers and eventually his "identity and role in the world" (Abrams & Harpham 255). The film depicts this in his oscillation between queer rebellion represented by Ray and the gang of queer street youths and assimilation represented by Trevor and the Mattachine Society. Arriving in New York, Danny immediately goes to Greenwich Village and walks down Christopher Street, an area where gays settled during the 1960s. He seems amazed by the open display of homosexuality, when he sees a couple leaned at a car and holding hands as he walks down the street and enters a diner to have breakfast (00:01:47-00:02:00). While he is sitting at the counter, a

TV set in the background broadcasts the Apollo 10 space mission and the moderator announces the successful landing of the astronauts: "Colonel Tom Stafford, Commanders John Young and Eugene Cernan appear to be in excellent condition after their splashdown in the Pacific today, where they were picked up by the USS Princeton" (00:02:18-31). This could be seen as a cinematic technique to set the timeframe of the plot. The black-and-white images and the broadcast of this specific space mission dates the scene clearly at the end of the 1960s (the Apollo 10 mission ended on May 26, 1969). Taken as a metaphor for Danny's situation, however, the TV broadcast obtains another meaning in foreshadowing the plot that is about to unfold. Like the astronaut, Danny has finally landed at a place where he belongs now that he arrived in Christopher Street. After a short encounter with a trans* person (Queen Tooey), the street youth Ray enters the diner, starts a conversation with Danny and directly addresses his background. He assumes that Danny comes from a pea farm in Kansas and that his father is a preacher, but he also knows that Danny has not voluntarily left home:

> *Ray:* I already got you all figured out, okay? [...] Let's see, grew up in Kansas, right? On like a pea farm, or whatever, kissing goats. And your daddy was the preacher, but secretly a little whoopsie, right? And Mama probably baked apple pies and wrote your name in your underwear with tiny thread. [...] Once you realized what you really were, you had to run away from home to find your ass, and quick.
> *Danny:* And what am I?
> *Ray:* Well, you certainly didn't come to Christopher Street for the pizza.
> Danny: I didn't run away from home. Kicked out.
> *Ray:* Hey look, run away, kicked out – all that really matters is now you're here, right? And you don't know what is what. Welcome to New York and keep up.
> (00:05:35-00:06:01)

The conversation unsettles Danny at first, but it immediately conveys a sense of mutual understanding and thus belonging. Ray then introduces Danny to the group of street youths: "Danny, meet my little ladies of the night. Queen Conga, straight off the boat from some godforsaken island. And this Beatle groupie over here, that's Quiet Paul. And the chicken bone is Little Lee. [...] And this pathetic creature is Orphan Annie" (00:06:07-36). From the beginning on, the street youths are depicted as rebellious. They are a group of queers with diverse backgrounds, from

white lower-class to Latin and African American, who are homeless and earn their living by prostitution. When Annie compares Danny with a boy named Justin, who seems to have been Ray's lover but disappeared, Ray attacks Annie with a broken bottle: "Don't you fucking talk about Justin, you little bitch" (00:06:45-49). Danny seems intimidated by this sudden outburst of aggression and is about to leave when Bob Kohler (Patrick Garrow), an older homosexual and friend of the group, interferes to de-escalates the situation. This first encounter shows how rough their life on the streets is. Due to his midwestern, white, middle-class background, Danny seems to be way better off than the others, but by including him to the group, the film suggests that they are all the same, no matter where they are from. They all landed on the streets because of their sexual identity and, hence, have made the same or at least similar experiences.

However, Danny's set of values does not fit the morally reprehensive behaviour of the street youths. They are stealing, shoplifting, and show no respect for authorities. After his initiation to the group, Danny immediately gets to know their criminal side and does not seem to approve of it. Queen Conga, one of the gang members that especially acts against Danny's moral values, steals a hat by throwing in a shop's window with a brick and just takes the hat. Danny is horrified while the others are only amused about this criminal act (cf. 00:07:53-00:08:01). Conga poses with the hat and the others cheer her on, leading to a campy presentation of their group, who has a theme song: "We are the baddest girls, we wear our hair in curls. We wear no underwear, we show out pubic hair" (00:08:10-20). The people passing them are shocked by such an open display of queerness. Danny seems equally shocked, if not disgusted. When the police are called to the scene, the gang runs away laughing (00:08:21-26). Moreover, they steal food from the supermarket in the Village after they just escaped the police (cf. 00:08:29-59). Even though Dany does not approve of these acts of delinquency, he seems to relax when they sit together and share the stolen food. He is amused by their effeminate manner while they are talking about their idols Judy Garland, the protagonist of *The Wizard of Oz*, and Barbara Streisand (00:09:03-26). Later in the plot, Ray smuggles him into the cramped hostel room they share at times, but he hesitates to enter the room, shocked by the sight of the filthy room with around ten people sleeping on the floor (00:25:46-00:26:34). This sight clashes with his middle-class background. Clearly, his set of morals and his lived reality differs from theirs to a great extent

Due to their different set of moral values, Danny soon turns his back on his new group of friends, seeking more adequate role models. Ray's counterpart on the side of the assimilationists is Trevor, an older homosexual Danny meets on his first night at the Stonewall Inn. Trevor is a member of the Mattachine Society, an organisation formed in the 1950s to improve the rights of homosexuals in legal ways. In opposition to the street youths, they are portrayed by the film as respectable, white, middle-class males – 'the normal gays,' as Steven Seidman would call them (cf. Seidman *Closet* 14) – who want to assimilate to dominant heteronormative society. Like Ray, Trevor seems to know all about Danny right after they met: "you don't seem like the type of guy who wants to hang out at the Stonewall and turn tricks with your girlfriends" (00:59:24-31). Even more so, Trevor immediately thinks he knows what is best for Danny and that he does not "have the right friends" (00:59:43-45). He invites him to the meetings of the Mattachine Society, "an organization that fights for gay rights. Take Stonewall, for example. You know it's run by crooks who rip off and poison gay men. We deserve the right to own our own clubs" (00:48:06-23). Since Danny already questions the street youth's lifestyle, he decides to join the Mattachine meeting. When he arrives, an older white man in a suit is standing on the stage under a banner with the slogan "Gay is Good" on it. He explains the Society's agenda:

> More and more, we are seeing that homosexuals will no longer tolerate discrimination. People will recognize that gay is good. The American people will start to understand that firing us for being gay is just plain wrong. And that is the day we are working for. But we have to fight in a peaceful way and resist the radicalism that I see starting to take hold in some quarters. Don't forget, wearing a suit and tie will make them understand you're just like them. That's how we win. (01:04:05-43)

The man on stage is Frank Kameny (Arthur Holden) who co-founded the Mattachine Society in Washington D.C. (cf. Carter 38) after he lost his job as an astronomer with the U.S. government (cf. Carter 21). He famously coined the slogan "Gay is Good" (cf. Carter 255), which is shown on a banner behind him. The film reflects the Mattachine Society's educational approach towards the heterosexual majority of American society as well as their assimilationist views. Central to the assimilationist position was the endeavour "to win acceptance by the dominant culture" (Warner *Trouble* 50). Portraying Kameny as rather conservative in his suit and tie, the film seems to take a critical stance towards this agenda. When Danny seeks

advice from Kameny and asks him about possible career options at NASA, Kameny disenchants Danny's dreams of becoming an astronomer: "You can't be a homosexual and work for the government. You're gonna have to find something else. We're not there yet, I'm sad to say. Sorry. But we will be. It's a long journey, a long road" (01:05:14-32). Upset by this discouraging outlook, Danny storms out of the room but is stopped by Trevor. He tries to explain that it will take some time until equality will be achieved and that "[p]eople like Frank Kameny have been fighting this battle for years. No one has done as much for our cause as he has" (01:05:47-56"). Danny, however, is furious:

> What, by wearing a suit and tie? Come on. Is that really what you want? What, to blend in? I mean, we are different, right? You know, I'm beginning to realize just how different we really are. […] You know, I'm getting to really feel like – like I just want to break something, you know? (01:05:57-01:06:09)

After his experiences with Joe and his family, Danny does not want to blend in anymore and suppress his homosexuality. While the assimilationists highlight their similarity to heteronormative society in order to be accepted, he emphasises their difference. Moreover, they insist on peaceful protest whereas Danny is so infuriated that he wants 'to break something' and thereby indicates his disposition to rebellion. Not only does this reflect one of the central issues between the position of assimilation versus rebellion that is in many ways still prevailing in political debates about sexual equality today, but it also shows Danny's youthfully rebellious attitude that is typical for a coming-of-age story. The older generation represented by Kameny and Trevor doubt that "rioting [i]s an effective or desirable form of protest" (Stein 10). By depicting Danny's anger at these "politics of respectability" (Stein 10), the film tries to convey the impression that he does not share this view.

Seemingly contradictive to that, however, he accepts Trevor's invitation to dinner and begins a love affair with him. He even moves in with Trevor right after their first night spent together, takes up a job at the local mini market to pay rent, attends evening classes to graduate from high school and, thereby, assimilates himself. This upsets his friends, especially Ray. When Danny picks up his belongings to move in with Trevor, Ray confronts him with his irritation:

> Let me tell you something. The difference between us – I don't have a choice. And you just wanted a little time slumming in the streets. What, so tricking was just an adventure in your story? I know what this is. This is a little funny story about Ray. And Lee, and Paul, and Cong, and Annie! Funny fucking story, isn't it? (01:12:24-48)

Here, the film reveals the main criticism of assimilation: the "claim to normality justifies social integration but only for normal-looking and acting gays and lesbians" (Seidman *Closet* 14) which creates a "hierarchy of respectability" (Warner *Trouble* 49). Through Ray's condemnation of Danny's behaviour, the film seems to denounce assimilationist strategies. At the same time, Danny sympathises with this lifestyle, even though he misses his friends (cf. 01:17:50-58). The film thereby "unintentionally captures its own deceit" (Jung n. pag.): "The street life was always a kind of drag for Danny, who, actually, would be attending Columbia in the fall. He hustles just long enough to work through his identity and start the movement before going off to live the good life in Morningside Heights" (Jung n. pag.).[35]

Moreover, it shows the instability of Danny's identity, since he is still torn between assimilation and rebellion. Eventually, his inner conflict culminates with the climax of the film. Coming home one night after work, Trevor seems to have gone out. Danny decides to go to the Stonewall and finds his lover dancing closely with another young man to the same song he had put on for Danny the night they met. Danny watches them as they eventually even kiss. This infuriates Danny who rushes off to pack up his things in Trevor's apartment and is about to leave New York when he is suddenly kidnapped. After an action-like rescue by Ray, he is happily reunited with his friends at the Stonewall Inn, where soon the riots will begin. During another unannounced raid, a crowd of patrons, bystanders and passers-by gathers in front of the bar. As the police violently arrests some of the gays, the crowd grows more and more angry and some of them start shouting and booing, some of them even pushing the officers who try to arrest patrons. Suddenly, Conga retrieves a brick from his bag: "I've had it with this bullshit" (01:35:14-16). Danny is immediately alarmed and tries to keep Conga from throwing the brick: "No, you're gonna make it worse!" (01:35:17-18). But Conga is furious and replies fiery:

35 Morningside Heights is the neighbourhood in Manhattan where the Columbia University campus is located and is considered a white island in the midst of urban districts inhabited by people of colour.

> How can it get worse? This was the mob, and those fucking money grabbing pigs! A society hating and oppressing us for being gay! And still want to be polite? 'Cause it's gonna take away your precious fucking scholarship if you get arrested? Come on! (01:35:18-33)

Right in this moment, Trevor enters the scene and sees Danny with the brick in his hand: "Danny? What are you doing? No, that's not the way, Danny" (01:35:36-44). Trevor, of all people, wanting to stop Danny infuriates him to such an extent that he eventually throws the brick with a loud roar. Followed by the eyes of everyone present, the brick darts through the air and smashes one of the windows of the Stonewall Inn. Danny turns around and screams: "No, Trevor, it's the only way! Gay power! Come on!" (01:35:52-56). The crowd follows suit: chanting "Gay power" as well, they start throwing bottles and stones and attack the police officers, eventually pushing them inside the Stonewall. By this act of rebellion, Danny finally seems to have resolved his inner conflict and chosen his side. From being silenced to his forced coming out, from being called faggot to shouting 'Gay Power,' Danny's coming-of-age is brought full circle. Not only has he emancipated himself from the oppressive structures of heteronormative society, but also from the assimilationists. Thereby, the film seems to take a critical stance towards assimilation. However, by telling Danny's and not Ray's story, it does in fact exactly what it seems to criticise. Making the beginning of one of the most important events in the history of the gay liberation movement – as the film wants the viewer to believe – a personal matter of a white, cis-gendered, middle-class male, marginalises those who were the actual initiators of the riots. Even though the film tries to criticise assimilation by having the central character turn against this position, it establishes an assimilationist undercurrent in its meaning that is fully revealed in the formal-aesthetic composition of the film.

Milk's Self-Empowerment

Before his career as a gay rights activist and politician, Milk was a closeted homosexual. This is made obvious in one of the first scenes of the film, when he picks up his later partner Scott Smith (James Franco) in a dimly lit subway station (cf. 00:04:24-00:05:59). The symbolism could not be more blatant at this point: the homosexual part of Milk's identity literally has to stay underground and cannot be lived out on the surface. For this

reason, he issues a warning to Smith after they have had sex in Milk's apartment:

> You can't respond to just every strange man that picks you up on a subway platform. It's too dangerous. […] The New York Police are the toughest. They're arrogant and they're everywhere. I'll show you all the cruising spots, but you have to be very careful, little Scotty-san. […] I'm just discreet. I know a lot of people. If they see me, I could lose my job. (00:06:44-00:07:14)

Even though the comment is meant ironic and playful, it also shows Milk's initial fear of severe discrimination and creates an atmosphere of anxiety that will prevail throughout most parts of the film. This impression is enhanced by the scenes that precede the "subway station encounter" (Scott *Freedom Fighter* n. pag.). As Anthony O. Scott points out in his film review,

> we have already seen real-life news video of the aftermath of Milk's assassination, as well as grainy photographs of gay men being rounded up by the police. These images don't spoil the intimacy between Harvey […] and Scott Smith […]. Rather, the constant risk of harassment, humiliation and violence is the defining context of that intimacy. (Scott *Freedom Fighter* n. pag.)

At the same time, the scene indicates that change is about to come, not only for him but for the whole gay minority. Amused by Milk's seemingly outdated closetedness, Smith points out "Oh, you're one of those. Well, I think you need to find a new scene. Some new friends" (00:07:14-22). Then the plot jumps to their relocation to San Francisco together, where a gay neighbourhood is just about to be established: "the place where everyone wanted to go. To drop out, to fall in love. […] The new place for us refugees was a little Irish Catholic neighbourhood in the Eureka Valley, six blocks square, the Castro" (00:08:12-38). Calling the gays who moved to San Francisco "young people who were looking for a home away from home" (00:14:01-04), Milk generates a comparison with 'refugees.' The phrase emphasises the feeling of being uprooted and that "there is no place in this great country for them, no place in this world" (00:44:04-11). Having finally left the closet, Milk stresses the importance for homosexuals to be out and proud and it will become his major weapon against the Briggs Initiative. The following paragraphs will focus on the positive depiction of the social practice of coming/ being out of the closet on the screen by showing how the film draws a negative picture of the less radical 'gay establishment' of

San Francisco who prefer to blend in with heteronormative structures and by discussing the liberating effects visibility and shamelessness have for the gays' lives as they reverse the heteronormative mechanisms of marginalisation and shaming.

"The meaning of the closet – of being in or and out – changed dramatically with the gay liberation movement" (Valocchi 760) and became a controversial issue amongst different groups of homosexuals during the 1970s. Fearing severe social and, in part, legal punishment, many "activists were very sensitive to the potential risks of coming out which included job loss, family rejection, and public stigma" (Fetner 19). However, it is also "bound up with the whole process whereby persons come to identify themselves as homosexual, and recognize thereby their position as part of a stigmatized and half-hidden minority" (Altmann 118). This process of self-identification, hence, helped to create a social group who became able to resist their oppression. Thus, coming out became a "radical political act" (Fetner 19-20) of self-empowerment, since it

> was both a political act of resistance and an important personal transformation. Incorporating the feminist critique that the personal is political, liberation ideology held that to reveal one's true self to the outside world is the first step in creating a world that values sexual difference. (Fetner 19)

Contrasting the views of the more reserved 'gay establishment,' represented by David Goodstein (Zvi Howard Rosenman), owner of the gay magazine *The Advocate*, and his partner Rick Stokes (Stephen Spinella), and Milk's radical ideas about the political and social liberation of homosexuals, the film emphasises the divide running through the LGBTQIAN+ minority. When Milk runs for city supervisor the first time, Goodstein refuses to give Milk an endorsement in his magazine. He explains his decision as follows:

> I worked for a financial institution in New York. I was very discreet. One night I went to the Metropolitan Opera, II Trovatore, Verdi. I was sitting in a box, next to my lover. Someone spotted us. Next day I was fired. So, I decided to do something about it. Came out here to San Francisco, I bought *The Advocate*. I use my money and my influence in very subtle and quiet ways to do what I can. (00:24:04-29)

As the quote shows, Goodstein has made the experience of being outed, which had severe consequences for his career. For this reason, he decided to take a coveted role in gay liberation and thus, from inside the closet.

Milk's radical views and his openness about his sexuality, in contrast, discomfort Goodstein and Stokes. They fear that entering politics as an open homosexual would be going too far and that, thereby, they might lose their influence entirely. Thus, they advise Milk to scale down his expectations:

> *Milk:* We need one of our own in office.
> *Stokes:* Harvey, you can't demand acceptance overnight!
> *Milk:* Why not?
> *Goodstein:* The more 'out' you make us, the more you incite them. Harvey, step back and quiet down. (00:25:14-26)

This, however, infuriates Milk: "You're suggesting we should go back in the closet? Is that what you're saying? I spent more years in the closet than I care to remember. [...] And I'm not asking for anyone's acceptance. I don't have time" (00:25:26-39). The film communicates their different approaches to their own sexuality through the statements they make and emphasises their ideological alienation through the costume design in this scene. Goodstein and Stokes are both wearing suits and ties, accentuating their bourgeois attitudes. As Dustin Lance Black points out, "[t]hese two characters are a compression of most of the leadership of the gay movement and liberal establishment of the time" (Black and van Sant 106). In the portrayal of Milk, on the contrary, Black wanted "a modern audience to understand how radical [his] ideas were at the time" (Black and van Sant 106). Thus, he is shown in tight jeans and wearing a ponytail, illustrating his affiliation with the hippie movement. Moreover, Milk's young boyfriend Smith swims nakedly in the pool before joining them at the table. He sits there still stark naked, which seemingly unsettles Stokes who tries hard not to look at him. Goodstein's and Stokes' inhibitions and the nonchalance both Milk and Smith evince regarding their sexuality are thereby juxtaposed. For them, assimilation is the only viable tactic to forge gay rights, while Milk sees the self-empowering potential in being out and proud. Their assimilative attitude becomes even more obvious later in the film, when the threat posed by Proposition 6 makes Milk form an alliance with them and the democratic party establishment. Stokes and Goodstein have organised a meeting with the democratic congressman Phil Burton (Robert Chimento), whose party has designed a flyer against the Briggs Initiative reading "Proposition 6 is an affront to human rights. An invasion of the state into the private lives of California citizens" (01:08:33-39). Milk is bewildered that they try to oppose the threat of Proposition 6, "without a single mention of the word 'gay' on the entire flyer" (01:08:40-43). Reveal-

ing his restrained strategy once again, Goodstein emphasises: "By design, Harvey" (01:08:43-44) and Burton adds: "With the heat bearing down on your movement right now, we feel it's best to dodge the gay bullet. Go for the human rights angle" (01:08:46-52). Despite the formality of a political meeting such as this, Milk gives vent to his anger about this strategy, which results in using explicit slang: "maybe we should just roll over and make it easier for Briggs to fuck us in the ass" (01:08:24-27). Making his opinion of the flyer very clear, he adds: "People need to know who it is that's being affected. You need at least one old queer on this flyer. […] This is shit. This is shit and masturbation. It's just a coward's response to a dangerous threat" (01:08:52-01:09:06), while ostentatiously putting the flyer into the chimney fire. By giving a negative portrayal of the more moderate opinion that coming out could harm more than help, the film follows Milk in taking an unequivocal stand on this issue.

To emphasise this impression, the scene is visually juxtaposed to the subsequent one, showing Milk, his friends and other young activists gathering at Cleve Jones' place to discuss their strategy against the Briggs Initiative. In contrast to Goodstein and his peers who "don't want to change, they want to stay in the past" (01:09:35-37), as Jones complains, the young gays are, according to Milk, "organizers and fighters, not politicians" (01:09:23-27). This view suggests that the young activists really want to get out and actively fight for their rights, while members of the older generation, who are involved in politics, wish to remain in the closet. Surprised to find Smith at the gathering after their breakup, Milk says: "I thought you got out of politics" (01:12:32-35) to which Smith simply replies: "Politics. Not the movement" (01:12:35-38). Thereby, the film draws a line between politics and activism. The mise-en-scène in these two consecutive scenes emphasises this contrast in their approach. While the place where the politicians meet looks chic and bourgeois and they are all wearing suits and ties sitting in front of a fireplace, Jones' house is very crowded with people sitting on the floor, not wearing suits, but jeans and sweatshirts. Moreover, the shots are taken in low key lighting, underlining the subversive atmosphere. In this surrounding, Milk works up his courage to suggest a new idea for fighting Proposition 6:

> We have to let them know who we are. Everybody has to come out. Across the entire state, no matter where they live […] If we're going to beat Prop 6, we tell all of them to come out. Every gay lawyer, teacher, doctor, dog catcher. We have to leave the ghetto. We have to let all those

> people out there know that they know one of us. And if somebody doesn't want to step out of the closet, we open the door for them. (01:10:16-47)

Even amongst the young activists, this idea comes across as rather radical and they express their concerns. Jim Rivaldo (Brandon Boyce), for instance, points out the dangers of Milk's plan: "Harvey, that could be really, really dangerous. I mean, there's such a thing as a right to privacy" (01:10:52-56), while Smith interposes that they will not be able to convince all of California since "[t]he whole state isn't San Francisco" (01:10:48-51). Milk, however, sticks to his argument:

> I'm not saying this as a Supervisor, but privacy is the enemy. And if you want real political power, if that's what you want, try telling the truth for a change. All right? Starting here. If there's anyone in this room, right now, who hasn't told their families, their friends, their employers, do it now. […] They vote for us two to one. If they know, they know one of us. (01:11:01-43)

When Dick Pabich (Joseph Cross), one of the young activists, admits that his "dad doesn't know yet" (01:11:32-34), Milk urges him to come out and holds out a telephone to him. Even though he doesn't "think that's such a good idea," Dick agrees to call his dad. This leads Smith to think that Milk is going a step too far. On their way out after the meeting, he takes him aside asking him "What the hell was that in there? […] Those are kids in there. You're asking them to lose their families. […] That's fucking insane." (01:12:39-56). Moreover, he accuses him of being a hypocrite: "You were the biggest closet case in New York. You asked me and all your boyfriends to keep our traps shut. […] How many times did I have to listen to calls to Mom, where you denied my existence? And you want to be normal like anybody. More than anybody" (01:12:56-01:13:17). However, Milk has a different opinion: "If their families don't love them for who they are, who they really are, then they should lose them" (01:12:49-54). Seen from this perspective, it seems that Smith misconceives the fact that Milk does not want to adapt anymore to *pass as* normal, but to really *be* normal, which means to make the heteronormative society accept him the way he is, even if that means that he is losing beloved people. Furthermore, he wants to raise awareness for the circumstances that homosexuals are indeed already part of society despite being marginalised and "if straight people understood how many gays they already knew and accepted on a personal level, their abstract bigotry would be significantly undermined" (O'Hehir

n. pag.). Thus, in the campaign against the Briggs Initiative coming out becomes a powerful political strategy, which is why Milk insists: "What we need is exposure!" (01:20:39-41). Through this depiction, the film emphasises Milk's view that the social practice of coming out helps to make homosexuals visible and becomes a tool to transgress heteronormative structures. By this act of self-naming and, hence, self-empowerment LGBTQIAN+ individuals no longer accept the shaming heteronormative society is eager to impose on them because of their sexual and gendered identities. Since "[p]owerlessness is seen as part of the mechanism of invisibility" (Russo 129), visibility becomes a mechanism to "challenge the status quo" (Russo 129). Thus, the film seeks to paint a positive picture of homosexuals who "no longer sit quietly in the closet" (00:42:58-00:43:02). Following this perspective, Milk prompts gays to embrace the possibility to make their homosexuality publicly visible throughout the film.

Moreover, the film excludes the part of Milk's life in which he is still closeted. The plot sets in at the most important turning point in his life, when he, "[f]orty years old and [hasn't] done a thing [he's] proud of" (00:07:34-39), realised that he "need[s] a change" (00:07:25-27). Thus, the film suggests that his 'real life' begins once having decided to come out of the closet and embrace his homosexuality. This change is additionally emphasised by showing Milk's and Smith's move to San Francisco. Driving in their car, Milk seems to leave his old life behind entirely and is moving towards something new. Once settled in San Francisco, Milk develops a "burning desire to lead all gay Americans out of the closet" (Burns 318), realising that queer visibility is a powerful social weapon and will eventually help them to make a change. He explains to Smith, "[p]olitics is theatre. It doesn't matter so much about winning. You make a statement. You say, 'I'm here!' You get their attention" (00:17:14-22). Not only does the film suggest that gays who are out and proud get more attention, but it also shows the empowering and thus liberating effect this practice can have. The film portrays different levels of gay visibility, ranging from the exchanges of affection in public, the inclusion of authentic footage of celebrating gay men flogging the streets of the Castro during gay rights parades (00:12:55-00:13:16), to sex scenes between Milk and his partners Smith and Lira.

Besides visibility, the social practice of coming out evokes the notion of shamelessness. Since gay shame is a tool of social control employed by heteronormative structures within society (cf. Hotz-Davies 169), homosexuals who refuse to feel ashamed for what they are and make their homosexuality

visible actively defy to conform to the heteronorm and thus this form of social control. This is especially emphasised in the film when depicting the 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade. The scenes are a mix of restaged and archival footage (cf. 01:29:15-01:30:02). A crowd of around "375.000 – the largest assemblage of people that would meet in one place in San Francisco during the entire 1970s" (Shilts 263), is shown marching the city centre and waving banners with slogans like "Dade County means fight back", "Why Wichita?", or "I teach Spanish not sex" on them. Milk, who had recently been elected to the board of city supervisors, is shown amongst them. Based on an authentic photograph of him, he is depicted sitting on top of an open convertible car, waving a bouquet of flowers. He is wearing an equally expressive slogan on his T-shirt: "I'll never go back". Even though he has received an anonymous death threat right before the parade, reading: "You get the first bullet the minute you stand at the microphone" (01:30:06-09), he is not discouraged from taking an active part in the celebrations. Despite the efforts of his worried friends, he is not to be stopped from entering the stage to address the cheering crowd. The film quotes parts of a speech in which he "made a powerful appeal to closeted gays to come out to their families, friends and co-workers, so the straight world might stop demonizing an abstract idea" (Ebert n. pag.) at the Gay Freedom Day Parade in 1978:

> My name is Harvey Milk and I'm here to recruit you! I want to recruit you for the fight to preserve your democracy! Brothers and sisters, you must come out! Come out to your parents, come out to your friends, if indeed they are your friends. Come out to your neighbors, come out to your fellow workers. Once and for all, let's break down the myths and destroy the lies and distortions. For your sake, for their sake. For the sake of all the youngsters who've been scared by the votes from Dade to Eugene. (01:30:35-00:31:23).

Hence, coming out becomes a mechanism to transgress the heteronormative structures and ultimately also to fight for their rights. Milk

> wants to recruit them into the politics of democracy, to persuade them that the stigma and discrimination they are used to enduring quietly and even guiltily can be addressed by voting, by demonstrating, by claiming the share of power that is every citizen's birthright and responsibility. (Scott *Freedom Fighter* n. pag.)

As the film shows, this open display of their sexual liberation clearly offends the moral sensibilities of more conservative citizens of San Francisco. Pointing at the extent of nudity, and thus, at the shamelessness amongst the demonstrators, Supervisor White comments the parade in an interview as follows:

> Well, I see naked men walking around, naked women walking around, which doesn't bother me as far as my personal standards of nudity, but it's not proper. It wouldn't be allowed for any other parade in San Francisco, and it should not be allowed for the Gay Parade. (01:32:53-01:33:09)

While he is speaking, the crowd can still be heard in the background, cheering "Harvey, Harvey, Harvey!" (01:32:53-01:33:09), conveying the impression that White is the one in the marginalised position this time. The scene reveals that the opponents of gay equality are no longer liable to decide for the homosexuals what is 'proper' and what is not, since their shaming loses its power of social control. Through visibility and shamelessness, the failure to conform to the norm is turned into the conscious decision to "[n]ever blend in" (00:59:05-06). The film depicts the parade as the most obvious demonstration of gay pride, "a confident show of strength" (Shilts 263) and, hence, an achievement to transgress the heteronormative structures. Interestingly, White especially takes offense at the unfairness he claims to perceive between the treatment of the gay liberation parade and other parades in the city, instead of referring to the indecency of gays displaying their homosexuality openly in public. This portrayal reveals the difference between the representation of oppressive heteronormative structures and homophobia, and the portrayal of Milk's assassin White. Instead of presenting him as the clear-cut homophobic villain, the film seeks to scrutinise his motives for killing Milk by tracing his development from a rather sympathetic albeit unconfident character in the beginning to the murderer he becomes in the end. Thereby, the film unravels the complicated power structures working within the system of hegemonic masculinity. White's development becomes symbolic for the deep anxiety many men sense due to the evolvement of alternative forms of masculinity. Emancipation in this sense, is defined by a constant negotiation process between heterosexual and other forms masculinity, which try to shift power structures. Accordingly, Milk's emancipation is narrated along the line of the emancipation of the gay liberation movement and their empowerment. By insisting on the strategy of coming out of the closet, he appeals to

members of the gay community who might already be able to refuse to feel ashamed for what they are and make their homosexual identity publicly visible as a mechanism to eventually transgress the heteronormative structures and fight for their rights.

3.3 Between Authentication and Intimacy: Queer or Homonormative Gaze?

Exclusion in *Howl*

The formal-aesthetic composition of *Howl*, as Bruhn and Gjelsvik argue, "fits the transgressive political and sexual content of the poem" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349). As an experimental film that circulates between the genres of biopic and literary adaption, "an exploration of the relationship and transmutation between visual and verbal images" (Marcus 47) seems productive when analysing the gaze that the film establishes. In order to do so, I will focus on the narrative strand of Ginsberg's life presented in flashbacks marked as past events by their black-and-white colour scheme. Nonetheless, some examples from other narrative strands will also play an important role here, for instance when the animation is used to enhance certain aspects of Ginsberg's experiences. Therefore, I draw special attention to the symbolical use of eyes, glasses, cameras, photographs, windows, and mirrors which are typical stylistic devices for distortion the film makes use of. When examining the selected scenes, I presume that the characters' gazes within the film as well as the governance of the audiences' gazes has three effects which are closely connected to the question whether it is a queer, gay, or homonormative gaze and thus in how far homonormative structures might be enforced. First of all, the viewer is invited to identify with Ginsberg and perceives the events shown from his perspective. Secondly, Ginsberg's gaze in the film serves as a marker for his exclusion from heteronormative society, which is made very clear in the representation of (hetero)sexual intercourse. And thirdly, the gaze might also lead to the exclusion of women from the narrative.

The viewer is put alternately in the position of an observer or participant of the scenes (later the viewer is also taking on Ginsberg's perspective). Often reverse angle shots are used, resulting in the first effect of the gaze, namely a high degree of identification offered. The film begins with staging Ginsberg's first reading of the poem 'Howl' in San Francisco in 1956 and

the camera already establishes a close proximity between the poet, his audience on screen and the viewer watching the film (00:00:15-42). This effect is achieved by switching from a close up of Ginsberg's face to the faces in the audience to a medium long shot from within the audience, suggesting the viewer is sitting with the other members in the fictive audience listening to Ginsberg's reading. The intimacy the film thereby establishes matches the intimate revelation that the film grants the poem and thus introduces Ginsberg as the central character of the narrative. This is further enhanced by the first scene after the title sequence showing Ginsberg supposedly in his own home being asked questions by an interviewer off-screen. The viewer is at the same time observer but also part of the scene, again switching from an observing position next to the interviewer to a position that (almost) takes the perspective of the interviewer (00:02:53-00:04:04). The film suggests that the viewer is learning the whole truth by becoming one with the interviewer as Ginsberg recounts the story of his life. Furthermore, by the use of authenticity devices such as authentic newspaper articles (e.g. 00:01:43-00:02:29, 00:07:34-50), photographs (e.g. 00:25:17; 00:32:54-57) letters (e.g. 00:31:22-00:32:25) and video footage (e.g. 00:25:41-48, 00:21:59-00:22:19) of that time,[36] the film connotes historical accuracy – alluring the viewer into believing that this is how the 'real' Ginsberg perceived the events happening in his 'real' life. This effect is foregrounded in later interview sequences, when Ginsberg is lying on his couch (e.g. 00:17:45, 01:06:47). Again, the film creates a special intimacy with the viewer, "one that allows Ginsberg, on the brink of turning 30, to speak for himself – out of the past, directly to us" (B. R. Rich "Howl" n. pag.). These scenes are highly evocative of a psychoanalytical session, except that the analyst, who is supposed to sit behind the patient's head in classical psychoanalysis, is not to be seen. The reason for this seems to be that the viewer is still in the position of the interviewer/analyst who cannot be seen. At the same time this setup suggests an even closer scrutiny of Ginsberg's inner life, his thoughts, and feelings, as he would presumably tell his therapist the unadorned truth. Even more so, his narration is open to the analysis and interpretation of the viewer/analyst, who seeks to unearth hidden truths. This depiction is adding to the impression that the film seeks to build intimacy with the viewer to whom Ginsberg opens up for scrutiny.

36 Moreover, as Bruhn and Gjelsvik argue, this layering of different media indicates the superimposition of different levels of interpretation the film offers making it a palimpsest of meaning (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349).

As has been argued in the preceding chapters on *Howl*, the revelation of the artist's feelings and his coming out as homosexual is the film's idea of what Ginsberg tried to convey through his poetry.

In this sense, windows as presented in the film gain special symbolical importance as a narrative device: they illustrate a liminal space between inside and outside which can be read as a metaphor for the inside world of Ginsberg, his feelings or soul, and the outside world of reality (cf. Noll Brinkmann 10). One of the first shots that includes a window is the introduction of the animation. Ginsberg is shown sitting at his desk – typewriter in front of him – contemplatively turning his head towards the window which comes into view and shows the animated world of the poem outside (00:18:16-19). Through this depiction the film issues an invitation to participate in Ginsberg's writing process and breaks down the distinction between the illusionary world of literature and 'reality.' At the end of *Howl*, cut in with scenes showing the judge pronounce the sentence for the trial about the poem, the viewer is presented with several shots that show Ginsberg looking out of the window, excluding what he might see outside (1:07:07, 01:08:09, 01:08:13, 01:09:02, 1:09:06). As Christine Noll Brinkmann assumes, showing a character behind the window glass is an aesthetic method to emphasise the character's individual perception and suggests subjectivity (cf. Noll Brinkmann 11). Moreover, she interprets window shots as prompting the viewer to look behind the curtain and share the character's experience (cf. Noll Brinkmann 11). Consequently, the scene showing Ginsberg behind the window stirs the viewer's empathy for him while he awaits the outcome of the trial. This effect is reinforced by the last black-and-white shot that depicts Ginsberg's past and the process of coming out. After having finished writing the poem, he is looking into the mirror, gazing right into his own eyes, recognising himself (01:11:50-01:12:02). For Noll Brinkmann, the look into the mirror implies a very private moment for the character, who is duplicated for the viewer and split into a real and a surreal persona (cf. Noll Brinkmann 18). She concludes that the reflection in the mirror reveals the 'true' self of the character (cf. Noll Brinkmann 18). Having finished writing the poem, Ginsberg has not only revealed his 'true' identity to the viewer, which is emphasised by this final black-and-white mirror shot, but also opened a gay man's perspective on the world. He explains in one of the final interview scenes: "Homosexuality is a condition, and because it alienated me or set me apart from the beginning, it served as a catalyst for self-examination, or a detailed realization of my environment and the reasons why everyone

else is different and why I am different" (01:13:37-01:14:04). The alienation provided him with a perception of the world that seems to match the 'gay sensibility,' "coloured, shaped, directed and defined by gayness" (Babuscio 40).

Figure 1: Looking into the mirror (01:11:56)

Moreover, a gay sensibility is created by a cinematography that presents Ginsberg as an autodiegetic narrator. The viewer is invited to follow Ginsberg's gaze and what he sees from his individual gay perspective by use of point-of-view-shots. This method is applied in the black-and-white flashbacks to make the viewer receive the impression that he or she gets to know Ginsberg's story from his point of view and simultaneously provides another layer of possible identification with the protagonist. This is reinforced by scenes that show his unrequited love interest in (often heterosexual) men. As has already been pointed out, the first man he falls in love with is his friend Jack Kerouac, who is also the first person he comes out to as homosexual. Not only is this made visible on the content level, but also through the aesthetic composition of the film. Kerouac is introduced in a scene that shows both men dancing with women, presumably during a double date in their university dorm (00:10:14-17). While Kerouac seems happy and relaxed dancing with a blond woman, Ginsberg is rather stiff and nervous. Never once looking at the woman he is dancing with, he continuously glances at Kerouac who starts kissing his date after a while. One shot positions a close-up of Ginsberg and his dance partner in the front right corner of the frame and in focus, while Kerouac and his dance partner are in the back left corner and slightly blurred. Ginsberg turns away from his dance partner and looks over his shoulder at his friend, who does not

take notice of him at first (00:10:54). In the next shot, however, Ginsberg is not on-screen anymore and Kerouac, with his dance partner, takes centre presence in the frame. He in turn is now gazing right at Ginsberg, but then smiles and continues kissing the woman, whereas Ginsberg who reappears in the frame avoids kissing his dance partner, wriggling out of her embrace (00:11:02-11). The final shot of the scene shows all four asleep on a couch; Ginsberg takes little notice of his date, who lies at the left end of the couch on her own, while he is cuddled up with Kerouac, his head tenderly leaning on Kerouac's shoulder, who is at the same time holding the blond woman tightly in his arm on the other side (00:11:13-17). Even though there seems to be some affection that Kerouac holds for Ginsberg, he never requites Ginsberg's romantic feelings for him. In the next black-and-white scene that follows, they are sitting on a park bench and Ginsberg reads his poetry to Kerouac, desperately trying to get his attention and please him. However, Kerouac does not seem to be impressed (00:11:32-55). Since literary expression and sexuality are strongly connected in the film, Kerouac's ignorance of Ginsberg's poetry implies his sexual disinterest in Ginsberg. Parallel to the latter shot on the couch, the final shot of the park scenes shows Ginsberg looking enamoured at him, while Kerouac looks away (00:12:17).

The message that Ginsberg falls in love with the wrong men and his feelings are not requited is conveyed even stronger in the scenes with the second man he falls in love with: Neal Cassady. On his road trip with Cassady and his girlfriend, Ginsberg is shown taking a picture of the couple and asks them to kiss to get a good shot of them. Instead of making use of a point-of-view shot or eyeline match, the film here generates the viewer's identification with Ginsberg through mirroring. This means that the frame is composed in a way that the viewer is positioned directly opposite to the character he or she is supposed to identify with. First, the viewer is offered an extreme closeup of Cassady's and the woman's faces slightly blurred in the front and Ginsberg in the background but in focus, holding up the camera in between them (00:28:59). Then the camera zooms out until the viewer sees a long shot with Ginsberg standing in the middle of the frame, holding the camera ready to take a picture, while Cassady lifts his girlfriend to passionately kiss her. Watching his friends, Ginsberg lets the camera sink slowly, suddenly showing him gazing into the distance (00:28:59-00:29:32). This scene is symmetric to one of the following scenes depicting Ginsberg's and Cassady's first sexual contact (cf. 00:30:22-53). After having spent the night together, they meet in the kitchen. Looking deeply into each other's eyes, they seem to be on the verge of kissing when, instead, Cassady

pushes Ginsberg down on his knees for oral sex (00:30:34-55). Imitating Ginsberg's perspective, the camera tilts up to Cassady's face in a close-up, his eyes are closed, and he seems to enjoy what the viewer is not able to see. Suddenly, Cassady's girlfriend enters the room with a bag of shopping items and looks at them in shock (00:30:58). This impression is visually supported by an eyeline match cut, first on Cassady's face and then to the woman and finally to a close-up on Ginsberg's face, who looks evenly shocked, but also guilty (00:30:59). The scene is put in stark contrast to the scene before when Ginsberg was watching the heterosexual couple kiss. The film visually connects the two scenes, marking the difference between 'normal' heterosexual romance and 'abnormal' homosexual lasciviousness. The first is socially acceptable by showing Cassady romantically lift up his girlfriend. Instead of being kissed, Ginsberg is pushed down for an unromantic lust-centred act of sexual relief which is condemned as socially inacceptable by Cassady's girlfriend. Moreover, the viewer is not mirrored as in the latter scene, but again takes Ginsberg's point-of-view. Thus, while the film invites the viewer to identify with Ginsberg, this scene foreshadows that a woman, or women in general, will sooner or later disturb their affair since Cassady does not unconditionally commit to their sexual relationship. For him, it is simply a time of exploring his sexuality in various ways, of playfully rebelling against the existing structures whereas Ginsberg seriously struggles to accept his homosexual identity within the surrounding

Figure 2: Hetero- vs. homosexual love (f.l.t.r.: 00:28:59, 00:29:32, 00:30:58, 00:30:59)

heteronormative structures. Similar to the scenes with Kerouac, intimacy and identification is created by putting the viewer's gaze into Ginsberg's perspective through point-of-view-shots or mirroring.

Furthermore, the metaphorical use of eyes and glasses becomes particularly important. In the animation, the eye is used as a symbol for control through norms. This becomes noticeable in the representation of the 'Eye of Providence,' a symbol of Christian iconography that is situated above an unfinished pyramid of thirteen steps, part of the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States, and depicted, for instance, on the one-dollar bill. In the animation, the Eye of Providence, which usually signifies the eye of God, is enthroned on a pyramid filled with skulls and turns into a vulva, "the one-eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar" (00:18:35-42). The all-seeing eye of God controls the individual, while the state and thus laws ensure their confinement until death, which emphasises the homosexual's oppression by capitalism and heteronormativity. Other depictions of eyes in the animated sequences seem to highlight this impression, for instance when showing a mixture of the Eye of God and a khamsa (00:41:35), or Solomon's electroshock therapy when the lights above the operation table turn into the menacing eyes of Moloch (00:54:14-16).

Glasses, on the other hand, are used as a symbol of Ginsberg's subjective perspective. Everything he perceives in the film is perceived through his glasses. Of course, this is also historically accurate, since the 'real' Allen Ginsberg wore glasses as well. It is, hence, most interesting to look for instances in the film when he is not wearing his glasses. Most obviously this happens when he loses his glasses after a car accident, which is followed by his institutionalisation (00:23:18-42). Without his glasses, he is no longer able to perceive and interpret the world from his individual perspective. Thus, the loss of his glasses signifies the loss of his gay sensibility. As he explains, during this time he "was questioning [his] sense of reality versus the social sense that was being imposed on" him (00:28:04-09). He describes this as a problem for many homosexuals who developed "total self-rejection, a rejection of their own universe – lip service, actually, to supposedly acceptable social patterns" (00:28:18-31). Without his gay sensibility, however, his homosexual subjectivity and hence his identity is compromised. Whenever he is struggling most with his sexual identity, the film depicts him without his glasses. Thereby, the film enhances Ginsberg's feeling of being excluded from heteronormativity and thus from a 'normal' romantic life. When Cassady breaks up with him in a letter that is read out in a voice-over, the shots switch between Cassady driving in his car and Ginsberg

reading the letter at home while sitting in an armchair, eventually taking off his glasses (00:31:32-00:32:23). In contrast to Cassady's literally suggested progress by showing him in motion, Ginsberg's immobility suggests the intractability of his situation as a gay man. Similarly, when working in marketing and arranging the poster for a *Pepsodent* advertisement, Ginsberg takes off his glasses, stressed and constrained by the heteronormative ideal the picture of the family in combination with the words "Bright!", "White!", "Wholesome!" and "Alluring!" connotes (00:43:57-00:44:00) – an ideal that he will never achieve even in his romantic relationship with Orlovsky. Thus, taking off his glasses marks his subjective disintegration. Emphasising the meaning of Ginsberg's glasses even further, they become a medium to enable a critical gaze at heteronormativity, thus turning his gay sensibility into something productive rather than impeding.

Not only do the aforementioned kissing scenes between his friends or lovers and their girlfriends suggest a level of identification with Ginsberg's gay perspective, but they also depict the negative impact of heteronormativity through his eyes by showing its exclusive mechanisms. The way the film composes Ginsberg's gaze in explicit sex-scenes suggests a deconstruction of heterosexual lovemaking. Thereby, the gaze "intentionally challenges normative viewing and hegemonic representation" (Tobin 64) and might, hence, be described as queer. Moreover, most of the heterosexual intercourse is depicted in the animation which in turn illustrates his poem and thus his subjective perception. One of the first sex-scenes in the animation shows a heterosexual couple pinwheeling through the sky. As the camera zooms out of this scene, the viewer sees that an unspecified figure is sitting inside a cinema and watches the sex-scene on the screen (00:19:10-17), thus interpreting it. The sense of being excluded from any form of 'normal' life is further emphasised by the animation sequence that sets in right after Cassady's breakup letter has been read out. It shows a heterosexual couple, probably Cassady and one of his many women, having sex in a car. The scene is shown from outside of the car and the frame of the front window emphasises the insuperability of sexual norms and the exclusion of homosexuality. Moreover, the couple is being watched from afar by the animated Ginsberg/the lyrical I of the poem with the sex scene being mirrored in his glasses (00:33:04-06). The gaze that is established in these two sequences, looking through the eyes of the homosexual, however, does not elevate the heterosexual lovemaking, but underscores the feeling of exclusion that the homosexual poet experiences. Thus, questioning heteronormative sexuality,

these scenes receive a subversive efficacy, which is why the gaze established in these scenes can be described as queer.

Figure 3: Heterosex in cinema (00:19:16)

However, in a film about homosexual liberation, it is striking to find the depiction of explicit heterosexual intercourse to such an extent, while at the same time homosexual lovemaking is mostly precluded. As Bruhn and Gjelsvik point out "the film has its shortcomings: in particular, it could be said to weaken the poem's transgressive power, for instance through its rather safe depiction of drugs and sex" (Bruhn und Gjelsvik 351). Besides the aforementioned scene showing Ginsberg and Cassady on the brink of oral sex, there are two more scenes indicating homosexual intercourse that I would like to discuss here. Like the oral sex scene, which is not explicitly shown (and interrupted by Cassady's girlfriend), a sex scene between Ginsberg and Orlovsky is only hinted at. In a scene of perfect romance, Ginsberg is shown in a checked dressing gown, taking photos of the sleeping and bare-chested Orlovsky. The shots are again marked as Ginsberg's perspective by eyeline match cuts and the camera he uses, alternately depicting Ginsberg with his camera and the sleeping Orlovsky. After having taken some photos, Ginsberg crawls into bed with his lover, tenderly waking him and eventually they share a passionate kiss. This scene is repeatedly intercut on the one hand with a scene showing the couple out in the city, leaning on each other's backs and enjoying a happy relationship moment, holding hands and looking at each other romantically. On the other hand, the scene is intercut with the scene depicting Ginsberg working on the *Pepsodent* advertisement, suggesting that, even though "[t]he first time, [he] felt accepted in [his] life, completely" (00:45:03-11) by Orlovsky,

he still felt repressed by the omnipresent structures of heteronormativity: "I was still trying to act normal. I was afraid I was crazy. I was sure that I was supposed to be heterosexual and that something was wrong with me" (00:45:25-38). The editing emphasises this triad of sex, love, and social norms that structure and complicate Ginsberg's life. Nonetheless, the sexual component is not explicitly shown by the film, even though it is hinted at by depicting Ginsberg's and Orlovsky's kiss in bed and concluding the scene with Ginsberg smoking a cigarette while the bare-chested Orlovsky is huddled up against him (00:55:56), implying the casual 'cigarette after sex.'

Despite the exclusion of explicit gay sex scenes, another scene insinuates homosexual intercourse by highly aestheticizing the act. The following lines of the poem are read out in the voiceover: "Who let themselves by fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists. Who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love" (00:14:57-00:15:19), while the animation shows the lyrical I of the poem first in a closeup on his face with another face right behind him, suggesting that an explicit illustration of the simultaneously recited lines is about to unfold. As the camera zooms out to reveal the whole scenery, however, the viewer sees two persons on a motorcycle, sitting closely behind each other. When the two motorcyclists are driving through a Caribbean woodland, the trees transform into erect penises ejaculating into the sky, which turns into fireworks, a classical Hollywood symbol for male orgasms. Even though the film might caricature Hollywood symbolism, this depiction seems oddly obfuscating, especially when considering that Ginsberg describes the recited lines of the poem as "the crucial moment of breakthrough" (01:09:18-23) while writing the poem. He emphasises that "[it] was an acknowledgement of the basic reality of homosexual joy" (01:10:02-07), which is attenuated by the depiction of the scene in the animation compared to the manifold explicit representations of heterosexual intercourse. Cassady, for example, is explicitly shown having sex with women in several parts of the animation. One instance is particularly striking as it depicts Cassady, "cocksmith and Adonis of Denver" (00:33:25-27) as he is called in the poem, driving in his car, which enters a tunnel. The tunnel leads through hills which turn into female thighs in between which a male body thrusts back and forth and eventually the heterosexual couple shoots through the sky like a firework disappearing behind hills (00:33:29-46). Again, the film makes use of the fireworks as a symbol for ejaculation but shows the sexual intercourse far more explicitly than in the example above. Moreover, the female body is sexualised to such a degree, that the gaze

can only be described as a typical male gaze. Thus, these depictions of sexual intercourse in the film enforce rather than question heteronormative structures, eventually creating a homonormative aesthetic.

Figure 4: Homosexual intercourse (f.l.t.r.: 00:14:57, 00:15:08, 00:15:18, 00:15:19)

Ensuing from this, the final effect of the gaze is the exclusionary or negative representation of women in the film. Not only are women shown as nameless sex partners, but also as intruders of male homoeroticism. Except for Ginsberg's mother, who is only talked about, but not depicted, female characters in the film are largely characterised in a negative light. Ginsberg's, Kerouac's, and Cassady's dates or girlfriends do not even have names in the film, even though especially Cassady's girlfriend appears more than once and plays an influential part for the plot by intruding on their homosexual affair. The female characters are mostly not subjected to the male gaze, however, they are excluded by the narrative of the film. They become an interchangeable impersonalised mass that negatively influences Ginsberg's sexual and artistic development. On the one hand, this representation could allude to the universal and impalpable structures of heteronormativity, as they symbolise women *as such* hindering Ginsberg's identity formation as a gay man. On the other hand, however, the depiction of women as nameless bodies that serve only for the sexual gratification of men is a ubiquitous trope in heterosexist filmmaking. In a film with a homosexual protagonist, this derogatory representation of women might imply gay male

misogyny. The depiction of the female as the abject other for the gay male has become a cliché in cultural representations addressed at a possibly male homosexual audience. Since this form of representation does not question the oppression of women, but instead fosters misogyny, I would argue that the gaze cannot be considered queer and must be described as a (gay) male gaze. In conclusion, the film does not present a consistent gaze that is either queer or gay, but rather shows certain ambiguities. While the film successfully invites the viewer to take on a queer perspective at times, it cannot cohesively maintain a queer gaze, especially when it comes to the depiction of women.

Straightwashing in *Stonewall*

By centralising a character like Danny, *Stonewall* promotes the most assimilated individual while marginalising queers who do not conform to normative standards of (white) homosexuality – especially men who do not adjust to the masculine gender role, but also lesbians, trans* persons, and queers of colour. In the analysis of the gaze that is established, I will focus on how the film makes use of the camera angle, axis, and focus as well as perspective to enhances the dichotomous relation between gender-appropriate and effeminate queers. When examining the selected scenes, I presume that the characters' gazes within the film as well as the governance of the audiences' gaze has three main effects. Firstly, the viewer is invited to identify with Danny, since the film mainly offers his perspective on top of narrating only his story, bridging the gap to the more unconventional characters like Ray. Secondly, Danny's gaze serves as a lens through which heteronormative viewers may safely perceive homosexual life, instead of confronting the viewers with a queer gaze. And thirdly, effeminate, trans*, and drag characters gaze back at Danny, making him the object of their desires. Instead of favouring the anti-assimilationist approach towards gender norms, the film strengthens these tendencies by othering effeminate homosexuals, trans* characters, and drag queens. The supposed 'other' (e.g. trans* individuals) is reduced to a few, stereotypical character traits which are demarcated as non-normative and, hence, disapproved of, or even rejected, thus, offering only monocausal explanations for their behaviour.

Danny, by contrast, is a round character whose views and actions are made comprehensible to the viewers. Jung describes him as an "audience surrogate: the white guy who can properly tell the story of 'the other'" (Jung

n. pag.). Thereby, Danny serves as a figure of identification for white and heterosexual American audiences while at the same time incorporating the queer agenda into mainstream politics. The presumption that heterosexual acceptance would be at stake if the representation does not reflect dominant perspectives (cf. Shugart 68) leads to an aesthetic asset of the film that avoids marginalised positions and centralises a white, gender-conforming protagonist instead. Frequently, Danny takes on a heterosexual, at times even homo- or trans*phobic, perspective. During his first days in New York, for instance, he is often startled by an open display of homosexuality. When he walks down Christopher Street for the first time, he sees a couple leaning against a car, flirting with each other, holding hands and eventually even kissing (00:01:49-00:02:04). While being shocked by the sight of indiscriminate sex and sex work, Danny seems amazed by the sight of homosexual love in public. His (hetero)normative moral values can be ascribed to having been briefed by oppressive and stigmatizing educational material, for instance by the documentary shown in his school. As depicted in a backflash, Danny and his classmates are watching the documentary with amusement but also fear, while the voice over explains:

> Public restrooms can often be a hangout for the homosexual. Bobby and his friends hadn't noticed the man who had been in the restroom when they changed, and as it was late, he suggested they take the shortcut under the pier but the others preferred to take the more travelled way home. […] Bobby had made a wise decision. It may have saved his life. (00:12:10-14)

The town's sheriff, who had been invited to show the documentary, concludes the lesson with the following statement: "Okay, kids, these are the things we have to be aware of. You know there are sick people out there, and they are waiting" (00:12:10-19). Even more so, one of Danny's classmates explains while they walk down the school's corridor: "A guy wears a dress. The other guy takes that dress off, and then they do it up the butt" (00:12:30-33). Not only is homosexuality thereby associated with effeminacy and cross-dressing, but, as the quote from the documentary shows, also with paedophilia and above all it is criminalised by evoking the threat of abuse or even murder. Even though the film tries to cast these associations in a negative light, the contrast between Danny's gaze at more 'normal-looking' gays and effeminate or trans* characters fosters homo- and especially trans*phobia. His gaze discloses his moral understanding of sexuality and relationships, since he is usually (positively) amazed by

any sight of openly enjoyed gay love but embarrassed by effeminacy and even shocked by the display of trans*sexuality, gay sex, prostitution, and non-monogamous relationships. Like the couple he sees in Christopher Street on his first day, he is enchanted by the relationship model the street youths' friend Bob leads. On a visit to Bob's home, his partner Terry (Yan England) enters with a bag of shopping items and asks politely: "Staying for dinner? I'm making spaghetti and meatballs" (01:15:07-09). Surprised by this imprint of bourgeois domesticity, Danny asks: "Wait. Sorry. You – You guys live together?" (01:15:11-13) and they tell him that they have been together for four years. They seem to represent what Danny could never have dreamed of: a totally 'normal,' domestic relationship of two men. As Danny hopes to lead a relationship like theirs, he leaves Ray and the others for a life with Trevor. Danny's desire for a similar model puts Bob's relationship in a positive light and elevates the heteronormative principles of love, monogamy, and domesticity.

In contrast, when Ray and the others take Danny to the Stonewall Inn for the first time, he is astonished by the other patrons dancing around half naked and gazes at them nervously while walking through the bar. Moreover, he is embarrassed by his friends' effeminate behaviour and refuses to dance with Ray. Playing "Venus" by *Shocking Blue* on the jukebox, Ray dances around in a dress and tries everything to get Danny's attention, but Danny cannot be persuaded. Since Ray gave him an ecstasy pill when they entered the bar, Danny begins to feel dizzy. He watches a light changing colours, everything gets blurry around him, the song sounds hollow and overlapping. The others do not seem to notice that Danny is not feeling well and continue dancing around him. Moreover, giving Danny an ecstasy pill without his consent (Danny did not know what it was) underscores Ray's encroaching behaviour. Right in this moment of confusion, Trevor, who has been watching them, decides to enter the scene. Like Ray, Trevor puts on music on the jukebox and "A Whiter Shade of Pale" by *Procol Harum* starts playing while Trevor walks slowly towards Danny. The juxtaposition of Ray and Trevor is emphasised by the different music styles. In contrast to Ray, Trevor approaches Danny more casually and not at all in an effeminate manner. When he starts talking to Danny, the latter smiles nervously (cf. 00:45:35-00:46:11). He rescues Danny out of this uncomfortable situation and immediately seems to know all about him: "You know, you look like you need a little rescuing. […] So, this particular shithole does not look like Danny's natural habitat" (00:46:17-29). To Ray's indignation, Danny

accepts to dance with Trevor, foreshadowing that Danny will leave the gang of street youths for finding more conventionally 'true' love with Trevor.

Figure 5: Danny vs. Ray (00:06:34 & 00:05:53)

Not only is Ray juxtaposed to Trevor, but also to Danny: while Danny is white, cis, from a middle-class background, seeking a monogamous relationship with true love, conforming to a masculine gender role, even passing as heterosexual, Ray is a Latino (Puerto Rican), possibly trans*, drag queen from a lower-class background, homeless, earning his living with sex work, not conforming to the masculine gender role, and flaunting his homosexuality in an effeminate manner. This stereotypical attribution of identity features makes Ray into a foil to project Danny against to make him more conventionally likeable and elevate his perspective. Danny's centralisation in contrast to Ray and the other street youths is also visually enhanced. He usually is either central to the screen or the focaliser of the scene. To substantiate this thesis further, other characters like Ray, are often filmed in an over the shoulder shot, in which Danny is still visible, slightly blurry in the front. Thus, all other characters are always set in relation to Danny, which has the effect of keeping their characters flat and crude and thereby marginalising non-white and effeminate gay masculinity. Stressing the hierarchical order implied by these identity features, the Stonewall's corrupted manager Ed Murphy (Ron Perlman) remarks to Ray about Danny: "You see, now this is what we need more of around here – all-American kids, clean-cut kids, not gutter trash like you, Ramona" (00:41:57-00:42:04). Similarly, the members of the Mattachine Society equally want "to blend in" (01:06:27-30) and despise of homosexuals "wearing a dress and prancing up and down Christopher Street" (01:06:33-36), as Trevor puts it. Danny defends his friends' lifestyle by answering that "it takes a lot more balls to wear a dress than it does a suit and tie" (01:06:37-40). Hence, having Danny argue against "the openly

transphobic Trevor" (Ginelle n. pag.) could be interpreted as a critical stance towards trans*phobia and homonormativity; the stereotypes the film enforces, however, impede these advances. Right after having defended his friends' effeminate behaviour, Danny expresses his discontent upon learning that usual 'male' job opportunities are not available to him: "What would you have me do, huh? Be a fucking florist, or a decorator? […] What, are these the options open to me?" (01:06:41-50). Disdaining jobs that are associated with a female gender role and dreaming of becoming an astronomer and working with NASA, he not only dissociates himself from effeminate homosexuality but reinforces gender and sexual stereotypes. This representation seems almost cynical considering that his friends' only option to make money is prostitution. The scene follows directly after Ray is shown having been beaten up by a trick. In contrast to the violent attack on Danny by the police officers, the abuse of Ray is not explicitly shown. Danny finds him in the hostel room, bleeding from his swollen face and crying. When he bids him to "Stop tricking, Ray!" (01:00:55-56), the latter loses his temper:

> And then what? What? Tell me! You want to know where home is for me, Danny? Nowhere. There is no home. There is no family, Danny. All there is – is some guy in fucking Sing Sing who might be my dad. And I don't know where my mom is. My sister, she's in foster care. And I got a dead grandma in Ponce. Happy fucking family. What the fuck am I supposed to do, Danny? Nobody wants me! Nobody, not even you! I don't have anything! So what? So what if I fucking get beat up every now and then? Who the fuck doesn't? A faggot is always gonna get beat up, Danny, even you. Either from another faggot, or from a cop, or from a trick who's got something to prove. No big deal. (01:01: 14-01:02:42)

Ray's situation emphasises that sex work was a dangerous occupation and that – in marked contrast to Danny – he and the other homeless street youths do not have any other choices. Hence, the content of the film suggests a critical reading of Danny's privileged position in comparison to the others. This critical stance, however, is vigorously undermined by the formal-aesthetic composition of the film. Although trans* individuals, queers of colour, and sex workers were probably much more severely exposed to institutionalised homophobia and hate crimes, the film strengthens the identification with Danny. As Emmerich points out: "Danny is a very straight-acting kid, […] The audience can relate more strongly to him and through Danny's eyes they'll experience the more extreme situations

depicted in the film" (Emmerich quoted in Jung n. pag.). Guiding the perspective even when Ray gets abused, the audience is invited to feel with Danny, finding him sympathetic, because he acts empathically. After Ray's outburst of emotion, Danny comforts him and proposes to "find [...] something better" (00:02:30-32) for him. When Ray asks, "Why do you care?" (00:02:33-35), Danny simply answers, "Because you are my friend" (00:02:37-39) and puts his arm around Ray who apologises to him under tears. Danny is thereby depicted as pure and kind. However, as his and Ray's suffering is equated, Danny's moral attitude is ideologically elevated.

The next morning, he leaves Ray and the other street youths to see Trevor and decides to move in with him the same day. While this betrayal of his friends could be seen as morally wrong, Ray is the one who is depicted as overreacting and not appreciating Danny's kindness. When he finds out that Danny might be meeting Trevor and the Mattachine Society, he yells at Danny "you're learning to be a real New York cocksucker. Learning how to lie before you even get dressed" (01:03:44-53) and storms out, slamming the door behind him. His anger seems to be led by jealousy and therefore irrationality, even though Danny is in fact lying and about to leave him behind for a better life. Thereby, the film connects effeminacy with negative character traits such as jealousy and irrationality. Moreover, Ray is depicted as unloveable, since "it's taken as a given, an implicit fact, that Danny could never, ever fall in love with, or have sex with, someone like swishy, gender-fluid Ray" (Lawson n. pag.). As Keegan points out, however,

> Stonewall rather accurately represents the exclusion of trans people and people of colour from the gay imaginary, but it blames this exclusion as 'unlovable' on those ostracised populations themselves, rather than on the white, middle-class gentrifiers who have been willing to abandon them in exchange for nominal inclusion in straight culture. (Keegan 54)

These stereotypical representations alongside the visual subtext contradict the endeavour to convey an anti-assimilationist message on the content level. Visually centralising the most assimilated character in such a way and thereby marginalising less heteronormatively conforming characters aesthetically reinforces the subliminal assimilationist tendency and thus homonormativity of the film.

Furthermore, the film misrepresents and even criminalises effeminate, trans*, and transvestite sexual desire. As has been pointed out, Danny is usually the bearer of the look and thereby the focaliser of the story. At the same time, however, he is also gazed at, and even objectified, especially by

effeminate and trans* characters. After Danny has been beaten up by the police, Ray offers him a place to sleep in their hostel room. Even though he accepts the offer, Danny does not seem to feel safe in the filthy room full of street youths. In contrast to the scene showing Ray after having been attacked, Danny is not shown as weak and in need for comfort by Ray. Because of his aching body, Danny undresses slowly, which is shown through a mirror, a detail that will become more important in my later analysis of transsexual desire. The camera switches back and forth from Danny getting undressed to Ray's face who looks voluptuously at him, letting his gaze wander down Danny's body. Before Danny turns around, Ray quickly rearranges his hair to look good for Danny, putting on a sexy facial expression and lasciviously biting his lip. When Danny takes of his shirt and exposes his bare, muscular chest, Ray says: "You're handsome" (00:27:15-16). Danny lies down with his back to Ray and pretends to be sleeping while Ray still talks to him, imagining a life together in California. In contrast to Danny's innocent quest for true monogamous love, Ray is shown as sex-driven and slobbering over Danny's normatively good-looking body, perpetuating the violence that Danny has experienced before. Presenting Ray in this way, the film feeds the "hackneyed convention of the gay, male character as flamboyant, hyper-emotional, or single-mindedly sexual" (Keith 232). Making Danny the object of Ray's "hypersexual" (Keith 233) queer desires the film connects the scene to sexual assault. Moreover, the film emphasises the impression that Danny's homonormative appearances appeal to the other characters. When they meet at the Stonewall Inn, Marsha P. Johnson (Otoja Abit) acknowledges: "You're lucky, people in New York like a straight-looking boy like you. You can do very well down here" (00:42:29-35). As in other instances, this remark shows that the film seems to be aware of the homonormative implication of Danny's looks and behaviour. However, it impedes the possibility of taking a critical stance. The way the other characters look at him further elevates Danny's appearance at the expense of queer characters. Despite highlighting that he is more sex-driven than Danny, Ray's effeminacy is mostly displayed in a sympathetic if marginalised way. Yet, most other trans* or non-binary characters are depicted in a derogatory way.

On his first day in New York Danny is approached by a person in drag called Queen Tooey, while he is having lunch in a diner on Christopher Street. In spite of Danny's attempt to avoid her by looking the other way, Tooey comes closer to him, even molesting him: "Aw, poor little thing. Long way from home, starving and dragging a suitcase like a little baby

chicken" (00:02:41-52). When he answers dismissively "I'm not starving, sir, I just had two hot dogs," Tooey answers provocatively "You want a third?" (00:02:53-58). After making this cheeky remark, Tooey offers Danny a place to stay. Seemingly uncomfortable in this situation, Danny declines, but Queen Tooey starts singing along the song playing on the radio and touches Danny's shoulder. Danny begins to feel increasingly unceasy, just as Ray enters the diner and comes to his rescue: "Queen Tooey, leave him alone, Jesus! You never stop, and you sound terrible" (00:03:42-59). Tooey answers: "Ray, darling, I sound just fine for someone who's had a dick in his mouth all night" (00:04:11-17). Ray warns Danny: "Listen up, kid. Don't follow this one unless you want to end up tied to a chair and smothered in pancake batter, or whatever that shit is" (00:04:34-41). The film emphasises Tooey's sex-centredness and mocks her seemingly weird sexual preferences as a trans* character and probably sex worker. Furthermore, unaware of the concept of trans*, Danny refers to Tooey by the male pronoun while they talk about her, whereas Ray markedly pronounces the female pronoun (Tooey herself uses the male pronoun, though). Their different use of pronouns could be interpreted as another attempt by the film to criticise Danny's trans*phobia, but the stereotypical representation of trans* characters in later scenes advocates the opposite. After Tooey has left the diner, Danny shows no approval of Tooey's sexual preferences: "I know I don't want to be tied to a chair and covered in pancake batter" (00:05:19-22), to which Ray adds "I don't know. It could be fun. Sticky, but fun" (00:05:24-30) and they laugh, providing comic relief for a rather suspenseful scene. However, both suspense and comic relief have been established at the expense of a trans* character. This adds another layer of juxtaposition in the film, which serves as a strategy of othering. By stultifying Tooey and contrasting her to Ray, the film creates a hierarchy of tolerability of trans* characters, in which Ray's sexuality sets the limit of tolerable effeminate behaviour while Tooey is already bordering the stereotypical representation of trans* as potentially dangerous, but he still resides in the realm of ridicule. Moreover, since the film stages Ray as Danny's cheerful helper, he serves homonormative and assimilative purposes.

Later in the film, another scene depicts trans* desire and is paralleled by the scene introducing Tooey. After Danny is kidnapped, Murphy forces him to prostitute himself. They enter an expensive-looking hotel together and, having knocked at the door of a large suite, Murphy hands Danny

over to a man who looks like a butler or servant. In sharp contrast to the street prostitution happening at the piers, Danny is politely asked to take a seat, offered a drink, and waits for his suitor. A door nearby is opened and a hand and a pink high heel come into sight in the dark corner of the room, then a man "in grotesque drag" (Lawson n. pag.), wearing a dress opulently decorated with rhinestones and a red wig, gazes at Danny across the room like a preying animal. The film does not offer any explanation of the person's gendered identity. However, staying close to Danny's perspective, the viewer is prompted to identify with Danny and read the person as a male character in drag. The camera cuts back and forth from the man and Danny's terrified facial expression (cf. 01:23:05-01:24:54). Fixing himself a drink, the man starts talking: "Danny, right? [...] A nice American name – like Scott, or Justin" (01:24:55-01:25:06), pronouncing the name Justin sharply and watches Danny's reaction in the mirror in front of him, connecting the scene to Ray, who also looked voluptuously at Danny through a mirror, while the latter was getting undressed. The mirror is a cinematic device to indicate the revelation of the characters' true self (cf. Noll Brinckmann 18). In the two scenes, the mirror distorts the gaze, which might create a queer gaze, since it is used to represent a reflection of the male gaze that is directed at another men. However, instead of embracing the opportunity to break with the visual conventions of the male gaze, the film uses the distortion to reveal the true intentions of trans* characters which categorises their gaze of as unpleasant if not dangerous. Moreover, the reference to Justin draws on two earlier scenes, in which this name was mentioned by characters in the film. The first is right after Danny has met Ray and his gang. One of them, Orphan Annie (Caleb Landry Jones), compares Danny's appearance to a guy named Justin, which enrages Ray who attacks Annie with a broken bottle. Later in the plot, Ray is interrogated by special agent Seymor Pine, who shows him photographs of Justin's dead body and bids him to help solve the crime of Justin's murder. The fact that Danny's suitor pointedly talks about Justin and seems to find pleasure in nice American boys like him, hints at the possibility of him being Justin's murderer and hence provides suspense for the scene. When the man walks towards Danny, appearing ungainly in his heels and breathing heavily in the tight dress, the suspense is highlighted auditorily by ominous opera music and visually by a statue of a lion and a tiger fighting set on the mantelpiece in the background. Moreover, the man in drag is shot mostly from a low angle, alternately in an over the shoulder shot from

Danny's perspective, or from behind, towering threateningly over Danny, who seems terrified. The established gaze emphasises his menacing power over Danny. Pressing Danny further and opening his belt, he keeps talking: "Do you know the Bible, Danny? Anything from the New Testament? […] The Book of John. […] 'You are my friends if you do what I command of you.' – John 15:14. And I am a good friend, Danny. I am a very good friend to nice young boys" (01:26:03-34). While he utters the last words, the opera singer's voice coming from the record player reaches her climax and a close-up shot shows the man in drag violently pulling down Danny's trousers and grabbing his legs. Right in this moment, Ray comes to Danny's rescue,[37] setting off the hotel's fire alarm. Being saved by Ray again, on the one hand, determines Ray as an ally to hegemonic gay masculinity instead of trans* characters and, on the other hand, marks the connection to the opening scene with Queen Tooey. Relating the two scenes in this way, the film reinforces the derogatory stereotype of older, effeminate gays, drag queens, or trans* persons molesting young boys and thus exactly what Danny had been warned of in school. The way Danny is gazed at ranges from lusciously and voluptuously to predatory and menacing, creating a hierarchy of gender-conforming und gender-nonconforming characters, with Danny as the 'normal' gay at the top, followed by effeminate allies and the sex-driven, dangerous, villainous trans* characters at the very bottom of respectability. Not only is this a strategy of scapegoating trans* characters for deficiencies such as paedophilia, molestation, and rape within the LGBTQIAN+ community, but it perpetuates trans*phobic views rather than challenging them. This "aesthetic gentrification of queer and trans cinematic worlds" (Keegan 50), as Keegan puts it, is made apparent by a gaze that consolidates trans*phobia, racism, and classism. White- and straightwashing the historical Stonewall Riots, the film further marginalises the narratives of trans* people and queers of colour. As Jung condenses, this is the most crucial flaws of the film:

> The historical record only contains fragments of the lives of poor people and queer people of color; since their lives are precarious, so, too, are

37 Ray had found out where Danny was brought by threatening one of Murphy's assistants to reveal his homosexuality: "Oh, but I know all about you and little Georgina Vee. I mean, George Vasquez. Maybe I should spread the news. See what happens. A faggot club owner, and the driver for the mob. I give it a day" (01:24:10-25), which can be seen as another strike against trans* characters in the film, as he mocks his feminine identity by calling him Gorgina.

> their memories. And yet isn't this the beauty of narrative? That it allows us to access worlds beyond our reckoning and uncover hard-to-see truths? In this way, *Stonewall* is a deeply cynical film, because it suggests we're so lacking in empathy that we can't experience the joy, sadness, and longing of another person simply because they don't 'look' like a movie star. (Jung n. pag.)

Thus, the film misses its chance to explore narrative and formal-aesthetic conventions more openly. A queer gaze changes "the very act of experiencing a film – the psychological process of looking at and identifying with characters" (Benshoff and Griffin 11). In *Stonewall*, however, the single mediator that filters all other characters' experiences is Danny; hence, the gaze never varies, it stays white, male, and trans*phobic during the whole plot. Thereby, the film generates a homonormative aesthetic that enables heteronormative identification, serves the assimilation to heteronormativity, and sustains heteronormative structures instead of criticising them.

Collectivisation in *Milk*

As the narrative structure of the biopic tradition suggests, the viewer is constantly invited to identify with Milk's perspective. This is made clear from the beginning, as the film embeds audio tapes that the historic Milk recorded before his death. These recordings recur throughout the film, usually serving as captions anticipating the events that are about to be shown in the subsequent scenes and, hence, structuring the entire plot. The gaze that is thereby established on screen, first of all, creates a mood of authenticity by intertwining authentic material with staged scenes, especially in the frame narrative. This is closely connected with the second function of the gaze, which is the establishment of intimacy between the viewers and the characters on screen, thereby issuing an invitation to identify with Milk. This is emphasised by a clear differentiation of the gay and homophile characters from the bigots Anita Bryant and Josh Briggs. Even more so, I suggest that the third function of the gaze is to generate a collective identity by recounting the story of gay liberation from the perspective of the 'glass-ceiling breaker.' Milk pathed the way for others to follow, but also serves as a mediator between the gay perspective and the heteronormative majority. In this endeavour to connect gay and straight Americans through collective commemoration of a national hero, however, the film disregards the hierarchisation that goes along with the assumption that Milk can speak

for all homosexuals. Especially the appeal to visibility obscures the hazard for many queers to come out of the closet and reduces the experience to the perspective of rather privileged gays.

In the beginning of the film, authentic black-and-white footage shows men being arrested by police officers, presumably homosexuals who were meeting in bars, which was rigorously controlled during the late 1960s and early 70s. Even though homosexuals were allowed to go to bars and drink by the end of the 1960s, same-sex physical contact, dancing, or kissing was still forbidden. The footage is intercut with authentic newspaper articles with headlines such as "Police and Gay clash" (00:00:41), or "Tavern charges Police brutality" dated Jan 19, 1967 (00:01:03), that indicate the timeframe of the scenes. In the article with the headline "Police start crackdown on homosexual bars; arrest 6" (00:01:36), the names and addresses of the arrested are published. This was a common practice to expose homosexuals, which had severe consequences for their public lives, since they could be fired from their jobs, an issue which takes centre stage later in the film. Foreshadowing the plot in this way, the film authenticates the scene. Then the screen fades to black and the year 1978 – the year Milk was assassinated –in white typewriter digits blends in (00:02:21). Thereafter the staged scenes set in and Milk appears on screen, beginning with the following statement: "This is Harvey Milk speaking on Friday, November 18th. This is only to be played in the event of my death by assassination" (00:02:32-44). These statements Milk makes in the staged feature are mostly taken from an authentic tape recording the 'real' Milk recorded as his will before his death. Thus, the film connotes historical accuracy, which is emphasised by implementing authentic footage yet again. While Milk is still heard in a voice over, news video material from the day of his and Moscone's assassination are woven into the staged scenes. Wailing sirens can be heard in the background, press and police are running into city hall, a police walkie-talkie squawks – the chaos of the situation suggests that something terrible must have happened. Then a stretcher with a body bag is wheeled out of the city hall. The authentic footage shows shell shocked Diane Feinstein, President of the Board of Supervisors, stepping up in front of a throng of news reporters and announcing that Milk and Moscone have been shot and killed. Feinstein's grief is emphasised very vividly by slowly zooming into her face, showing the tears form in her eyes, and people in an unseen audience gasp in fright when they hear the news (00:03:44-55). Then the scene jumps back to Milk who says: "I wish I had time to explain all the things that I did" (00:04:07-11), upon which the title

Milk is displayed (00:04:12) and the scene changes to New York in 1970, as the caption tells the viewers that now the plot starts.

This format is repeated at the end of the film. Again, Milk is sitting at his table, recording his will, which is used as a voice over while staged scenes are merged with authentic footage of a candlelight vigil to commemorate his death (01:54:33-01:55:09). Then, for one last time, a jump cut invites the viewers to take a seat at Milk's kitchen table. Having finished his narrative, he presses the button of the tape recorder, puts down the microphone and the screen fades to black. Before the end credits, historic facts, such as "Over 30,000 people marched from the Castro to City Hall to honor slain Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone" (01:55:26-33) or "Just past the Golden Gate Bridge, amidst a shower of grape Kool-Aid, Doonesbury cartoons and bubble bath, Harvey's closest friends scattered his ashes out at sea" (01:57:07-19), are displayed on screen. Moreover, Dan White's fate as well as Milk's most important supporters and their achievements in the aftermath of his death are presented by juxtaposing staged material from the film with authentic photographs of their historic models, culminating in authentic footage of Harvey Milk himself (01:55:35-01:57:34). The specific setup and the editing of the scenes at the beginning and the end of the film serve as bookends to the narrative. By intertwining authentic newspaper articles, video footage, photographs, and Milk's recorded will with the frame narrative, the film claims authenticity. This means that the plot that unfolds in between the frame narrative is set in the light of real historic events. Thereby, the camera takes on a gaze that claims to be telling the truth about Harvey Milk and his assassination. However, the effect of authentication is closely linked to the intimacy the gaze creates with Milk and his peers as well as the identification with the characters on screen.

Hence, merging authentic material with staged scenes emphasises the film's endeavour to allow Milk to "explain all the things" (00:04:09-10) he did, thus making him the autodiegetic narrator of the film. Thereby, the film highlights Milk's own perspective on the final years of his life and the important social developments he has witnessed. Both at the beginning and the end of the film, every time the scene jumps back from the footage to Milk's kitchen, the camera slightly changes its position around the table. Reverse angle shots convey the impression of sitting at the table with him to the viewers, moving them closer to the scene and thus to Milk, which establishes intimacy between the spectators and the character on screen and enhances the identification with Milk. As screenwriter Dustin Lance

Black explains in the scene notes to the original screenplay, "quickly establishing this intimacy, [he] hoped to shape a story that, despite mountains of political talk and plot, feels more like the personal story of the man than a political issue film" (Black and van Sant 105). At the same time, the perspective and motives of the homophobes are undermined by the film. In stark contrast to the multifaceted gay and homophile characters, the film offers a rather one-dimensional portrayal of Anita Bryant and Josh Briggs and, hence, creates flat characters, in order to portray them "as the typical villainous homophobic" (Alegre 184) antagonists. Presenting Bryant exclusively through authentic footage of speeches and news reports about her denies her access to the narrative of the film as a proper multi-layered character. Black comments this decision as follows:

> The decision to let Anita play herself through archival footage was an early and important one. I feared it would be hard for folks nowadays to believe that a person actually said and meant the things she preached and believed. I didn't want her to come off as a caricature, and that's tough when you just read her words. So I decided to take myself and my opinions out of it – let her say it for herself. So all of her lines in this script are quotes taken from actual TV and newspaper reports. (Black and van Sant 107)

Thereby, the negative perception the viewer gets of Bryant is only implied by the film. It is the archival footage in which the 'real' person comes across as unsympathetic. Using an authenticity device in this way denies her the same form of representation the gay rights activists gain in the film. Black's view of completely taking his opinions out and letting Bryant speak for herself, shows that the film wants to convey the impression of impartiality. Moreover, her cameos are filtered through the gaze of the homosexual characters watching her on TV, most often Milk himself. Just after Milk hast lost his third run for office, Bryant is introduced by a compilation of her TV appearances. While she explains: "I believe that more than ever before, that there are evil forces round about us, even perhaps disguised as something good that would want to tear down the very foundation, the family unit, that holds America together" (00:35:21-43), the camera zooms out more and more to reveal a 1970s TV set with her on the screen. At the same time, the background sound of a bell indicates that a door must have been opened in the proximity of the TV set. A jump cut reveals that Milk has just entered the room and watches the show on Anita Bryant with concern. As her appearances are usually interpreted from a homosexual

Figure 6: Bryant on TV (00:35:26 & 00:35:30)

perspective, they are set into the context of the life-threatening struggle the LGBTQIAN+ characters lead for their equality. Not only does this enhance a gay sensibility that the film seeks to convey, but also marks another offer to identify with Milk by suggesting his motives for fighting back Bryant's and Brigg's political campaign against homosexuals. Interestingly, despite following a clear good-versus-evil scheme that is innate to Hollywood films, directing the gaze towards the vindicators of the heteronormative system reverses the long tradition of the gay villain trope in cinema (cf. Russo 122). Questioning homophobic viewing habits, this gaze can hence be described as queer.

Moreover, in the depiction of the love story between Milk and Scott Smith, the film facilitates an intimate gaze, allowing the viewers to get closer to the private Milk instead of the public persona. Scenes of their romantic feelings for each other are interspersed at the beginning and the end of the plot, which serve as another layer of frame narrative, this time on the diegetic level. As has already been pointed out in the chapter on Milk's emancipation, the plot begins with his 40th birthday, more specifically the night before his birthday, when he picks up Smith at a subway station. From the moment they meet, intimacy is created, suggesting their special bond. After their short encounter at the subway station, Milk takes Smith to his place where they have sex. The camera highly aestheticizes their sexual encounter by extreme close-ups that show only parts of their faces, such as their eyes or lips. In classical Hollywood cinema, this form of fetishization is usually applied to female bodies on screen, making women the objects of representation to "impose masculinity as 'point-of-view'" (Mulvey Afterthoughts 125). Here, however, the two characters on screen are both male and look at each other in turn, challenging the heteronormative viewing patterns. Thereby, the camera takes on a queer gaze that changes "the psychological process of looking at and identifying with characters"

(Benshoff and Griffin 11) and offers the viewers "a queer viewing position" (Benshoff and Griffin 10). After they had sex, another close-up on their faces almost gives the viewers the impression of being in bed with them. Parts of this scene are repeated at the end of the film, right after Milk has been assassinated. Accentuating the intradiegetic frame, this sets a queer tone for most of the film.

Furthermore, at the end of the plot, another very intimate scene between the two is interwoven with scenes showing Dan White getting up and breaking into city hall to kill Milk and Moscone, emphasising the dramatic ending. On the day of his assassination, Milk calls Smith in the early morning hours, just before dawn, to let him know that he went to see *Tosca* at the opera the night before. To show that they are engaging with each other again, Smith asks him if he can let him know next time, then he would come to the theatre with him. Then the scene switches to White on his way to Moscone's office, to create suspense and connect their intimacy with the tragic fate that awaits Milk on the same day. Another jump cut later Smith avows to Milk: "Harvey, I want you to know that I am proud of you" (01:52:15-18). This remark brings Milk to the verge of tears, which form in his eyes while he contorts his face in emotionality and says: "I don't wanna miss this" (01:53:00-02). When Smith asks "Miss what?" (01:53:03-04), he simply answers "This" (01:53:07-08), indicating that he misses Smith and the intimacy they once shared. Smith still seems to be one of his closest confidants, although they have not been a couple for some time. Thereby, the film emphasises the affection they still have for each other "and the possibility of rekindling the relationship were it not for Milk's untimely death" (Lenon 47). Moreover, their intimacy seems to point to Milk's vulnerability, making his experiences even more relatable to the audience. To visually enhance this impression, the camera perspective allows the viewers an intimate gaze by making use of close-up shots on their faces or medium long shots. The frames are juxtaposed, as they are both depicted in their dimly lit homes, holding the phone to their ears the same way. The gaze that is established through their intimacy highlights their romantic love story. "One way to interpret this is that, in contrast to his relationship with the troubled and volatile Lira, Milk's relationship with Scott Smith is offered as true love" (Lenon 47). Thereby, however, the film frames Milk's love life within heteronarrative expectations.

Figure 7: Last phone call (f.l.t.r.: 01:52:12 & 01:53:08)

In contrast to the relationship with Smith, a bond with a special quality, in the scenes with Lira, the sexual attraction is usually emphasised instead of the love they felt for each other. The film suggests that while Smith is Milk's true love, the effeminate Lira is just an affair and "portrayed as needy, jealous, emotionally unstable, and a problem to Milk's political aspirations; little or no validity is given to their relationship" (Lenon 47). Even though the sex scene between them is equally intimate as with Smith, it is still more playful and less conventionally romantic. On their first encounter, Lira is very drunk and seems quite lost, which is why Milk feels the urge of taking care of him. After they had sex, Lira immediately avows his love to Milk upon which the latter asks: "Do you even remember my name?" (00:53:41-43). When Lira denies, Milk introduces himself again: "I'm Harvey" (00:53:52-53) and Lira answers: "Harvey, I love you" (00:53:55-58). Having Lira utter these highly charged three words at their first encounter and without even remembering his lover's name, the film mocks heterosexual ideas of relationships and thus provides comic relief in a sexually charged scene. However, the heteronarrative convention of monogamy is upheld, since Milk starts a relationship with the men he takes home for sex and does not pick up them up just for one-night-stands. Thus, the film smooths Milk's more unorthodox sex life by including "not a single mention of the baths where those boys were spending all their time (just one coy mention of a night at the sauna for Scott), no running out to discos every night (only for Harvey's election celebration), and a decidedly chaste version of Harvey's own bedding practices" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 251). Furthermore, having Lira confess his love to Milk does not seem serious. Thereby, the film suggests that their love affair is going to be more superficial than the relationship Milk had with Smith. This is also highlighted by Lira's jealousy of Smith, for instance, when he is nagging him with questions when he comes home late from work: "Who were you

with? Scott? Or with a new boy you were trying to save?" (01:07:41-45). Moreover, Milk's friends are very sceptical of, if not hostile towards, Lira. Shortly after Milk has met Lira, Cleve Jones tells Anne Kronenberg: "The new Mrs. Milk. I give it a week" (00:55:50-54), while Smith tells Milk straight out with a disapproving glance towards Lira: "you can do better" (01:26:15-16). Milk's explanation for dating Lira emphasises their sexual rather than intellectual bond: "When I come home to Jack, I don't have to talk politics, I don't have to talk intelligently. I don't have to talk at all" (01:26:16-22). However, the disparaging attitude amongst Milk's friends towards him does not escape Lira and he constantly complains to Milk that his friends do not like him: "You know, your friends aren't very nice to me, Harvey" (01:01:10-12) or "Cleve and Anne, they tried to cut me out of your table, baby. I'm so sick of them. You should fire them" (01:25:27-35). When Milk and some other politicians meet to discuss their strategy against Proposition 6, this goes even so far as that Lira hides in the closet, because Milk is late and he does not feel welcomed by the others. Upon arriving, Milk is greeted with "Hello, Harvey, running late? Your boyfriend is in the closet" (01:07:16-20), which is clarified when Milk reacts with indignation: "The Latino has locked himself in the closet upstairs" (01:07:22-25). This situation could be read as a symbol for the enclosing result Milk anticipates when following the rather conservative strategy in fighting Proposition 6. However, Lira staying in the closet while everybody else is out offers yet another layer of interpretation. Not only does this emphasise his instable psyche and his immature behaviour, but it also shows that it is not possible for every LGBTQIAN+ individual to come out of the closet. While lampshading this issue, the film misses an opportunity for a more diverse perspective on the question of coming out and an inclusion of non-white and non-male perspective.

The intimate portrayal of a very private Harvey Milk strengthens his message that a gay-straight alliance will be formed when more heterosexual people get to know just one homosexual more closely: "We're going to convince the 90% to give a shit about us 10%. […] We have to let all those people out there know that they know one of us" (01:10:12-43). Thereby, the film creates a gaze that offers the identification with a collective homophile identity. Milk becomes the great connector of both worlds, as director Gus van Sant explains in a conversation with screenwriter Dustin Lance Black and actor Cleve Jones: "I always thought of Castro Street itself and City Hall as being two separate and not connectable places in San Francisco, and here was the connection: the man from Castro Street who

glued Castro Street into City Hall, along with the lifestyle of the denizens of Castro Street" (Black 118). Even though this could be described as an attempt at applying a queer gaze, the enactment of Milk's memorial that seeks to generate a collective identity not only amongst members of the LGBTQIAN+ community but also amongst the heterosexual majority could be seen as fostering the gay/straight dichotomy. Empowering one individual of a marginalised group as the 'glass-ceiling-breaker' does not necessarily mean that the glass ceiling is broken for other individuals, too. As the case of Lira shows, the oppressed can be the oppressor as well. This becomes particularly clear in the film's suggestion that everyone should come out. As a "rallying cry, a symbol of the political aims of the period, and a fully depersonalized theme with consequences for only minor characters" (Erhart 273) in the film, coming out always proceeds in demarcation to the heteronorm. Since this is the precondition for the closet, the heteronorm might thereby also determine which queer practices are seen as worthy of heterosexual acceptance. Heteronormativity thereby "continues to oppress, or oppresses most insidiously, once 'outness' is claimed" (Butler 'Imitation' 308–309). Coming out of the closet becomes a regulatory tool of the oppressive system of heteronormativity, while the appeal to come out might foster homonormative structures within the LGBTQIAN+ community.

Moreover, the obstacles and dangers of leaving the closet are not evenly distributed especially comparing white gay men with non-white, more effeminate homosexuals and trans* individuals. As Lira tells Milk during their first night spent together, his "father beat [him] when he found out" (00:53:12-13), which is why he fled from Mexico to San Francisco. As actor Diego Luna points out in an interview, Lira "had a lot of loneliness, and just the fact of not being accepted in your family sounds like enough to get lost" (Luna quoted in Lamble n. pag.). However, the film seems to overlook that Lira's loneliness due to Milk's tight political schedule were not the sole reasons that lead him to commit suicide but his social marginalisation and a deeply seated feeling of shame due to his homosexuality. As Seidman points out, "simply coming out does not rid us of feelings of shame and guilt, and […] visibility alone does not threaten heterosexual privilege" (Seidman *Closet* 7). This shows that not only was coming out not as safe for Lira as for the other characters, but he was also not accepted with open arms in the gay community, increasing his loneliness even more as he neither belongs to the hetero- nor to the homosexuals. Since the film leaves out his depression, alcoholism, and the irrational fights that strongly burdened their relationship (cf. Shilts 269), his effeminacy and clinginess to Milk are

highlighted and come to be the only visible reason for his marginalisation within the LGBTQIAN+ community. Thus, the homonormative gaze directed at Lira for being more effeminate than the other characters hampers the overall endeavour of the film to establish a queer gaze. Even more so, the film thereby misrepresents queers of colour and, hence, reflects "the hegemonic whiteness of mainstream queer activism" (Lenon 49). Recalling the roots of gay liberation and emphasising the "great extent to which Milk sought to establish alliances and coalitions with a wide variety of communities, including communities of colour" (Lenon 48), Suzanne Lenon criticises the absence of queers of colour and women in the film: "This is a significant misrepresentation as well as misremembering of genealogies of the birth(s) of the gay liberation movement, given that drag queens and people of colour led the 1969 Stonewall revolt and riots and ultimately *made* a figure like Harvey Milk possible" (Lenon 47). Furthermore, as Rich points out, "[i]t may not be a deliberate message, but understated evidence of women's absence from Castro goings-on is everywhere apparent" (Rich 245). There is only one woman who plays a significant role for the plot of the film: Milk's campaign manager Anne Kronenberg (Alison Pill). She is hired after Smith and Milk have ended their relationship and thus only becomes relevant in the second half of the film. When she enters the camera shop for the first time, she immediately notices that the other activists are skeptical of her and asks provocatively: "My girlfriends say you guys don't like women. I'm just asking. Is there a place for us in all this or are you all scared of girls?" (00:48:32-37). This scene fulfils two functions. On the one hand, it provides comic relief and on the other it serves to highlight the fact that the gay liberation movement during the 1970s was in fact widely misogynist (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* 245). However, the film does not take this idea any further and rests on having drawn attention to the issue and including a woman to some parts of the plot. Furthermore, when one of the activists stands up for her and tells the others that "she's got bigger balls than anybody else in here" (00:48:53-55), the film perpetuates the stereotypical divide between lesbians and gays and thus offers only a very cliché representation of lesbian women.

By creating a collective gaze from a white and male perspective that equally invites straight viewers and offers its audience a means for collective identity formation, the film at the same time stratifies the LGBTQIAN+ community. Even though this might be seen as a valuable recognition of "the significance of gay historical figures" (Erhart 264), it subsumes a variety of LGBTQIAN+ individuals under what is conceived as "normal, good citizens"

(Seidman *Closet* 23), thus making a certain type of LGBTQIAN+ "ready for public consumption" (Shachar 13). Consequently, the gaze *Milk* establishes can also be interpreted as a means to assimilate homosexuality into American national identity. Making Milk a national hero commemorated by both homo- and heterosexual Americans can be oppressive to queer citizens who do not conform to the standards of gay normality. As Benshoff stresses, the "generic moorings" (Benshoff 261) of white, middle-class cis-male homosexuals might "allow for the easy replication of pre-existing stereotypes" (Benshoff 262) and foster homonormative structures.

3.4 Genius, Rebel, Martyr: Archetypes of Hegemonic (Gay) Masculinity

The Misunderstood Genius

Howl is an experimental assemblage that is reminiscent of New Queer Cinema in its mixture of genre, use of pastiche, and the eclectic way it is dealing with the historical subject matter of Ginsberg's literary creativity, which foregrounds the perspective of the marginalised and thereby exposes the heteronormative institutions and authorities as oppressive. However, as a biopic, the film belongs to a very traditional cinematic genre (cf. Vidal 4). By following the biopic tradition in the representation of the author as genius, the film perpetuates a certain narrative of masculinity. The following chapter analyses in how far the film produces a form of hegemonic (gay) masculinity by focusing on the representation of Allen Ginsberg as the misunderstood genius which is an exclusively male figure. Moreover, I will introduce the archetype of the male genius and the problematic implications for issues of gender to then elaborate on the representation of the male genius in the film.

Etymologically, the word genius derives from "the Latin word 'genius'", which referred to a deity or "spirit of procreativity" (Chibici-Revneanu 89). Based on this ancient origin, "the eighteenth century and the Romantic movement promoted a particularly powerful role for genius and fostered the cult of the individual man of exceptional capacities" (Korsmeyer 29). Since then, archetypical geniality is defined by a number of features: a genius is a "breed of free spirit, a nonconformist unbound by social convention or pedestrian rules" (Korsmeyer 10), a "romantically isolated and lonely figure [...]" (Korsmeyer 10) who is "strong and capable of independence from tradition and social norms" (Korsmeyer 29). Moreover, "geniuses

overcome all obstacles, lead their lives exclusively dedicated to their art and have their works of inherent, universal value proven right in the end" (Chibici-Revneanu 99), which might imply that "the originality of genius is often misunderstood until the passage of time delivers a verdict" (Korsmeyer 10). By "creating from his unique imagination through an act of 'expression'" (Korsmeyer 31) a true genius is not only able to create "superior artworks, but [his] vision has altered the direction of the field altogether" (Korsmeyer 29). Moreover, "many contended that true artistic imagination stems from an inborn spark that is antithetical to the plodding rules of reason, a position that represents a brand of resistance to the dominion of rationality so prevalent in philosophy" (Korsmeyer 31). Thus, "Renaissance notions of genius pictured a great artist as one who can create by a controlled kind of madness" (Korsmeyer 29).

However, as Rob Pope points out "the concept of 'genius' is deeply gendered. It is the ultimate embodiment of 'the great man as creator' – or 'destroyer.' Either way, the emphasis falls equally upon 'great' and 'man'" (Pope 105). Already in 1928, Virginia Woolf proclaimed the gendered nature of geniality in her well-known lecture that was later published as *A Room of One's Own*. Famously contradicting common perceptions of artistic freedom, she states that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births" (Woolf 72) and that "intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends on intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time" (Woolf 116). Therefore, "it is men who are assigned the role of artistic creativity free from biological destiny" (Korsmeyer 14). Yet, in this sense, associating geniality with irrationality seems rather illogical, since rationality is widely considered a male quality, while irrationality and madness (hysteria) are stereotypically feminine qualities (cf. Korsmeyer 12). Even more so,

> [m]etaphors of labor and birth popularly describe artistic inspiration and creation, for example. Both masculine traits (toughness, courage) and feminine ones (emotional sensitivity) are interpreted as having special creative powers and are assigned to the best minds of an age, minds with virtually exclusively male exemplars. (Korsmeyer 30-31)

Therefore, the genius is a contradictory figure who acquires a special position within the hierarchy of masculinities. Transgressing normative boundaries, he is often misunderstood and seen as mad especially when bearing traditionally feminine traits such as being (or seeming) irrational and having a recourse to feelings. Nonetheless, after overcoming social obstacles

and being acknowledged, thereafter being described as a heroic figure belonging to the best minds of mankind, the genius assumes a hegemonic position. This effect is reinforced by the oppression and marginalisation of women.

In *Howl*, I submit that Allen Ginsberg is presented as the typical male genius and thus claims a hegemonic social position. As Bruhn and Gjelsvik argue, the film is "leaning heavily on a romantic Gesamtkunstwerk vision of artists and artistic creation" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 350). Accordingly, it establishes Ginsberg as the misunderstood but brilliant genius figure who transgresses social, formal, and even sexual boundaries. This shows "the directors' ambition in creating a semi-documentary 'biopic' concerning a politically charged question of censorship, and a psychedelic animated universe to match the vital artistic genius of Ginsberg" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 350). At the same time, this representation marginalises women and feminine influence on his artistic development. This aspect is especially interesting when considering that research on the Beat Generation from the 1990s on has continuously criticised the male-centredness and at times even misogyny of the movement and its aftermath (cf. Forsgren and Prince, Knight, Waldman, Watson). Thus, in this sub-chapter, I will address the following questions: In how far dos the narrative structure portray Ginsberg as a genius? How does this establish him as a representative of hegemonic (gay) masculinity? And why might this representation perpetuate the marginalisation of female authorship within the Beat Generation?

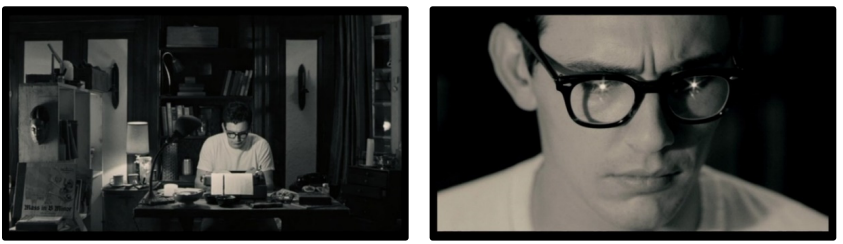

Figure 8: Ginsberg at his desk (00:04:05; 00:04:13)

As the whole plot of *Howl* centres around and is structured by the eponymous poem. The process of writing and publishing the poem is enacted as Ginsberg's coming out. Yet, combining creativity and sexuality again, the poem as well as his sexual orientation is used to mark Ginsberg as a genius which is why his character is occupying a special position within the

hierarchy of masculinity. The title sequence already introduces Ginsberg as an ingenious figure in close connection with his poetry: "In 1955, an unpublished 29-year-old poet presented his vision of the world as a poem in four parts. He called it … – HOWL." (00:02:29-00:02:35). While the title of the film is shown onscreen, Ginsberg is depicted walking slowly through a narrow passage in between the walls of two houses, emerging out of the shadow into the light (00:02:35-00:02:43). This depiction foreshadows his development in becoming a celebrated ingenious poet (cf. Bruhn and Gjelsvik 348) and his struggle to accept his sexual identity. Moreover, the introduction of the title already alludes to the concept of geniality by using the phrasing "his vision of the world" (00:02:29-00:02:35). To have a vision is one key characteristic of the genius that is constantly invoked by the film, and hence "the main structuring principle is […] the epiphanic visions expressed by the quasi-divine poet and his voice" (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 349). Ginsberg is introduced as an author, shown sitting at his desk in "clichéd scenes of cigarette smoke and a typewriter" (Shachar 131). The "typical literary biopic tropes and symbolism" (Shachar 132), support the image of the intellectual. The mise-en-scène in this frame is based on an authentic photograph of Ginsberg the film uses to emphasise Ginsberg's geniality. The objects seem to be randomly arranged in his studio – a record of Bach's 'Mass in B minor", tribal masks, candles, books – and are, next to his glasses, symbols for a high amount of cultural capital due to an intellectual occupation. Thus, Ginsberg is depicted as a 'man of letters.' While he is typing, the film indicates that he is having a vision by reflections on his glasses that take on the shape of little stars, symbolising the "inborn spark" (Korsmeyer 31) of his geniality and his "unique imagination" (Korsmeyer 31). By suggesting subjective processes taking place in his mind, this depiction, which is recalled several times in the course of the film, can be interpreted as a filmic hint to the ingenious vision Ginsberg has while writing 'Howl' (cf. Noll Brinkmann 17). The scene follows right after the first interview sequence in which Ginsberg describes the process of his writing:

> Sometimes I feel in command when I'm writing. When I'm in the heat of some truthful tears, yes. Other times, most of the time, not. You know, just diddling around, woodcarving, you know, finding a pretty shape, like most of my poetry. There's only been a few times when I've reached a state of complete control. Probably a piece of 'Howl,' and one or two moments in other poems. (00:03:44-00:04:05)

As the quote shows, his writing oscillates between control and emotionality and thus between rationality and irrationality. Rationality and control, for Ginsberg, do not constitute what more traditional definitions of the terms would suggest, since he links control to the affect of being "in the heat of some truthful tears" and thereby blurs the boundary between the two very reverse concepts of affect and reason.

By making recourse to the art of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh, two famous post-impressionist visual artists (cf. Brodskaïa 281), the film enhances Ginsberg's modernist sense of art and poetry. The focus on emotions and real-life experiences, as well as to attain "truth in art" (Brodskaïa 31) is also central to the (post-)impressionist artistic method (cf. Brodskaïa 12; 256). Moreover, the affiliation with Cézanne and van Gogh stages Ginsberg as a genius coming from a well-established line of geniuses. While the reference to van Gogh is more subtle, with a small part of the animation being reminiscent of the famous painting *The Starry Night* (1889; 00:19:10-17), the film quotes Cézanne prominently by implementing one of his most famous pictures of the serial *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, a motif he often painted near his hometown Aix-en-Provence (cf. Brodskaïa 321). The viewer follows Ginsberg in one of his flashbacks to see the picture in a museum (probably the Museum of Modern Art in New York (cf. Ginsberg in Taransky 8)). While the frame, like all flashbacks, is shot in black-and-white, the picture is singled out by showing it in colour which underlines the impressionist principle that colours play an important role for the conveyance of emotions (cf. Brodskaïa 256). In front of the picture is an elderly woman looking at it, while Ginsberg is in the back. Then the frame changes from a long shot to a medium long shot, showing him looking at the picture in deep thought (00:40:24-45). While the sequence is shown, Ginsberg's off-screen voice explicates his opinion on artists and their intertextual influence on each other:

> In the moment of composition, I don't necessarily know what it means. It comes to mean something later, after a year or two, I come to realize it meant something clear, unconsciously. Which takes on meaning in time, you know like a photograph developing slowly. If it's at all spontaneous, I don't know whether it even makes sense sometimes. And other times, I do know, it makes complete sense, I start crying. 'Cause I realize that I'm – I'm hitting on an area that's absolutely true. In that sense, able to be read by someone and wept to, maybe, centuries later. In that sense, prophecy, because it touches a common key. I mean, what prophecy ac-

> tually is, is not knowing whether the bomb will fall in 1942. It's knowing and feeling something which someone knows and feels in a hundred years. Hmm? And maybe articulating it in a hint that they will pick up on in a 100 years. (00:40:53-00:42:13)

By evoking the concept of art as prophecy the film once again alludes to the artist as genius. Thereby, it conveys Ginsberg's own recourse to Cézanne, since the 'real-life' Ginsberg had immersed himself in the study of the post-impressionist painter to rework the impressionist style in his poetry (Ginsberg in Taransky 8-9).[38] The film stages the link between the artists by cutting back and forth between Ginsberg's face and the painting, moving from close-ups on details of the painting to close-ups on his face, suggesting that he loses himself in the contemplation of the painting and eventually letting the animated lyrical I of the poem enter the world of the painting (00:41:01-21). In later scenes, the film entangles the content of the poem and the painting again when the destruction of Rockland and Moloch is shown. As the walls of the asylum collapse in front of the two patients (the lyrical I and Solomon), Cézanne's landscape is shown outside (00:55:15), indicating that an appeal to (impressionist) art might yield their liberation.

The influence of Cézanne present in Ginsberg's poetry is taken up by the film when Ginsberg describes the process of writing. Taking one line of 'Howl' as an example, he explains how he incorporated the impressionist method into his poetry. He states that he had "this word [Moloch]" (00:48:35-38) and he "also had the feeling" (00:48:40-42), but "what about it?" (00:49:02-03). Looking around himself, he adds objects that he perceives around him (like windows). "And then I had to finish it somehow" (00:49:14-17). Thereby, his writing becomes a mixture of his personal impressions: rational parts like the words and perceptions blur with irrational parts like the feeling and a certain urge to finish off. The sexual connotation that this quote alludes to is made very explicit in another scene when

38 Ginsberg explains in the interview with the Paris Review: "The last part of 'Howl' was really an homage to art but also in specific terms an homage to Cézanne's method, in a sense I adapted what I could to writing; but that's a very complicated matter to explain. Except, putting it very simply, that just as Cézanne doesn't use perspective lines to create space, but it's a juxtaposition of one color against another color (that's one element of his space), so, I had the idea, perhaps overrefined, that by the unexplainable, unexplained nonperspective line, that is, juxtaposition of one word against another, a gap between the two words – like the space gap in the canvas – there'd be a gap between the two words that the mind would fill in with the sensation of existence" (*Ginsberg in Taransky 9*).

Ginsberg talks about his poetry almost as if he talked about an orgasm. I have already analysed the scene in much detail when describing the connection between sexuality and artistic expression.[39] But I wish to highlight again here that Ginsberg sees his writing as "a rhythmic articulation of feeling" which is "an impulse that begins inside, like a sexual impulse" (00:38:28-00:39:11). He describes this experience as being overwhelmed by feeling. The impulse "begins in your stomach and rises up through the breast and out of the mouth and ears" (00:38:28-00:39:11), on the one hand, the film emphasises his perception of art as "an act of 'expression'" (Korsmeyer 31). On the other hand, the connection between the artistic impulse and the sexual impulse also alludes to the procreative aspect of geniality (cf. Chibici-Revneanu 89). Moreover, the perception of a work coming from within the ingenious artist is evoked by the Beat Generation's approach to writing which "has centred on spontaneous prose and poetry, aleatory composition methods such as 'cut-ups,' to enable thoughts and emotions to be channelled directly to the reader" (Forsgren und Prince 14). Hence, they see literary expression as a very personal and affective act, which is why Ginsberg claims "that writing is personal. […] it comes from the writer's own person. His body, his breathing rhythm, his actual talk" (00:10:15-25). For him, the path to good writing is "to approach your Muse as frankly as you would talk to yourself or to your friends. It's the ability to commit to writing – to write the same way that you are" (00:16:48-00:17:45). Thereby, his work becomes central to the artist's life and his identity, which is another characteristic of the genius.

Not only are the aspects of irrationality, procreation, and a personal approach to art enhanced by the film, but also the notion of madness as a trait of the genius and hence being misunderstood, isolated, and excluded by society. Considering this aspect, the reference to van Gogh becomes significant, as he is the epitome of the mad, misunderstood genius (cf. Brodskaïa 374). The painting *The Starry Night* which the film references was made during van Gogh's stay in an asylum when he suffered from hallucination (Brodskaïa 379). The film incorporates the painting by showing heterosexual couples pinwheeling in a vortex through a van-Gogh-like starry sky above the skyline of New York (cf. Fig. 8). Nathalia Brodskaïa's description of the *The Starry Night* in her chapter on van Gogh comes actually very close to the scenery with which the viewer is presented in the film:

39 See chapter 3.3.

> Dark blue, stretched above tiny houses, the sky in this painting is filled with that mysterious life beyond human perception. The stars and the moon are brightly wreathed, while celestial bodies move among one another in entangled spirals. And man appears small and helpless in the vortex of life in the universe. (Brodskaïa 385)

In the film, the celestial bodies become actual bodies of copulating couples. In transforming the famous painting on screen, the film visually conflates artistry, sexuality, and madness. It points to the fact that Ginsberg also stayed in an asylum for several months due to his homosexuality, which was still defined as a mental illness during this time. As he recounts, his homosexuality "alienated [him], or set [him] apart from the beginning" (01:11:28-31). Even though he suffered from the repugnancy of his sexual identity and heteronormativity, his otherness "served as a catalyst for self-examination or a detailed realization of [his] environment and the reasons why everyone else is different and why [he is] different" (01:11:31-48). His homosexuality eventually became a strength for him as a poet and a means to criticise heteronormative structures employing literary expression. Staging Ginsberg's rebellion through his literature, the film characterises him as the "free spirit" or "nonconformist" (Krsmeyer 10) who "can create by a controlled kind of madness" (Korsmeyer 29) which is essential to the mad genius. Furthermore, the film stresses that he is misunderstood only by conservative people like the vindicators of the heteronorm in court, who do not seem to be able to grasp his significance of possibly altering the perception of literature by creating something absolutely new (cf. Korsmeyer 29). Their lack of intellect renders them incapable of seeing the geniality in Ginsberg's poetry. Even more so, their aggression towards Ginsberg and their intolerance of his poetry correlate with their impression that he causes instabilities in the system of the hegemonic discourse which threatens their definitions of masculinity. This, however, subordinates them and thus puts him into a hegemonic position. Even though he is homosexual, he claims a hegemonic position within the heteronormative gender order and not merely within the LGBTQIAN+ culture. This depiction can be read as a mechanism of empowerment, since the 'ordinary' man, usually gaining from hegemonic masculinity, is thereby subordinated to Ginsberg as a genius, which turns around the social stratification of gay men who are oppressed by a hegemonic masculinity. Presenting Ginsberg as a genius hence unhinges the system of hegemonic masculinity: by claiming a place within hegemonic masculinity, Ginsberg creates hegemonic *gay* masculinity.

However, to place the gay author in the position of hegemonic masculinity does not only come at the expense of 'ordinary' men like Kirk and McIntosh ('the average man,' who is not able to grasp the poem, as McIntosh stresses), but in a large part marginalises and oppresses women, which is another key aspect of hegemonic masculinity. None of the other Beat characters gets a voice in the film. William S. Burroughs, for example, is left out completely; but at least other male Beat personalities like Kerouac, Solomon, Ferlinghetti, and Cassady figure in the film and are shown in their influential interaction with Ginsberg. Moreover, their personal development as Beat artists is referred to in the end credits of the film while authentic photographs of them are shown. In contrast, women and especially female Beat writers and their influences on Ginsberg's life and writing are completely left out. This is curious since the marginalisation of female authorship within the Beat Generation has been a controversial issue amongst authors as well as scholars. In her memoir, Beat author Joyce Johnson remembers:

> The real communication was going on between the men, and the women were there as onlookers. You kept you mouth shut, and if you were intelligent and interested in things you might pick up what you could. It was a very *masculine aesthetic*. (Gifford and Lee 235-236; italics added for emphasis).

It was not before the 1990s that the issue became relevant amongst scholars involved in research on the Beat movement and remained a hot topic in the academic discourse during the receding years. With *The Women of the Beat Generation* (1996), Brenda Knight has published the seminal work on the misrepresentation and marginalisation of female Beat artists. In the book, she emphasises her intention to "finally understand these women as important figures in our literature, our history, and our culture and as some of the best minds of the Beat Generation" (Knight 6). Anne Waldman, who is often referred to as a Beat writer as well, agrees that the male Beats "have gotten most of the credits as the movers and shakers of the 'Beat' literary movement" (Waldman in Knight xi) in her foreword to Knight's book. Moreover, Frida Forsgren and Michael J. Prince emphasise that women did indeed influence the Beat movement. By analysing "the role women have played as key junctures of literary change and innovation, as catalysts, as providers of material, emotional, and intellectual support, as editors, and as muses" (11), they cast a light on the canonisation of Beat literature which "continues to be read and interpreted as a masculine

construction" (Forsgren und Prince 11). Considering the film by Epstein and Freidman, they argue that "the evocative social critique in Ginsberg's *Howl* seem[s] to have an enduring effect as [a] masculine cultural trope […] despite more than forty years of feminist discourse" (Forsgren und Prince 11). Thus, they criticise the

> persistent and enduring focus on the literary triumvirate Ginsberg-Kerouac-Burroughs, their contribution, and their aesthetics. Recent films such as *HOWL* (2010), *On the Road* (2012), *Big Sur* (2014) and *Kill Your Darlings* (2014) produced in the last decade continue to fuel the creation of the myths surrounding their canonical works, and stamp their continued output on university curriculums and the general public. (Forsgren und Prince 14)

As argued before in this thesis, the cultural representation of a person or group severely affects how they are perceived in society (cf. Dyer 1). Not only does the presentation of Ginsberg as the misunderstood genius in the film mark him as a representative of hegemonic masculinity, but the oppression of female characters at the same time further marginalises female agency in the Beat movement.

Except for expert witness Gail Potter, neither are the female characters in the film allowed to speak nor do they have names. As has been pointed out before, they are marked as intruders into male homoeroticism. Considering that the film aesthetically connects sexuality and art, the female characters hence also inhibit Ginsberg's development as an ingenious artist. This becomes apparent in a scene showing Ginsberg and Cassady at the verge of having oral sex when interrupted by Cassady's partner. This scene is followed by Cassady breaking up with Ginsberg to "become truly straight" (00:32:17-18). For Cassidy, this means having numerous sexual affairs with different women, which, on the one hand of course, enhances Ginsberg's exclusion from heteronormative society, but on the other hand objectifies women on the screen. Especially in the animation, women are highly sexualised and reduced to their sexual allure for the male members of the Beat Generation, with Cassady, "cocksmith and Adonis of Denver" (00:33:25-27), leading the way. Furthermore, showing the female characters only as Ginsberg's, Kerouac's, and Cassady's nameless and speechless sex partners emphasises the tendency to relate Beat women to the famous men they were surrounded with instead of acknowledging their works of art. Instead of being individual artists or even geniuses themselves, women can only assume two roles: they are either muses for or subjects of works of

art or they inhibit the artist's true geniality. Gail Potter, the only female character with a name and a voice in the film, is another example of a woman standing in Ginsberg's way to become a genius. On account of this, she is stultified by the film for her narrow-minded view on literature. Even though it is very clear that the film thereby tries to expose the traditional and heteronormative perspective on art as preposterous and obsolete, showing the only speaking female character in this way must be critically scrutinised.

As has been pointed out before, Potter seems not very reliable as an expert on literature since she contradicts herself in her testimony when insisting on 'objective' facts while at the same time relying heavily on her own subjective reaction. However, considering her degrees from numerous prestigious universities like for instance Stanford University and her own practice in writing (cf. Ehrlich 92), which the film does not mention, makes her less inexpedient than the film wants her to appear and rather reinforces the sexist 1950s view that a woman's opinion was not considered relevant. The film advocates complete freedom of all forms and ways of living, especially regarding sexuality. Potter does not share this view and thus must be stultified by the film. Even though the film thereby criticises conformist views, it recurs to the fact that due to the social role designated to women in the 1950s, female expertise was not regarded with the same respect as was given to their male contemporaries. This becomes obvious in a scene that depicts Potter being literally laughed at by the audience in the court room when she explains that she rewrote *Faust* (cf. 00:07:55-00:09:35). This is an accurate depiction in accordance with to the original court transcript, but, as before, the film leaves out the part that makes Potter less ridiculous. Potter explains that she rewrote *Faust* from its forty original manuscripts (cf. Ehrlich 92), which is a serious academic pursuit and nothing to be laughed about. Including this piece of information, might thus have reduced the scene's comic relief and let Potter appear more reliable as a literary expert. Moreover, the film undermines the practice of re-writing, which is a feminist strategy of empowerment. Through an act of re-vision, rewriting becomes a technique for feminist appropriation of the field of literature and thus to rebel against the dominance of male authors (cf. A. Rich "Re-Vision" 18).[40] The way the film presents Potter reinforces the

40 In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1972), Adrienne Rich refers to Henrik Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken* and compares the situation for women in the 1950s with Ibsen's protagonist, a woman who realises that she is being

impression that women are not taken seriously by men. Making very clear that her expertise as a teacher for English literature is in question, the film emphasises the fact that Ehrlich does not even cross-examine her and asks her to step down from the witness stand. With this depiction of Potter combined with the absence of any other female characters, the film finally connives the gender bias of the 1950s that was also prevalent within the otherwise so progressive Beat Generation and hence perpetuates the male-centredness of the movement. Moreover, the film imbeds Ginsberg into the American literary tradition "that highlights the making of an already 'great author,' feeding off and into the celebrity figure of the authorial body" (Shachar 131) and thereby strengthens the myth of a male canon of Beat geniuses.

The All-American Rebel

As has already been pointed out, *Stonewall* does not comply with all the features of the biopic genre, since its protagonist Danny is not modelled after a historic character. However, the coming-of-age story follows a biopic-like cinematic style and traces its protagonist's development from his final high school year to the liberating act of rebellion that turns everything around for him. With Danny, the film moreover implements a character who fully complies with the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. He is presented as the 'normal' everyday white American high school boy, except that he is gay. Telling his story against the backdrop of the Stonewall Riots – a movement that was initiated by trans* persons and queers of colour – centralises white gay masculinity while marginalising non-white and queer masculinities. Thereby, Danny is not only the key player of his own life but also in an important moment in history. The film makes use of two interconnected master narratives or myths in Barthes' sense: on

objectified by a male artists. She uses the protagonist's awakening as a metaphor for women's awakening awareness of their discrimination (cf. A. Rich "Re-Vision" 18). However, female authors lack role models of their own sex (cf. A. Rich "Re-Vision" 19) which is why Rich argues that re-writing is a means to see the literary canon from a different angle, namely the female: "Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" (A. Rich "Re-Vision" 18).

the one hand, it stages the Stonewall Riots as the beginning of the gay liberation movement and, on the other hand, it narrates the story of how Danny becomes the rebel figure central to this movement. In my opinion, this filmic strategy embeds homosexuality into American national identity, thereby creating the myth of a collective queer identity that is assimilated to heteronormative American society. William H. Epstein sees "Hollywood as a political player in the ideological superstructure, as an instrument of hegemonic power and American national identity" (Epstein 16). Not only is the rebel archetype closely linked to American nationalism, but also to masculinity and thereby to a hegemonic position which is able to determine the perspective on historic events and thereby grant the prerogative of interpreting these events – a debate that has already been touched upon in the historical background to the film. Therefore, the rebel archetype as well as the features of the cinematic rebel figure will be introduced to then examine their representations in the film and carve out how the Stonewall myth is white- and straightwashed. As Marc Stein emphasises, the Stonewall Riots were made into the symbolic beginning of the gay liberation movement, even though there had been a variety of developments leading to the nationwide revolt of the LGBTQIAN+ community. Thus, the myths that were created around the Stonewall Riots promote the assumption of a homogeneous LGBTQIAN+ community and their collective identity. Thereby, trans* people, people of colour and sex workers within the movement are marginalised and misrepresented – a problem that Stonewall veteran Sylvia Rivera had been stressing since the beginning of the gay liberation movement (cf. Tedjasukmana 64). Since "film exerts a profoundly mythological function, contributing to the symbolic order of images of the values and behaviours endorsed through hegemony" (McKelly 210), the cinematic appropriations of historic moments such as the Stonewall Riots, "commonly become part of how we remember the subject, converting what is already usually legend into codified, reconceived pseudo-myth" (Atkinson n. pag.). Analysing the narrative that rests upon the Stonewall myths is, hence, a valuable approach to examine how the film *Stonewall* perpetuates homonormative structures. In the film, this myth is produced mainly by the implementation of the rebel archetype and thus connected to hegemonic gay masculinity as well as American nationalism. Focusing on the way the film engages with historical material, I will address the following questions: in how far is Danny depicted as the rebel archetype? And how does this representation perpetuate the mythmaking of the Stonewall Riots as white and male?

The evolution of the rebel is a pervasive cinematic theme especially in American feature films since "it has all the elements of drama, with powerful themes of justice and injustice, conflict and reconciliation; it represents a universal dilemma in so far as most societies and institutions have an authority structure which not unusually provokes rebellion or revolt" (Nitsun 2014, S. 215). The rebel as a distinctive masculine archetype has its cinematic prototype in Jim Stark played by James Dean in the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). James McKelly identifies the diegetic structure of *Rebel Without a Cause* as centring on a "precariously situated protagonist trying to Do The Right Thing in facing the twofold moral challenge issued to him in the idiom of a twofold self-destructive threat – physical and social" (McKelly 211). The rebel is never completely bad-natured, but a likeable character and morally good at the core. This impression is conveyed by presenting his struggles and offering background knowledge about what he is going through to understand his motives better. These motives are driven by the complicated negotiation of the rebel's urge to behave correctly and a social background that restrains him. Thereby, he is bound to become "a victim of hegemony, driven by self-destructive frustration, sent hurtling toward the literal edge of culture" (McKelly 211). In the archetypical representation of the rebel, "hegemony visits upon youth through the agency of parents" (McKelly 211) or other authority figures which are usually represented as "flawed, oppressive and generally problematic and the relationship to authority as complex and ambivalent" (Nitsun 216). The rebel has to revolt against these authority figures to emancipate himself from the hegemonic structures that suppress him. Thereby, violence plays an important role and is depicted as an accountable reaction to hegemonic structures.

Analysing different psychological models to explain violence in his book *Why Men Rebel* (2016), Ted Robert Gurr argues that "the primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism" (Gurr 36). According to his 'relative deprivation' hypothesis, frustration appears and might lead to violence when individuals perceive a "discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled" (Gurr 24). Hence, their sense of entitlement determines what they think they deserve, while they get frustrated when this does not occur, which increases the probability for aggression and rebellion (cf. Gurr 24-35). Since violence is seen as a typically male trait (cf. Connell *Masculinities* 83) that "can open possibilities for progress in gender relations" (Connell *Masculinities* 84), rebellion can be connec-

ted to masculinity. At the same time, as Connell point out, "[h]egemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus represent the interests of the whole society" (Connell *Masculinities* 164). Thus, the violent act of male rebellion is seen as a mechanism to relocate the social norms on behalf of everybody else. This is reminiscent of another common cinematic trope: the white saviour, forming a "genre in which a white messianic character saves a lower- or working-class, usually urban or isolated, non-white character from a sad fate" (Hughey 1). In fact, the

> trope is so widespread that varied intercultural and interracial relations are often guided by a logic that racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites). Such imposing patronage enables an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the non-white pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities. (Hughey 2)

The concept of white saviourism goes back to, among others, two notions of white American national identity: manifest destiny, which "carried with it the implicit assumption that white Americanness was exceptionally virtuous and was divinely inspired to spread that virtue to others" (Hughey 9) and the 'white man's burden,' relying on Rudyard Kipling's 1899 eponymous poem, which "came to symbolize an increasingly taken-for-granted weltanschauung: a world populated by dysfunctional people of color thought unredeemable without righteous white paternalism" (Hughey 10). Still today, "[t]he white savior film perpetuates, in subtle and friendly terms, the archaic paradigm of manifest destiny, the white man's burden" (Hughey 15). Seen from this perspective, the rebel archetype becomes the white and male saviour of people of colour, queers, or women, who would not have been able to enforce their demands for equal rights without the help of white men. Nevertheless, the narrative of the rebel usually includes a "return to the conventional order, but on his own terms" and thus a "reconciliation of hegemony" (McKelly 211) in the end. This means that eventually some form of status quo has to be re-established, possibly with amendments to the normative order that the rebel has enforced, but still within its structural confinements.

There are very similar narrative structures in *Stonewall*, which is why I describe Danny as an archetypical rebel character who uses violence as a

viable form of revolt and becomes the white/male saviour at the end. The film introduces Danny as a likeable character and the rebel yet to be. His background story is narrated via flashbacks, highlighting his motives for rebellion. Throughout the whole plot, he wants to adhere to the norms of heterosexual society, he does not like unlawfulness, is always polite, never swears, steals, or gets arrested. In short, he is portrayed as innocent. Danny is the naive hero, who believes in the good in people, but gets disappointed by it; he perceives himself as good and feels entitled to a 'normal' life, if not a position amongst hegemonic masculinity, which is why he cannot understand why he is constantly humiliated and treated unfairly. This deprivation explains his frustration which at some point erupts in anger. Thus, the following paragraphs serve to define Danny's story as an archetypical narration of the evolution of the rebel in relation to two of the most pervasive Stonewall myths: that the riots were led by white gays at the fore of a homogeneous group and that it ushered in a new era for all LGBTQIAN+ people. Thereby, the film links these myths with the character's American national identity: Danny becomes a rebel for the good cause and a national hero. I will take a close look on how the narrative structure of the film emphasises Danny's perspective and depicts him as a decent, likeable, and innocent character especially in comparison to the members of the gang of street youth. His adherence to moral virtues, his integrity, and his pursuit of love and friendship are presented as descent and desirable. Thereupon, an analysis of the scenes portraying the beginning of the riot will serve to carve out how Danny becomes the rebel and white/male saviour in the film, while other characters such as Ray and Marsha are marginalised and ridiculed. Finally, I will show how this depiction of Danny eventually reincorporates gay/queer rebellion into heteronormative structures, revealing the film's subliminal assimilationist agenda.

Throughout the plot, Danny is portrayed as the innocent white country youth, who does not "know what is what" (00:05:54-57), as Ray puts it. Danny's innocence, highlighted by depicting him in a white T-Shirt most of the time, is usually depicted in contrast to the other street youths to mark his morals as superior. "Danny's whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormative affect [...] allow him a social mobility denied to his new acquaintances" (Ginelle n. pag.). He is thereby put into a better light at the expense of the other characters. While they are stealing, hustling, and taking drugs, he is trying to lead a 'normal' life with a decent job, promising educational training, and a monogamous relationship. The first instances in the film that show the street youth stealing, Danny refrains from commenting. He

even shares their stolen food with them, probably because stealing food is more acceptable to him since they need to eat. But when Conga steals the curtain from their hostel room to mend herself a dress from it for the weekend, he accuses her of not adhering to the moral standards he considers to be right. While Conga holds the curtain up to her body like a dress, Danny gives her a critical judgemental glance, to which Conga reacts annoyed and asks him provocatively: "What? College boy has a problem?" (00:36:38-41). Camping it up in her underwear, she adds: "This weekend I go dancing at the Stonewall and I want to look just right when I'm dancing. I wanna shine bitches" (00:36:42-49). Danny confronts Conga: "So, you just take whatever you want?" (00:36:52-53) and she answers boldly:

> Yeah. That's right, farm boy. I take whatever I want, and can, because if I didn't, I'd have nothing at all. That might be a lesson you want to learn before you go to college, okay? 'Cause the truth is, you ain't going nowhere other than the street, just like the rest of us. Everyone in this room think they're on the way to somewhere better. But I have not seen one dream come true on Christopher Street, baby. Not one. (00:37:32-00:38:11)

As a white middle-class cis male, Danny does not experience the intersectional discrimination Conga has to endure as a Black, homeless, and trans* sex worker. This depiction equalises Danny's and Conga's experiences as members of sexual minorities and thereby relativises Black and trans* struggles. This depiciton reveals the film's racist, classist, and sexist undercurrent. Ironically, since he will make it to Columbia University despite having gotten expelled from high school, it is Danny's dream that will eventually "come true on Christopher Street" (00:38:04-07), while the others will not be able to fully escape poverty, homelessness, and discrimination.

Danny's aversion to the street youths' behaviour is even more explicit when it comes to the film's representation of prostitution. Seeking a loving and monogamous relationship for himself, hustling does not fit Danny's conception of gay love. On one of his first days in New York, he ends up at Christopher Street Pier, not knowing that it is an infamous cruising spot in Greenwich Village (00:16:36-46). Looking for Ray between trucks and cargo containers, he does not seem to be aware of what is happening around him. When someone lights a cigarette in the back of an alley between two trucks, he realises that the whole alley is full of copulating couples. The film shows a close-up of his face: he is shocked and mumbles "Oh shit!" (00:16:46) while he turns away in disgust. A few days later,

however, financial difficulties force him to accept an offer for prostitution he receives from Lee, one of the street youths (00:56:28-00:57:36). The offer seems to catch Danny off-guard at first, since he would never have thought of soliciting. Consequently, he initially declines: "Oh, no, man, no! Come on, that's not my – I don't do that man – " (00:57:16-18). His voice falters in the end, showing that he cannot even talk about prostitution. But Lee reassures him:

> Look, his name is Jack. He's an accountant with a wife and a bunch of kids, all right? Now, I told him that you're new and that it's going to be $25, but he's going to try to get you to settle for less. Just don't let that happen, okay? […] He's just going to suck you off. That's it. Look, it's nothing, okay, just go! Have fun, man. (00:57:20-36)

The description of the man fits the stereotypical assumptions about closeted, older homosexuals who pay young hustlers for oral sex. In need for the money, Danny decides to follow Jack to an area of debris nearby, even though Danny seems very nervous. After the money has been exchanged, Jack puts a newspaper on the ground to kneel on, then pulls down Danny's trousers. While dramatic music sets in, the camera zooms in from a wider, almost voyeuristic angle slightly from above, to Danny's face contorted with shame and discomfort (cf. 00:58:13-33). Contrary to Lee's recommendation to have fun, Danny is depicted as very uncomfortable with the situation. Thereby the film highlights that, in contrast to the others, Danny despises of prostitution and is just doing it because he desperately needs the money. This emphasises his experience of hardship, while the other characters' perspectives are omitted, hence, elevating Danny's white experiences above those of characters who are affected by multiple forms of discrimination. Hence, "Danny's role in the film is to transfer political imagination upward, away from poor people, trans people, and people of colour and toward middle-class white gay men – who have indeed become the historical beneficiaries of gay liberation" (Keegan 54). This aspect becomes even more obvious in the way the depiction of the Stonewall Riots.

Figure 9: Danny throwing the 'first brick' (01:35:48)

Before the main plot sets in, the film presents seemingly original black-and-white shots foreshadowing the riots, which are in fact restaged scenes. These scenes are constantly intercut with a historical contextualisation that sets the stage for the plot to unfold. Thus, the film uses authenticity devices to convey the impression that it narrates the story of the Stonewall Riots in a documentary fashion. In stark contrast to this impression, the film freely mixes events and characters based on real events and persons with a completely fictitious narrative. Presenting Danny as the white saviour emphasises his role as the rebel while feeding into the myth about the Stonewall Riots being mostly a white and male rebellion. The visual centralisation of Danny is especially obvious in the scenes depicting the riot. Danny in his white T-Shirt is always framed in the centre and shown in action. Most strikingly, he is the one to throw the first brick. The Christian symbolism in this scene, making a biblical reference to an utterance by Jesus "let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7), further emphasises Danny's innocence. At the same time, he is depicted as the rebel and white saviour, symbolically beginning the gay liberation movement. He literally takes the riot away from the trans* and queer people of colour when he takes the brick from Conga (cf. 01:35:36-56). Having incited the crowd in front of the Stonewall Inn to riot and shout "Gay Power!,"

> Danny becomes the fictionalised agent of a gay liberation politics that was strongly inspired by Black Power and largely invented by queer and trans people of colour. The implication is that, before Danny arrived as a gentrifier, the oppressed queer and trans population of the Village had no political imagination at all, only a juvenile criminality they directed laterally among themselves. Danny's 'gay power' is a paternalistic substi-

> tution of white, cissexist supremacy for actual gay liberation politics, an innovation that produces a far inferior product for a much wider (i.e. straight) consumer audience. (Keegan 54)

When Ray approves of Danny's rebellious behaviour: "Welcome to the fucking club, man!" (01:36:31-34), Danny is, ironically, welcomed to a club that will eventually push out Ray and other trans* and queer people of colour.

As has been brought forward by many film critics, the 'real' agents of the Stonewall Riots only get minor roles in the film, if at all. One of the most prominent examples is the cameo appearance of Marsha P. Johnson. As has been pointed out in the historical background to the films, Johnson was probably on the vanguard of the revolt (cf. Carter 261). In the film, however, "she is played unconvincingly by a cisgender male actor (Otoja Abit) and given only marginal, short scenes" (Keegan 53). Moreover, she is presented as rather inactive, being in handcuffs during most of the rioting we get to see on-screen. This depiction contradicts the narratives of eyewitnesses, who describe her as fiercely fighting the police during the revolt (cf. Carter 261). Since she does not matter for the plot, it seems that the film exploits her character, on the one hand to elevate hegemonic gay masculinity, and on the other, for comic relief. Whenever Johnson appears on screen, she usually behaves overtly effeminate, dropping some funny lines. She is introduced as a campy drag queen who would always stay in character, even when she is threatened by the police. During the first raid of the Stonewall, she proudly walks up to a police officer and says: "If any of you lily law girls want to dance, well, here I am! Ten cents a dance! But for our men in uniform [...] Tonight is free. Tonight is free!" (00:49:34-50). While the crowd gathering around is cheering, she is arrested, which she comments with: "What else is there but to enjoy the parade, right?" (00:50:56-59). Her campy way of dealing with the police is highlighted again during the riot scenes. When she is arrested and handcuffed together with Ed Murphy, the villain who had kidnapped Danny, she whispers to him: "Mr. Murphy! Some girls look good in Chanel, but you look perfect in a pair of nice and shiny handcuffs" (00:21:07-13). Later, when Murphy escapes and is forced to take Johnson with him, since they are still cuffed together, Johnson keeps up her comic spirit: "Are you taking me on a date, Mr. Murphy?" (01:34:12-15). After one of Johnson's friends in a S/M and leather club has removed their handcuffs, she gets more serious though:

Marsha: You know what, Mr. Murphy? You're done.

Murphy: You think? One night of faggy temper tantrums in the Village changes anything?
Marsha: I can't wait to watch you figure it all out, honey.
Murphy: Just don't call me 'honey,' you freak. (01:42:15-32)

Murphy threateningly plants himself in front of her, but Johnson is faster and punches him in the face without hesitation. When he prepares to strike back and holds his fist up to her face, her friends in the S/M-club gather around her with baseball bats and put him to flight. The fierce character who fearlessly fights back, as Johnson was described by her contemporaries, glimmers through here. However, this is overridden by the way she is presented in the subsequent riot scenes. When she comes back to Christopher Street, campily waving her purse while she runs, the film shows her taking off her earrings and pumps first before jumping up and down shouting "We got our civil rights" and then attacking a police officer with one of her shoes (01:43:51-01:44:17). In the middle of the rebellion, with rioters ravaging the streets, burning cars, and police violently fighting back, this representation serves as comic relief. Yet again, Johnson is thereby made into a buffoon character, who playfully interacts with her gender role and the oppressive heteronormative system.

Like Johnson, Sylvia (Ray) Rivera, another key figure of the Stonewall Riots and their aftermath, is marginalised by the film. In a famous speech she gave in front of white demonstrators on Pride Day in 1973, Rivera criticised the queer community for not being inclusive towards transgender, transvestites, drag queens, sex workers, homeless gays, street kids, and queers of colour. More than 40 years later, the film seems astonishingly unaware of this issue and thereby perpetuates their exclusion. Even though the Latina character Ray might be modelled loosely after Rivera, whose assigned name was Ray, she is not explicitly referenced and not even mentioned in the closing credits, when other, mostly white agents of the Stonewall Riots and their achievements are described (cf. 1:57:55-02:00:07). Moreover, Ray's rebellion is not taken seriously by the film. This aspect is made explicit when connecting his mourning for Judy Garland with the riots. In the morning before the riot, the actresses' death is announced on the radio while a newspaper article from the *New Nork Times* is shown saying "Judy Garland, 47, found dead. Her great talent will be missed, Judy's rainbow has faded" (01:15:18-49). These authenticity devices serve to set the scene for the myth that Garland's death affected the scope of the riots. Ray, dressed in a mourning garment consisting of a headscarf

and sunglasses, visits the shop where Danny works and asks him for a pack of cigarettes. Insisting that it is "an emergency" (01:16:11-12), Ray explains that "Judy just died" (01:16:15-16). Oblivious of any queer subcultural phenomena, Danny asks, "Judy who?," to which Ray indignantly replies: "Garland!" (00:01:16-19). Even though Danny expresses his condolences, he seems annoyed by Ray's attempt to mess up his life again: "Look, Ray, I cannot lose this job, all right? I got rent and stuff to pay now. Okay" (01:16:33-38). Bewildered by Danny's curt refusal, Ray accuses him of being assimilationist:

> You're just gonna walk away from me like that? It's people like you, Danny, who misunderstood Judy. You know, and you misunderstand people like me, but that's okay. That's okay. Don't worry about it. Go, pay your rent. Talk to your boyfriend. Do what you got to do. Forget it. Have a nice one. (00:16:40-58)

Clearly, Ray feels let down by Danny, but as in the other scenes analysed before, he is portrayed as the one being irrational and not understanding of Danny's situation. Eventually, Danny relents and buys him a pack of cigarettes, telling him that he actually misses them. Not only is Ray depicted as irrational and unfair, thus elevating Danny as the reasonable and more likeable character once again, but his mourning for Judy Garland is thereby connected to the imminent riots. Thereby, the myth that Garland's death "contributed to [the riots'] emotional intensity" (Stein 8) trivialises their political scope. As Stonewall veteran Bob Segal emphasises after having watched the film

> [t]he most disturbing historical liberty, one brought up again and again in the film, is that Judy Garland's death had something to do with the riots. That is downright insulting to us as a community, as inaccurate as it gets and trivializes the oppression we were fighting against. (Segal n. pag.)

Even more so, I suggest that it also undermines the potential of the campy approach towards rebellion the queer characters took. By the way it presents this particular Stonewall myth, the film completely overlooks the seriousness of camp (Sontag 282) that is found in its playfulness (Sontag 290). Instead of highlighting the playful interaction of camp and present it as a queer subversive practice, the film trivialises Ray's/Rivera's as well as Johnson's activism in favour of centralising Danny' hegemonic gay masculinity. As in the films of the 1960s and 70s, "[c]omics and buffoons could

get away with transvestism, double entendre and sexual ambiguity, but the heroes could not" (Russo 67). Against this backdrop, the riot scenes showing Danny throwing the first brick not only make him the white saviour, but also shows a stereotypically masculine reaction to humiliation. Unlike Ray/Rivera and Johnson, Danny is aggressively rearing up against his oppression, and in his cry for "Gay power!", choosing violence as "a way of claiming or asserting masculinity" (Connell *Masculinity* 83). Thereby, the narrative is not one of queer rebellion, which could be reinforced by queer practices of resistance such as effeminacy, camp, and an availing queer subculture, but a very masculine (and straight) form of rebellion, which incorporates the film into heteronarrative practices.

Eventually, being the archetypical rebel, Danny has to "return to the conventional order, but on his own terms" (McKelly 211) to restore the "reconciliation of hegemony" (McKelly 211). After the riot scenes there is a jump cut to one year after. Having finished his first year at Columbia University, Danny visits his hometown. He wants to reconcile with his father and Joe, but both of them reject him once again. Even though Joe is on the verge of tears when he tells him "Danny, whatever we – I'm not like you. If I'd known that you would hold onto it like this, I – I just think you should leave" (01:50:35-56), he will not change his mind about their relationship. He has married, his wife is expecting their child and he seems to have decided to lead a repressed life in the closet. On his way to the bus stop, Danny sees his father approaching him in his car. He stops and Danny walks slowly towards him, but then his father seems to have changed his mind and rushes off without giving Danny the chance to talk to him. On the one hand, these two scenes show the painful predicament in which outed homosexuals were as they often could not have both their old environment/family and being outed. On the other hand, however, Danny's emancipation still seems to rely on heteronormative acceptance, which is why he tries to assimilate to rather than break with his oppressive surroundings. Despite having allegedly chosen rebellion over assimilation as the coming-of-age plotline suggests, he wants to be the great conciliator, who bridges the divides not only within the gay liberation movement, between assimilation and rebellion, the Mattachine Society and street youths, men in suits and drag queens, masculine and effeminate men, and so on, but also between heteronormativity and homosexuality, which is the key effort of homonormative strategies. In the final scenes of the film – thanks to Danny – all the different groups that were represented by the film march together in the first Gay Liberation March in New York

in 1970. The film seems to suggest that they have finally been received by 'normal' American society making Danny the rebel who fights for (white/straight) American values and helps queers of colour out of their misery by finally including them into the larger white heteronormative society. Instead of a queer rebel, Danny is depicted as the all-American hero. Thus, the film implies that "the riots deserve recognition not only because of their importance for LGBT Americans; they deserve recognition because of their importance for all Americans" (Stein 19). In his inauguration speech, former US President Barack Obama put the Stonewall Riots in line with Seneca Falls and Selma (cf. Stein 1) and thereby

> staked a national ancestral claim to the history of Stonewall and situated the riots within a broad social justice tradition that included struggles for gender and racial equality. Many LGBT people were deeply moved by this, but it is worth asking what is lost as well as what is gained when a key moment in LGBT history becomes an important moment in U.S. history. (Stein 19)

Rather than dismantling heteronormative oppression, Danny comes to symbolise the assimilative tactics that the film seems to reject on the content level and thus represent hegemonic gay masculinity. Fostering the myth of a collective LGBTQIAN+ identity that is assimilated to heteronormative American society, the film grants the prerogative of interpreting these events to white and heteronormative audiences. In order to "assuage heterosexual and homonormative viewers alike with a feeling of 'safety'" (Keegan 54), *Stonewall* trades a more diverse queer representation for heteronormative amenability. Moreover, as the riots are "now claimed by more than just LGBT people" (Stein 19), the film helps to incorporate them into white US-American history.

The Immortal Martyr

Of the three films analysed in *Queer Enough?, Milk* can most definitively be assigned to the biopic genre, "one of the most conservative genres in cinema, tied to the fabled exceptionalism of the single heroic (or pathological) individual" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 249). Through "his canonization by Focus Features and its legend-making apparatus, materialized through the uncanny embodiment of Sean Penn" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 236), Harvey Milk's story "would finally be raised to the level of heroism and tragedy

for the big screen" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 242). This incorporates Milk's struggle for gay liberation into mainstream culture and contributes to the mythmaking of his figure. Portraying him 30 years after his assassination, I suggest that *Milk* seeks to raise its eponymous hero to a figure of hope and inspiration for generations of homosexuals to follow in order to recollect an important moment in the history of gay rights. Milk's death is thereby raised to martyrdom, consolidating the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and amplifying the message of hope that Milk was so eager to send out to the whole nation. Following the biopic tradition in the representation of Milk's achievements, the film perpetuates the narrative of the martyr in close connection to hegemonic masculinity. The following chapter will show how Milk's life and death is mythologised by presenting him as a martyr. Dying for the purpose of gay liberation is tied to the negotiation with hegemonic masculinity as well as Milk's (gay) identity. First, I will introduce the archetype of the martyr in order to define the representation of Milk and his death in the film as martyrdom and examine how it is connected to his negotiation of hegemonic masculinity.

The etymology of the word martyr lies in "the Greek *martyrein*, meaning 'to bear witness.' In Christian understanding this has meant witnessing to Christ and to the Christian faith, even under pain of death at the hands of others. Christ himself is the archetypal martyr in the scriptures." (McFarlane 258). This is linked to the belief that "'Jesus Christ, the faithful martyr' inspired many early Christians to endure through martyrdom" (Wallace and Rusk 232). Jesus is seen as a martyr since he "pioneered their way of life, and that way of life involved a willingness to endure suffering" (Wallace and Rusk 233). However, the usage of the term goes back further than Christianity: "The idea of dying in a praiseworthy and honourable manner pervades ancient Greek literature, and Greeks celebrated people who faced death unselfishly and bravely for the sake of helping others [and] felt that such hero gained a kind of 'immortality' in story and memory" (Wallace and Rusk 222). Based on the ancient origin, the contemporary meaning as defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* is "a person who suffers very much or is killed because of their religious or political beliefs, and is often admired because of it" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Thus, the term is not limited to a religious understanding of sacrifice but includes a political dimension. Acordingly, there are

> several features of archetypical matyrdoms:1. A hero – A person of some renown who is devoted to a good, just, or admirable cause. 2. Opposition

> – People who oppose that cause. 3. Foreseeable risk – The hero foresees action by opponents to harm him or her, because of his or her commitment to the cause. 4. Courage and Commitment – The hero continues, despite knowing the risk, out of commitment to the cause. 5. Death – The opponents kill the hero because of his or her commitment to the cause. 6. Audience response – The hero's death is commemorated. People may label the hero explicitly as a martyr. Other people may in turn be inspired to pursue the same cause, even in the face of opposition. (Wallace and Rusk 219)

Moreover, as this list of features shows, not only his opposition, but also the admiration and commemoration of the martyr by other people and the consolidation in narratives plays an important role. Thus, the mythologisation of historic figures connects martyrdom to myths. Despite the strong influence Jesus had on this notion in the Western world, the martyr is not explicitly framed as an exclusively male figure. Especially in the Christian tradition, there are several eminent female martyrs. However, as Beverly McFarlane argues, this circumstance is not a sign of female emancipation or an equal understanding of male and female martyrdom. On the contrary, it should be interpreted as a mechanism to assign women their place in patriarchy (cf. McFarlane 259). Analysing, amongst others, the account of Perpetua, a Christian martyr of the 3rd century, McFarlane shows that female martyrs on the one hand had to be sexualised and on the other 'become male' before they could be commemorated. Thus Perpetua "is prepared for battle by being stripped naked and rubbed with oil and she declares 'facta sum masculus' – 'I have become a man.' […] Since women were unable to become physically male, male and female became metaphors for moral categories" (McFarlane 259). This means that "'[b]ecoming male' was to show signs of spiritual development. Perpetua's 'male' body indicated that she would be victorious in the contest and in her martyrdom. Martyrdom was male-defined as policy and masculine-defined in its exercise" (McFarlane 260). Hence, gender roles and especially masculinity are inscribed into the concept of martyrdom. In spite of dying, I submit that the martyr assumes a hegemonic position within the system of masculinity in an act of reversal. Having thus established the concept of the martyr in connection with masculinity, I will address the following questions: In how far is Milk portrayed as a martyr and his death as sacrifice? And in what way is this connected to his negotiation of hegemonic masculinity as well as collective gay identity?

The film sets in with the announcement of Milk's and Moscone's death and unfurls the plot from there in a flashback. Thereby, inversion is the leading stylistic device of the narrative, a trope that structures the whole plot of the film. Starting with the end of Milk's life, the whole plot is inverted, mirroring the reversal of death into something positive and of hegemonic masculinity as inferior on the content level. Anticipating Milk's death in this way centralises the events leading up to this moment and hence characterises the story as one of martyrdom – it is explicitly not a story of mourning but a story of hope. Following the features listed above, the representation of Milk in the film can be defined as a martyr par excellence. He is depicted as a hero not only with an honourable cause, but also with "extraordinary commitment, obedience and faithfulness" (Wallace and Rusk 226), or as Milk himself puts it in an audio recording that forms the frame narration of the film and is mostly rendered from authentic audio tapes Milk recorded before his death: "Almost everything was done with an eye on the gay movement" (00:04:12-15). Thus, the movement was more important to Milk than personal needs. After his first run for office, he decides to assimilate to the looks of a politician. He cuts his long hair short, shaves his beard off and changes from jeans shorts and lumberjack shirts into a suit. Like Perpetua, he gets 'prepared for his battle' and stripped naked of marks which are not normatively intelligible for hegemonic masculinity (as Hippie clothing and long hair). This shows that assuming the masculine role serves to exert power.

His commitment even goes so far as to alienate the people in his life who love him the most. During the campaign for his third candidacy, his long-time partner and campaign manager Scott Smith gets so upset with Milk's obsession to win the election that he leaves him. After having lost the second run for official office, the districts are newly arranged, and Milk feels closer to winning than ever. As Jim Rivaldo, a member of his campaign staff, explains to him,

> the boundary for the new supervisor district is gonna go right down Market Street, right around the Haight like this, and right around the Castro. The Haight and the Castro. That's it. If these are the only people we have to convince, the hippies and the gays, you win, you win. You win by a landslide. You'll be the first openly gay man elected to major office in the U.S. (00:36:36-00:37:22)

Even though he doubts that he, Smith, or their relationship would endure another election campaign, Milk decides to run again. Trying to

convince Smith, he instigates against his competitor Rick Stokes and begs: "Just one more. We can't let Rick Stokes take this one" (00:45:53-57), but Smith simply answers: "Let Rick Stokes take it. […] I can't do another one" (00:45:58-00:46:12) while packing up his stuff and leaving their shared apartment. Milk just stays in his armchair, seemingly unable to move or talk. When Smith is gone, he curses: "Oh, God damn it" (00:46:56-00:47:00), but then the scene quickly changes to the shop where he is eager to prepare the new campaign: "Bring out the old, bring in the new. This is over. Done." (00:47:22-26), and he throws away the campaign flyers for the last election he lost. Even though he is talking about the old and new campaign material, it is also connected to the end of his relationship with Smith in favour of his political engagement. Moreover, he soon finds a new lover, the Mexican Jack Lira. When Milk wins the election to the board of supervisors, Lira grows more and more disillusioned during their relationship, because Milk has to spend a lot of time in his office at city hall. Due to an unstable psyche and feeling abandoned by his lover Milk, Lira commits suicide by hanging himself in the closet of Milk's apartment where the latter discovers his body upon coming home from work. However, "there is no fallout shown from the aftermath of what ought to be a major narrative event, that is, Jack's suicide. While we might expect a few scenes showing Milk coping with finding Jack's body, we hear simply Milk's voiceover" (Erhart 272). With the upcoming referendum on Proposition 6, Milk has to keep on going for the sake of gay liberation: "Jack was gone. I didn't have any time to mourn. There was no choice. I had to keep on – keep on fighting" (01:41:07-15). His reaction underlines that he puts his political ideals before his and his loved ones' personal sensitivities in order to face his opponents.

As has already been pointed out at length in the chapter on homophobia and the religious right, his rivals are Anita Bryant and Josh Briggs. Framed as personifications of homophobia, they are depicted as his severest enemies. His real opponent, however, is not homophobia and bigotry, but the sense of entitlement that gives rise to feelings of inadequacy and repression within hegemonic masculinity which will in the end lead to Milk's assassination. For this reason, the film shows Milk as a representative of (hegemonic) gay masculinity in negotiation with hegemonic masculinity symbolised by Dan White and the concomitant violence ensuing from White's feeling of marginalisation. In contrast to the clear-cut homophobic villains Bryant and Briggs, Milk's later assassin White is portrayed way more multi-layered. His reasons for opposing Milk are presented as much

more complex, even though some scholars have criticised the filmmakers for "giving White an incomplete characterisation" (Alegre 187). Alegre sees the depiction of "White's crime as a clear-cut homophobic act" (Alegre 187) as highly problematic since it might lead to a "stereotyping of Dan White as a homophobic villain, [...] a strategy of representation that rather than undermining homophobia contributes to perpetuating it as an under-analysed, misunderstood problem" (Alegre 183). Moreover, Alegre criticises the film's ostensible "reluctance to see White's backward patriarchal sense of entitlement to power rather than his homophobia as the main reason for his violence" (Alegre 191). I agree with her on the point that White's homophobic tendencies are closely related to his disempowerment and the decline of his masculinity, but I suggest that the film does indeed offer several interpretative approaches as to the reasons for White's murder rather than presenting it, as Alegre suggests, "unanimously as a homophobic crime" (Alegre 179). I submit that the plot traces White's moral decline alongside the decline of his sense of entitlement to a hegemonic position within the system of masculinity. His intense struggle to uphold his masculinity illustrates the instability of the model of hegemonic masculinity, which is exposed as socially constructed. The conflict between Milk and White reveals the constant process of negotiation between hegemonic masculinity and its supposed threat homosexuality. I follow James Burns' interpretation, who concludes that *Milk* "provides a plausible explanation for the killer's motives" (Burns 320) and Andrew O'Hehir's claim that "Josh Brolin does a wonderful job of making Dan White [...] seem like a damaged and confused person rather than a homophobic monster" (O'Hehir n. pag.). The film succeeds in showing the multi-layered causes and effects that turns a relatively likable character into a murderer, including his tendency to homophobia which is intersected with his traditional Catholic belief system, his financial problems, the pressure that is put on him by his peers, the questioning of his own masculinity, and his sense of being disempowered.

The film clearly gives room for the interpretation that White was homophobic. Milk himself expresses the belief that White's homophobia derives from his latent homosexuality: "I think he may be one of us. It's just a theory. [...] I know what it's like to live that life. That lie. I can see it in Dan's eyes. That fear, the pressure" (01:04:39-53). In contrast to Alegre, I would not argue that the film takes White's homophobia as a singular explanation for his crime, but that it is presented as one of many interwoven reasons why he assassinated Milk. Not realising that this is just one possible explanation and even more so a reference to Harvey Milk's point of view

in reality (cf. Shilts 303), Alegre argues that "screen writer Dustin Lance Black also refuses to analyse White's anger and despair; he makes besides the embarrassing mistake of hinting that White was a closeted homosexual attracted by Milk" (Alegre 187). Alegre seems to be aware that "the real Harvey Milk recorded a tape with his political thoughts and will […]. Using this excuse, Van Sant's film focuses throughout the narrative on Milk's point of view, which also shapes White's portrayal" (Alegre 188). However, she interprets it as an 'excuse' by the filmmakers in order to stigmatise White as a homophobic villain. I suggest a different reading: the video tape recordings were included to establishes Milk's point of view as a means of representation that reverses the traditional perception of masculinity. As a biopic about Milk's life, it seems unreasonable to omit a position he held in reality. Nonetheless, the film clarifies that the interpretation of White as a latent homosexual is solely Milk's point of view. Being the only one who ever utters this idea, Milk even stresses himself that it is "just a theory" (01:04:41-42). Moreover, his friends and colleagues do not believe him. When he expresses his 'theory,' they groan in disbelief. Michael Wong (Kelvin Yu) shakes his head, snorting "No, no, no" (01:04:43-44), while Jones ridicules Milk by accusing him of fancying White: "You just think he's cute" (01:04:44-46). Their reactions emphasises that the film does not foreground White's struggle with his latent homosexual feelings but rather seeks to trace his development by revealing the interconnection of homophobia with the multi-faceted issues within the structures of hegemonic masculinity.

This aspect is also apparent in the clash of White's Catholic belief system with the liberal politicians he works with on the Board of Supervisors, above all Milk. During the christening of White's son Milk got invited to, he raises the topic of his gay right ordinance on which he wants White's support while they are still in church. In spite of White's conviction that his "constituents would not favour that" (01:02:48-51), they agree to "watch out for each other's interests" (01:03:45-47). When White's wife Mary Ann (Hope Goblirsch) joins them, however, White hastily tries to change the topic, explaining that they have "just slipped into some shop talk" (01:03:53-55). Milk adds: "the Gay Rights Ordinance. My fault" (01:03:55-57), which obviously embarrasses Mary Ann. Making sure no one else could have heard them, she answers in a low voice: "Seems an inappropriate subject, don't you think?" (01:03:58-01:04:00). Trying to break the tension, Milk remarks with a smile: "Oh, don't knock it till you've tried it" (01: 04:00-03), only increasing the embarrassment. The conversation

highlights the discrepancy between Milk's and White's perspectives which will have become unsurmountable by the end of the film. Furthermore, the scene foreshadows the enormous pressure White will be confronted with due to his belief, his family, his financial situation and above all his former colleagues from the police department. His religious background led him to make campaign promises to his conservative voters that he is now struggling to push through against a very liberal Board of Supervisors. Thus, the first and most severe cut between Milk and White is caused when Milk refuses to vote for White's plan to remove a psychiatric centre from his district, even though White had gotten the impression that Milk had promised it. Fearing to lose his face in front of his constituents White exclaims: "Why? Why are you turning on me like this? At the last minute? What did I do? [...] Harvey, I can't go back to my family, to my folks, to my district without this" (01:14:28-51). White desperately needs to improve his political stand, since he is also in a very precarious financial situation. Therefore, he urges Milk: "Introduce pay raises, 'cause I can't take care of my family on our salaries. You don't have that problem, do you?" (01:23:58-01:24:05). Quite contrary to Alegre's interpretation, the film thereby illustrates that "White's problem was that he could not fulfil the role for which he had been chosen by his peers" (Alegre 188). Particularly his former colleagues at the police department "which at the time remained a bastion of old-school Irish Catholic values and right-wing political views" (O'Hehir n. pag.), put a lot of pressure on him, since he is the last one of the more conservative forces on the board to represent their interests. Just after a brief encounter in which White informs Milk that he had "just resigned" (01:46:51-52), Milk observes White getting summoned by the Police Association and assumes that he might be lobbied by his former colleagues. Only a few days later, White claims that he wants his job back. Milk interprets this as a validation of his conjecture and voices his concerns to mayor Moscone: "He gets dragged into this closed-door meeting at Police Association. Suddenly, he wants his job back. I mean, who knows what they might have said to him in there. Or what they may have promised him. Or worse yet, if they had threatened him" (01:47:33-44). White having actually made the decision to resign shows that he is unable to deal with the pressure put on him. However, the pressure is obviously not becoming less since he wants to be reinstated. Becoming increasingly discontented over the course of the plot, White starts to lean more and more towards the far-right Christian belief system and to sympathise with the religious right movement which seems to promise improvement for his situation. Emphasising his moral disposi-

tion in an argument with Milk, he stresses: "Unlike you, the way I was raised, we believe in right and wrong. Moral and immoral" (01:38:48-55). Since he has the impression that Milk does not follow the same moral principles, White decides to try and block Milk's political advances as much as he can. Milk attempts to calm down their dispute, but White reacts defiantly:

> *White*: What do you want? Me to support the queers against Prop 6, is that it? […] Harvey, a society can't exist without the family.
> *Milk*: We're not against that.
> *White*: You're not? What, can two men reproduce?
> *Milk*: No. But God knows we keep trying. – This isn't you, Dan. It's like you're channelling Anita and Briggs. (01:23:14 – 01:23:42)

Milk's last remark emphasises that, in stark contrast to Bryant and Briggs, White is not the blatant homophobic villain, but "someone who is insecure, terrified, afraid, and disturbed" (00:03:31-34). However, instead of picking up his courage, White is increasingly drawn into the homophobic belief system of the religious right. The influence of an ideology as proposed by the religious right on White is thereby ascribed to the decline of his masculinity and the sense of his disempowerment. As has been established before, homophobia cannot be explained solely by drawing on repressed homoerotic desires. Rather, it can be seen as the manifestation of a deeply inscribed male anxiety about their own status in society. This inscription works from out- as well as inside of the individual, since he is assigned to the role of hegemonic masculinity from without and at the same time has internalised a sense of entitlement to power that goes along with this assignment (cf. Kimmel 282). Accordingly, they feel threatened by other models of masculinity, while simultaneously confounding their own decentralisation with marginalisation and the depletion of their privileges with discrimination (cf. di Blasi 8; 48-49). Being a white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual, cis-male politician with a family, White is assigned to hegemonic masculinity and claims the entitlement to power this implies. Throughout the film, he seems to increasingly struggle with this role, finally becoming obsessed with the idea that he is on the brink of losing his power and his privileges while other, formerly marginalised groups seemingly gain more and more power at his expense. The film already hints at this in White's first appearance on screen:

> See, I'm not going to be forced out of San Francisco by splinter groups of social radicals, social deviants, and incorrigibles. Now you must realize that there are thousands upon thousands of frustrated, angry people, such as yourselves, just waiting to unleash a fury that will eradicate the malignancies that blight our beautiful city. (00:45:29 – 00:45:50)

Thus, he reveals his own aggression towards groups of people who might take away his power and privileges, even though White backpedals later in the film, reassuring Milk that such statements "referred more to junkies than to his people" (00:57:53-56). Furthermore, White's sense of entitlement to power is made clear when he explains to Milk that his "grandma immigrated here when this was an Irish Catholic city, the City of Saint Francis. But a lot's changed here since then, you know" (01:03:03-10), upon which Milk seems to anticipate White's own repressed anxieties by adding: "You're more like one of us now, an outsider" (01:03:10-13). Thus, the film traces White's constant decline in juxtaposition to Milk's success. While Milk's gay rights ordinance passes, White's project to remove a psychiatric centre from his district does not. Struggling with his political defeats he seems to increasingly believe that people like Milk are a threat to the hegemonic masculinity he seeks and is expected to represent. Convinced that he is the one entitled to power, White seems to think that Milk, belonging to the powerless group, would have to act to his bidding. When he realises that this is not the case, as Milk voted against his proposition, White feels doubly betrayed: on the one hand on a personal level by Milk, with whom he thought he had made a deal, and on the other hand on a structural level by the social circumstances that made it possible for the marginalised masculinity to claim privileges, seemingly at his expense. In an outburst of anger, he even tries to threaten Milk: "I'm gonna vote against your queer law and I'm gonna get Quentin against it, too" (01:14:55-58). However, his intended threat completely fails to have the desired effect, as Milk leans back in his chair and answers nonchalantly: "Oh, it's gonna pass anyway and you can't keep alienating yourself here, Dan" (01:14:58-01:15:01). Milk's impertinent response aggravates him even more. Getting quite aggressive he exclaims: "I gave you a chance, Harvey, okay? I gave you a chance and you blew it! You blew it" (01:15:01-07), banging his fist on Harvey's desks and knocking over a chair when walking away. Since he sees himself in the position to give Milk 'a chance,' this remark emphasises White's perception that he is supposed to be the one in power. Realising that this does not work, however, results in a crisis of White's masculine identity, since he

cannot even measure up to someone he perceives as powerless. Thus, in the depiction of White behaving like a defiant child, the film points to his own insecurity.

Another key scene exposing White's masculinity in decline is when he appears drunk at Milk's birthday party. Staggering, babbling, and swaying a flask in his hand, he explains to Milk: "I've learned a lot from watching you. […] I've realized you just gotta get out there. You gotta be noticed, 'cause that's how it all works. But you have an issue. See, that's your advantage. That's an advantage" (01:27:45-01:28:01). He seems unable to understand what Milk means when he replies that "it's more than an issue. […] This is not just jobs or issues, this is our lives we're fighting for" (01:28:01-28) and goes on babbling: "I've learned a lot from you, Harvey. […] I'm going to get my picture in the papers, too" (01:28:30-34). Due to his own disempowerment, White gets the impression that the marginalised now get all the privileges. At the same time, he thinks that the 'normal majority' is discriminated against and thus comes to represent "a public that worries that gay equality means the end of heterosexual privilege and the ideal of a heterosexual national identity" (Seidman 233). In an absurd inversion of reality, for him not being 'normal,' having an 'issue,' as he calls it, equalises to be powerful at the expense of people without an 'issue,' that is the 'normal' heterosexual majority. Therefore, he repeatedly stresses "I've got my own issues" (01:28:42-44). When Milk is about to leave him, he raises his voice shouting: "Dan White's got an issue!" (01:28:54-56), which reveals his instability and insecurity due to his disintegrating masculine identity. In their final encounter before Milk's assassination, this impression of being emasculated by Milk is emphasised even more. White forcefully exclaims: "You can't humiliate me, okay? You will not demean me" (01:39:13-20). Feeling thus disparaged, White comes to see that the only way out of this situation is to eliminate the factor that threatens his masculinity. As Connell points out, violence often "points to crisis tendencies [...] in the modern gender order" (Connell *Social Organization* 44), which "may, for instance, provoke attempts to restore a dominant masculinity" (Connell *Social Organization* 45). The night before his assassination, Milk watches the final scene of Giacomo Puccini's opera *Tosca* that depicts the heroine's death. Foreshadowing Milk's death, the film is "building a connection between the film's tragic hero and the opera's tragic heroine. […] both Tosca and Milk manage to win their respective battles. Tosca by murdering Scarpia and Milk through collective effort of the masses and strength of leadership" (Salazar n. pag.). Moreover, the film connects Milk's political

activism to theatre. Not only does he describe the San Francisco City Hall as his "new theatre […] You can make such a grand entrance by taking these stairs" (00:58:50-00:59:12) after having been elected, but he also explains to Smith in the beginning of the film: "Politics is theater. It doesn't matter so much about winning. You make a statement. You say, 'I'm here.' You get their attention" (00:17:14-22). Accordingly, parallel to Tosca's death, Milk's assassination is depicted theatrically: After White has pulled his weapon and starts shooting him, Milk goes down in slow motion, falling slowly to his knees, while the audio of the film becomes muffled and the music from the opera sets in. He looks up and out of the window and the last he sees before he dies are the banners for *Tosca* at the San Francisco Opera House across from his office, while the images of the opera house and Milk's face are superimposed. White believes that Milk with the help of his ally Moscone has taken away his power, his privileges and eventually also his masculinity. Milk's assassination thus becomes "a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions" (Connell 44) for White and his sense of entitlement due to belonging to hegemonic masculinity. Significantly, right before shooting mayor Moscone, White exclaims "It's not something that I wanna calm down about. You can't take this away from me" (01:54:01-05), indicating that by supporting Milk, Moscone made his success possible while at the same time degrading White. Consequently, he hereby imbues what Milk's voiceover already foreshadows at the very beginning of the film:

> I fully realize that a person who stands for what I stand for, an activist, a gay activist, makes himself the target for someone who is insecure, terrified, afraid and disturbed themselves. It's a very real possibility you see, because in San Francisco, we have broken a dam of major prejudice in this country. (00:03:18-43)

What agitates White is the feeling of having lost his power to someone who in his view is not entitled to power at all. Even with killing Milk, however, his power cannot be reinstated. It rather exposes White's insecurity, anxiety, and disturbance. Instead of reinstating the hegemony of heterosexual masculinity, White has only strengthened the gay liberation movement and thus the hitherto suppressed and marginalised gay masculinity. As a martyr, Milk succeeds in inverting White's hegemonic position by claiming a position of power within the system of hegemonic masculinity that even transcends death, eventually rendering him and his cause immortal.

Figure 10: Milk's assassination (f.l.t.r. 01:51:07, 01:51:14, 01:51:20, 01:51:34)

Highlighting Milk's martyrdom, he is able to foresee the risk of death, but his courage and commitment lead him to continue to fight for his cause (cf. Wallace and Rusk 219). Throughout the story, he receives several death threats, which cannot keep him from his commitment and spur him on even further. Even more so, in anticipating a serious threat to his life, Milk appeals to his followers not to be discouraged:

> If a bullet should enter my brain, let it destroy every closet door. I ask for the movement to continue because it's not about personal gain, and it's not about ego and it's not about power. It's about the 'us's' out there. Not just the gays but the Blacks and the Asians and the seniors and the disabled. The 'us's.' Without hope, the 'us's' give up. And I know you can't live on hope alone. But without hope, life is not worth living. So, you, and you, and you, you got to give them hope. You got to give them hope. (01:58:04-02:00:09)

This statement is re-enacted on the basis of the audio tapes Milk recorded before his death and is played as a voiceover while his friends, followers, and allies are shown in a candlelight vigil from the Castro all the way to San Francisco city hall. The film manages to portray the optimism and hopefulness Milk conveyed to the gay community in the U.S.: as a martyr he is able to inspire generations of the LGBTQIAN+ community. The juxtaposition of the initial and the final scenes of the film highlights this aspect.

The first scenes are a compilation of clips from authentic footage showing the arrest of several homosexuals on the grounds that they attended gay bars, which serves to establish the oppressive heteronormative structures homosexuals had to endure during that time. In contrast, the final scene shows a massive candlelight vigil in remembrance of Milk. Thereby, the narrative of the film has come full circle. Since the first night with Smith, the night Milk decided to come out of the closet and begin his career as a gay activist, a lot has changed for the gay community. Despite his death, or maybe because of his death, "Harvey Milk's dream started casting a shadow far larger than anything he could have fashioned in life; such is the nature of mortals and martyrs, dreams and their shadows" (Shilts xiv). Through Milk's relentless commitment to the gay rights movement and his insistence on visibility and shamelessness, he was able to spread a message of hope, which runs like a golden thread throughout the plot of the film. After Proposition 8 had passed in California in 2008, the film was "edited by history" (B.R. Rich *Cinema* 252) and became "an op-ed commentary on what had just gone wrong" (B.R. Rich *Cinema* 252), that "brought Harvey Milk back to life at a time when he was needed like never before for the example of his inspirational leadership and political tactics" (B.R. Rich *Cinema* 255). This impression also results from the choice of narrative strategy: "Van Sant's decision to mix documentary footage and drama was smart: it facilitated the audience's identification of the story with the stuff of history" (Rich *Cinema* 257). Therefore, I submit that it ties in with the films of the New Queer Cinema that sought to "affirm [the homosexuals'] identity to [them]selves and at the same time to carry a message of strength and tolerance to the wider society" (B.R. Rich *Cinema* 124). Milk's cause was realer to the viewers in 2008 than they would probably have imagined. The "need to keep on fighting through adversity may be Milk's most important legacy" (Charity n. pag.). The film almost seems to call for actions against the ban of gay marriage by having him persuasively exclaim: "I can't say this because I'm a public official, but if this thing passes, fight the hell back" (01:42:38-45). Thus, framing Milk as a martyr becomes a narrative of emancipation, as Milk moves from the marginalised to the hegemonic position. Moreover, he is able to form alliances and win the heterosexual majority for his political goals. When he spoke in front of heterosexual audiences, Milk often "began to open speeches with a line and it became kind of a signature. 'My name is Harvey Milk and I want to recruit you'" (00:02:48-00:03:00). On the one hand, this shows another form of inversion, as it reverses the assimilative practice of

including the homosexual into heteronormativity by playing with Bryant's fear of homosexuals recruiting children. Instead, he 'recruits' heterosexuals for his political agenda. On the other hand, as he needs to assimilate to the masculine role of the politician to communicate LGBTQIAN+ struggles to heteronormative society, this depiction helps to assimilate his agenda into American national history. Unlike in the 1970s, an alliance with the dominant culture is no longer necessary for survival today. Needing an adaptive character such as Milk for audience identification and connecting it with his ability to claim a hegemonic position within the system of masculinity, rather sends a signal of assimilation. Similar to former "President Obama [who] presented a posthumous award to Harvey Milk" (B. R. Rich *Cinema* 257), also the film wants the martyr Milk to be commemorated as an American national hero.

Conclusion: The Commercialisation of Diversity

The entanglements of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and hegemonic masculinity have wide-reaching ramifications for the formation of queer subjectivities. *Queer Enough?* sought to carve out how these notions materialise in popular culture such as contemporary LGBTQIAN+-themed cinema. My findings give valuable insights into LGBTQIAN+ films that, on the one hand, take a critical stance towards heteronormative structures in society, but, on the other hand, reproduce parameters that limit the representation of the LGBTQIAN+ community. The main aim was to show the ways in which important moments and agents of LGBTQIAN+ history are depicted and made consumable for mainstream heteronormative audiences, especially following the release of *Brokeback Mountain*. I started with the assumption that there is a fundamental difference between *queer cinema* and LGBTQIAN+ *cinema*. While the latter merely describes the representation of LGBTQIAN+ themes or characters, queer cinema considers *the ways in which* they are represented and critically engages with, or possibly deconstructs (hetero)normative structures.

The exemplary analysis of the films *Howl*, *Milk*, and *Stonewall* served to refine this differentiation, by looking into the films' engagement with queer representation. They ensue from a development in queer cinema history that made the introduction of LGBTQIAN+ themes possible in mainstream Hollywood. Most of the 20th century cinema censored any depiction of LGBTQIAN+ characters or showed them in a stigmatising and discriminatory fashion (cf. Russo 59; 122). It was not before the 1980s and 90s that a queer political agenda was represented in cinema, engendering the phenomenon of New Queer Cinema (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* xix). Drawing from these developments, the 21st century brought forward new possibilities for representations of queer subjectivites and eventually LGBTQIAN+ themes were targeted at heteronormative audiences (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* 185). Simultaneously, LGBTQIAN+ cinema might in turn have influenced the heteronormative mainstream and opened it up for queer themes beyond the realm of independent cinema (cf. Nowlan 16). Moreover, popular films depicting the LGBTQIAN+ community are capable of subverting and possibly even deconstructing heteronormative structures, regardless of whether they belong to independent cinema or mainstream Hollywood. The heightened

incorporation of LGBTQIAN+ films into the mainstream U.S. film industry, however, led to an increasing commercialisation of films with LGBTQIAN+ content and hence an intertwining of hegemonic structures of neoliberalism with their production and marketing (cf. Knegt 6). LGBTQIAN+ themes have thereby been assimilated to heteronormativity. The three films analysed in *Queer Enough?* are emblematic for this contradiction. As they show important political achievements of the LGBTQIAN+ liberation movement in the U.S. and are marketed to heterosexual audiences, they tie in with the question of assimilation and/ or subversion. Indicative to this is how the films highlight and partially deconstruct the negative impact of heteronormative structures on the protagonists by re-enacting their emancipation. Negotiating their sexuality and gendered identity with hegemonic masculinity and the generic representations of the genius, rebel, and martyr archetypes became central for addressing the films' engagement with the history of LGBTQIAN+ liberation. Moreover, exploring the gaze helped me to delineate to what extent the films make use of common clichés and stereotypes and whether these are considered critically or are rather used as a means of 'othering' in order to merely offer the (heteronormative) viewer a mark of recognition. In this, I considered how the films (miss)represent and marginalise members of the LGBTQIAN+ community coming from non-white ethnic backgrounds, Blacks, lesbians, trans*, and drag queens, by foregrounding white, middle-class, cis-male homosexuals. My findings are located at this trajectory and suggest that the films sustain a hegemonic divide regarding the LGBTQIAN+ community. The aim was to find out whether the selected films criticise the understanding of norms that uphold the hegemony of heterosexuality, but unwittingly reproduce homonormative parameters that limit the representation of homosexual men to a certain, heteronormatively shaped image. As part of popular culture, films are ideally suited to highlight and critically question social and cultural structures. In addition, the three films depict important moments or agents of LGBTQIAN+ history (e.g. the gay liberation movement) and thereby connect contemporary culture with the legacy of the 1960s and '70s. With the incorporation of LGBTQIAN+ themed films in mainstream Hollywood and the ensuing commodification of queer themes and characters, I posit that the possibilities for queer representation unfolded and at the same time tapered off. Before outlining the scope of these findings and affiliate them with the historical context of queer cinema, it is worthwhile revising the theoretical and methodological framework educed in *Queer Enough?*.

The theoretical basis of *Queer Enough?* is informed by postmodern (de-)constructivist as well as queer-feminist theories and extended by methodological approaches referring to narrative structure, cinematography, and normative viewing patterns. Next to heteronormativity, i.e. the social consensus that defines heterosexuality as the unquestioned norm, the innovative concept of homonormativity, coined by Lisa Duggan, has moved into the focus of gender research. It helps to grasp the tendency of heteronormativity to tolerate individuals and practices from the LGBTQIAN+ community that appear to diverge little from the heteronormative standards, making them seem almost 'heteronormalised.' Thus, the concept of homonormativity allows for an enhanced understanding of the ways in which hegemonic power structures shape these mechanisms of adaptation to dominant heteronormative culture, defining within the group of LGBTQIAN+ individuals what is perceived as 'normal' while marginalising anything deviating from it. These insights formed the basis to advance Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, which describes the social dominance of white, middle-aged, heterosexual, middle-class, abled cis-men. Combined with the analytical possibilities supplied by the criticism of hetero- and homonormativity, I analogously introduced the concept of hegemonic gay masculinity to be able to consider the implications of hetero- and homonormativity with masculinity. The concept of hegemonic gay masculinity was fruitful to carve out the hegemonic gradient and thus the processes of stratification among representations of male LGBTQIAN+ community members in contemporary biopics.

These three sensitising concepts – heteronormativity, homonormativity, and hegemonic (gay) masculinity – were central for my research. To make them the object of filmic analysis, they had to be combined with methodological approaches from film narratology, cinematography, and gaze theory. As Roland Barthes claims in his book *Mythologies*, ideologically upheld hierarchies do not derive from a person's own experience but are made coherent and comprehensible through narratives (cf. Barthes 143; 151-154). This means narrative traditions within cultural production not only reflect social and cultural circumstances, but also influence the way 'reality' is constructed and perceived and, hence, take an active part in shaping and upholding hegemonic structures. Deciphering these narrative structures serves to grasp the relation between power and representation and helps to unveil the ways in which ideology is inculcated in society. As a powerful agent in popular culture, cinema has its own narrative conventions, which shape the ways in which 'reality' is perceived. It is, thus, worthwhile to look

beyond the content to the formal-aesthetic components that can support a particular mode of representation. This becomes manifest, amongst others, in the choice of genre, since the historical biopic is used for the representation of queer history, even though it follows very traditional cinematic narrative techniques which seem contradictory to the concept of queer. Thus, the question arises in how far the deliberate employment of narrative conventions in order to raise the audiences' expectations is an important means for filmic representation to allege an ideological agenda. Historical films take an active part in shaping the cultural perception of the historical characters and events they depict and, hence, lay claim to the prerogative of interpretation. I therefore drew on the concept of heteronarrative that shows the entanglement of the films' narrative structure with heteronormativity. When it comes to the representation of masculinity, the archetypes of the male hero became most important. Moreover, I was interested in cinematic techniques, such as camera work, framing, colouration, i.e. the mise-en-scène, that directs the gaze of the viewer and influences *how* the characters on screen are depicted. For this reason, the question of how this gaze might work from a queer perspective was raised. Not only by making LGBTQIAN+ individuals visible, but also by having the audience perceive the action of the film through their eyes, I found that a new gaze could emerge that differs from the patriarchal male gaze. I especially focused on the question to what extent the established gaze is really queer, or in how far it enforces a normative LGBTQIAN+ perspective, which I called homonormative gaze. The comparative approach of *Queer Enough?* allows for a survey of the similarities and differences in the films' depiction of heteronormativity and hegemonic gay masculinity.

One of the most striking parallels of *Howl*, *Stonewall*, and *Milk* is their critical engagement with heteronormativity. All three films depict heteronormative structures as ultimately oppressive for the central characters and their friends. They distinguish between personal and institutionalised oppression, but all refer to its structural dimension. As I sought to carve out in my theoretical approach, the main institutions of oppression are the state, science, and religion. Other crucial sites of oppression include the family, education, sports, and media, which are often subsidiary to the three main institutions. In the films, the representation of the structural oppression emanating from governmental institutions, i.e. the state, is very consistent. Especially in *Stonewall* and *Milk*, the police as the arm of the law violently attacks LGBTQIAN+ people or denies them their assistance in cases of emergency or even murder. Next to the negative depiction of the police, the films

deplore the bleak legal situation for the LGBTQIAN+ community during the respective periods. In *Stonewall* this is illustrated by a juxtaposition of the rural and the urban sites shown in the film. Danny's rural background is informed by religious conservatism, the patriarchal rule of his father, homophobia, and above all, a strong covenant of silence. Once he makes it to New York City, he encounters a different mode of oppression – one that is noisier, more physically violent, but also one that he eventually succeeds in overcoming. At the end of the film, he and his friends participate in the first Gay Rights Liberation March through the streets of New York City in 1970. Back at home, however, he is not able to reconcile with his friends and his former lover Joe, let alone with his father. Similarly, also *Milk* establishes an urban rural divide by evoking a vision of the city, especially of San Francisco, as a place where heteronormative oppression can be overcome in contrast to rural areas where conservatism rules and the religious right is successful. For this reason, Milk recommends Paul, the boy confined to a wheelchair, to leave his home and get to the nearest big city in order to escape his oppression.

Howl in contrast defies this uplifting picture of the city: the metaphor of Moloch from the poem is used in the film for a metropolis where the merciless, all-devouring power of civilization reigns, oppressing all who do not conform to the uniform life of consensus. The exclusion of non-conformists is conducted in Rockland, the mental hospital where the rules of Moloch are re-impressed upon them. Next to the city as a suffocating space, the film critically engages with science as an institution of oppression, which is emphasised in the depiction of electroshock therapy and lobotomy and their negative impact on the characters. The film proposes literary expression as a possibility to escape these oppressive structures. The animation visualises the oppression of the lyrical I while the re-enacted scenes of the trial against publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti show that the arguments of the prosecutors are significantly weaker, partly ridiculous, and ultimately untenable in comparison to those of the defence. In the end, Ferlinghetti wins, which the film equates with the view that clinging to old norms and rigid structures hampers mutual understanding. Connecting artistic expression and sexual liberation, the poem functions as a symbol for the transgression of the (hetero)norm and the court case is ultimately a trial about the freedom of expression. The film offers a variety of interpretations of the poem "Howl" and thereby suggests that there is never just one perspective on any topic. Here, another juxtaposition becomes clear: that between an open and a closed world view.

Likewise, *Stonewall* and *Milk* work with this juxtaposition in their representation of religion. Intermingling the institutions of religion and the state, the representatives of religion manage to enforce their homophobic worldview. Hence, both *Stonewall* and *Milk* emphasise the concrete impact religious conservatism and homophobia have on the LGBTQIAN+ characters, calling attention to the importance of collective political activism. By juxtaposing the urban with the rural, an open with a closed world view, or liberal with conservative perspectives, the three films reveal the strong impact of both institutional as well as personal discrimination. However, *Howl* works more on a symbolic level in this respect, critiquing more universal themes such as 1950s conformity, authority, and the oppression of minorities in general. The other two films focus far more explicitly on the concrete effects of silencing, violence, and homophobia and their concomitant insidious dangers to the homosexual characters.

Nonetheless, the films also share many common features regarding the portrayal of the protagonists' negotiation of their homosexuality and heteronormativity. Their contents revolve largely around the enactment of their emancipation. All three central characters have a past of being closeted, of thinking themselves 'wrong.' They are more or less passing for heterosexual and, hence, are complicit with the heteronormative system at the beginning. Eventually they realise that it is the structures that need to be challenged and possibly changed, not their identities. As has been pointed out in the analyses, the protagonists' coming out of the closet, and hence their insistence of making their homosexuality visible in front of others combined with their refusal to feel ashamed, is presented as a tool for transgressing heteronormative structures. Before their moment of emancipation, they must go through a process of coming out. In *Howl*, the process of writing culminates in the public reading of the poem "Howl." Ginsberg's artistry is closely connected to his sexual identity and thus the performance of the poem on stage is equated with the performance of his homosexuality. Similarly, *Milk* plays with the interconnection of performance and sexuality. Milk's remark about politics being theatre condenses this very well. Thus, he emancipates himself through his political campaigns and finally wins the election to the Board of City Supervisors. Coming out is thereby framed as a tool for (self-)empowerment, which is why Milk urges everyone to come out, despite the warning of his friends. And his plan seems to work out: at least in this fight, visibility becomes a weapon to defeat the religious right.

Stonewall, in contrast, does not offer such an exclusively positive account of coming out. The portrayal of Danny being outed by his classmates em-

phasises the violence associated with an (involuntary) outing. His journey of coming out is superimposed by his coming-of-age. His identity forms as he passes the typical steps of a bildungsroman-like plot. Contrasting the rural and the urban yet again, the city is presented as a space where he can finally be safely out and proud in the end. All three films corroborate the empowerment of one individual as a 'glass ceiling breaker,' who heralds a new era for all the disadvantaged. However, the protagonists differ in the scope of their activism. Consistent with my findings, it can be summarised that *Howl* focuses much more on Ginsberg's individual emancipation moment than *Milk* which tends to emphasise the collective struggle of the gay liberation movement. In *Milk*, coming out is the first step for the gays' collective fight for legal equality. Of course, this is primarily due to the different historic moments the films are set in. While during the 1950s, the heteronormative structures were still far more repressive and deeply incorporated into the social system, Milk could draw on a powerful social movement that had already significantly changed the legal situation for the LGBTQIAN+ community. Hence, Ginsberg's activism as presented in the film centres on individual acceptance, whereas Milk pursues concrete political goals. This involves that the subversion of heteronormativity in *Howl* occurs rather from the exterior, as Ginsberg tries to influence heteronormativity with the release and performance of his poem "Howl." *Milk*, on the contrary, seeks to subvert the system that so forcefully oppressed him and his followers from within, by entering the realm of politics, which is at the same time the realm where the heteronormative bias is perpetuated. *Stonewall* vacillates somewhere in between. The process of Danny's emancipation oscillates between assimilation and rebellion and leads to the central moment of emancipation when he throws the first brick of the Stonewall Riots. Danny's individuality is consistently emphasised while his experiences and perspective are simultaneously presented as universal to all LGBTQIAN+ individuals. He seems to have resolved his inner conflict in his decision against assimilation. Thereby making the beginning of one of the most important events in the history of the gay liberation movement a personal matter of a white, cis-gendered, middle-class male in my opinion shows a very insensitive approach to the Stonewall Riots. While he graphically performs his empowerment in his revolt, however, he cannot fully emancipate himself from the judgement of his father and friends back home. This raises the question of whether he has truly emancipated himself if he needs his father's and hence heteronormative approval. In contrast to *Howl* and *Milk*, *Stonewall's* tendency to subliminally reinforce

assimilation is already evident in its content and becomes even more apparent on the formal-aesthetic level. Eventually, all three protagonists become active instead of passively accepting their shaming and make their sexuality visible in a performative act of empowerment. Although the films thereby expose the social construction of sexual identities, they remain entrenched in essentialism. Sexuality is not presented as a fluid concept, but rather, the characters' action is targeted at finding and expressing their 'true inner self.'

This position moreover essentialises gayness to a homogeneous experience, which suggests that all gays see the world in a similar way. This is especially obvious in the films' formal-aesthetic composition. Therefore, I sought to determine to what extent the films offer a different cinematic gaze than the generic male gaze. On the one hand, the gay sensibility the films offer might corroborate the essentialism indicated on the content level, which leads to an exclusivity that might establish a lesbian or gay gaze limited in scope. Presenting the events staged exclusively from the perspective of the marginalised, on the other hand, might help to adopt a queer perspective and, hence, establish a queer gaze. The films differ greatly in their ability to offer a non-normative, ambiguous, or disruptive viewing position, which includes but is not limited to the depiction of queer desire and sex. The gaze in the films serves several functions connected to the characters sexual identity. They invite the viewers to read the events shown from a gay perspective, thereby offering them insights to the 'true inner self' that the protagonists seek to find.

Both Ginsberg and Milk are presented as autodiegetic narrators of their lives and most other characters and events are interpreted from their perspective. This is mediated using the poem 'Howl' and Milk's recorded will. In *Stonewall*, Danny also governs the gaze as the single mediator that filters all other characters' experiences. The intimacy that is created serves to identify with them and allows viewers to understand the severe consequences they had to face when living an open homosexual life during the depicted times. At the same time, the films refuse or ridicule the perspective and motives of the homophobes. This reverses the long tradition of the gay villain trope in cinema and, thus, questions heteronormative representation. In *Howl*, the gaze especially supports Ginsberg's alienation from heteronormativity and thus from a 'normal' romantic life. The viewer perceives several instances of heterosexual lovemaking through Ginsberg's eyes. This portrayal does not elevate the heterosexual lovemaking but emphasises his feeling of exclusion. Questioning heteronormative sexuality, these scenes receive a subversive efficacy, which is why I described the

gaze in these particular scenes as queer. Likewise, *Milk* challenges heteronormative viewing patterns, for instance in the aesthetically fragmented sex scene between Milk and Smith at the beginning and end of the plot, which sets a queer tone for the film. At the same time, the film frames Milk's love life within heteronormative expectations such as 'true' or 'eternal' love and monogamy. This aspect is even more apparent in *Stonewall*. Danny offers an easy identification for heterosexual viewers, however, at the expense of other characters who are affected by intersectional discrimination, since he takes on a heteronormative, at times even homo- or trans*phobic, perspective. He approves of the heteronormative principles of 'true' love, monogamy, and domesticity, but is annoyed or embarrassed by effeminacy and even shocked by the display of trans*sexuality, (public) gay sex, cruising, prostitution, and non-monogamous relationships. The camerawork highlights his moral understanding of sexuality and relationships, which is strongly influenced by heteronormativity. His gaze serves as a lens through which heteronormative viewers may safely perceive LGBTQIAN+ life, instead of confronting the viewers with a queer or gay gaze. The contrast between Danny's gaze at more normative characters and effeminate or trans* characters is a filmic strategy of othering, which creates a hierarchy within the LGBTQIAN+ community. Nevertheless, effeminate, trans*, drag characters, and BPOC also gaze back at Danny, making him the object of their desires. Instead of seizing this opportunity to break with the visual conventions of the (white) male gaze, the film categorises their gazing as unpleasant if not dangerous. Not only does this serve the assimilation to heteronormativity, but also perpetuates racist and trans*-phobic views rather than challenging them. For this reason, the gaze in *Stonewall* can overall be described as homonormative. To some extent, also *Howl* and *Milk* enforce heteronormative visual patterns. *Howl* for instance excludes female characters from the narrative and marks them as the 'other' that hampers gay male desire, although they are mostly not subjected to the male gaze. Similarly, also *Milk* misses an opportunity for a more diverse perspective, for example in its representation of Milk as a mediator between the gay perspective and the heteronormative majority, in order to connect gay and straight Americans by their collective commemoration of a national hero. Thereby, however, the film disregards the hierarchy that goes along with the assumption that Milk can speak for all homosexuals. Especially the appeal to visibility obscures the hazard for many queers to come out of the closet and reduces the experience to the perspective of rather privileged gays. However, while *Howl* and *Milk* at least partially invite the viewer to

take on a queer perspective even though they cannot consistently keep up a queer gaze, *Stonewall's* formal-aesthetic composition enforces anti-queer stereotypes that vigorously undermines all asserted endeavours to suggest a critical reading of Danny's privileged position on the content level.

Another parallel of the films is the function of the gaze to create an authentic mood by including original footage that connotes historical accuracy of the events featured. They offer a view of the past in order to reflect upon contemporary issues while undergirding the myths about the historical figures and events shown on screen. This aspect is even more apparent when looking at the films' narrative structure. Memorialised through biopics, Ginsberg, Danny, and Milk have been stylised into iconic figures of queer American history. The three films present them as the archetypical figures of the genius, the rebel, and the martyr, highlighting Ginsberg's literary output, Danny's rebellious energy, and Milk's political success. Thereby, the protagonists claim social positions of power they were denied in heteronormative society. Despite their stylistic differences, the three films exhibit very similar narrative structures in their representation of masculinity.

Reminiscent of New Queer Cinema, *Howl* is the most experimental of the three. However, the film also follows the biopic tradition in depicting Ginsberg as the misunderstood but brilliant genius figure. It makes recourse to the post-impressionist visual art of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh to enhance Ginsberg's modernist sense of art and poetry and stage him as a genius coming from a well-established line of geniuses. On the one hand, this serves as an act of empowerment, since putting Ginsberg in a hegemonic position turns around the social stratification of gay men who are oppressed by hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, this representation marginalises women and might even foster a misogynous bias. Thereby feeding the myth of a male canon of (Beat) geniuses, the film imbeds Ginsberg into the American literary tradition. He occupies a special position within the hierarchy of masculinity despite the fact that he is homosexual. Instead of depicting the story of a real-life person such as the queer icons Marsha P. Johnson or Sylvia Rivera, *Stonewall* implements the fictional character Danny. Telling his story against the backdrop of the Stonewall Riots, Danny is not only centralised as the key player of the film, but also in relation to allegedly the most important moment in LGBTQIAN+ history. He is the one to throw the first brick, symbolically beginning the gay liberation movement and becoming a national hero. In his masculine outburst of anger and his cry for "Gay power!," Danny chooses violence

to claim a hegemonic position within the structures of masculinity. Instead of presenting a form of queer rebellion by way of queer practices of resistance such as effeminacy or camp, the film follows heteronarrative patterns, trading a more diverse queer representation for heteronormative amenability. This emphasises the way the film uses the rebel archetype to embed homosexuality into American national identity. Very similar to *Stonewall*, *Milk* seeks to raise its protagonist to an American national hero in relation to an important moment in the history of gay rights. In the depiction of Milk as a martyr, the film comes closest to the classic narrative tradition of the biopic. Milk succeeds in reversing his antagonists' hegemonic position by claiming a position of power within the system of hegemonic masculinity that even transcends death, eventually rendering him and his cause immortal. Moreover, Milk's martyrdom makes him a national hero commemorated by both homo- and heterosexual Americans. This endorses a gay-straight alliance, which can also be interpreted as a means to assimilate homosexuality into American national identity. Presenting the protagonists as the archetypical hegemonic masculinities – genius, rebel, and martyr – all three films comply with heteronormative narrative traditions. The protagonists are all striving for a hegemonic position within the hierarchy of masculinity, but they are denied a place at the top because of their homosexuality. In their failed attempts to reach hegemonic masculinity, however, they produce hegemonic gay masculinity. This means a similar hierarchical order is established in which the most heteronormatively assimilated masculinity is in a hegemonic position. Simultaneously, this process creates new normative structures and stratifies other members of the LGBTQIAN+ community, especially men who are not conforming to the masculine gender role. Furthermore, these narratives help to create an enactment of memorial that seeks to generate a collective identity not only amongst members of the LGBTQIAN+ community but also amongst the heterosexual majority.

Being labelled un-American during the McCarthy era, homosexuals may now become national heroes, who are celebrated and commemorated by a majority of the American society. Allen Ginsberg and other Beat Generation authors are celebrated figures of American popular culture and have long entered the literary canon. In 2016, the site of the Stonewall Riots was designated a National Monument as the first monument in the U.S. dedicated to LGBTQIAN+ history (cf. Stein 19). And former President Obama honoured Harvey Milk posthumously with America's highest civilian honour, the Presidential Medal of Freedom (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* 257). However, embedding LGBTQIAN+ lives and history into American national identity

influences which queer practices are seen as worthy of heteronormative acceptance. In conclusion, the mythologisation of historic characters such as Ginsberg, Milk, and the initiators of the Stonewall Riots facilitates the containment of queer history within the mainstream and thus contributes to the maintenance of heteronormativity.

These representations of LGBTQIAN+ individuals in mainstream Hollywood films are emblematic of current debates on diversity. At first glance, their representation seems inclusive, as it gives voice and visibility to realities outside the (hetero)norm. On closer inspection, however, it is vital to consider *how* they are depicted. It appears that the heteronormative system opened a little window of opportunities for some but did not fundamentally change for all. Thereby, many of these 'glass-ceiling-breakers' become tokens that are taken as evidence of improvement although no structural changes have been made. Thus, the representation of the formerly oppressed becomes a cliché for the dominant culture that enacts the acceptance and tolerance of the LGBTQIAN+ community while further enforcing hetero- and homonormative structures. This new diversity discourse is more subtle and more difficult to grasp than blatant homophobia, unabashed sexism, or obvious racism. While feigning tolerance, it resists more complex social experiences of exclusion and discrimination and presupposes static identities that solidify binary oppositions such as queer and straight. At the same time, the experience of marginality and discrimination is aestheticised and made consumable.

Yet, films like Barry Jenkin's *Moonlight* (2016) show that more complex negotiations and irritations of common diversity narratives can and do find mainstream appeal. The film follows its protagonist Chiron from boyhood to young adulthood in three chapters each of which deals with a significant period in the main character's life (played by Alex Hibbert as the boy 'Little', Aston Sanders as the adolescent 'Chiron,' and Trevante Rhodes as 'Black' in his mid-twenties). While negotiating a variety of themes such as coming-of-age, violence, poverty, drug use, masculinity, homosexuality, race, and class, the film stays very close to Chiron's subjective perspective. The film's structure carves out the complexity of Chiron's character by showing three versions of him at different points in his life. In this way, it defies any essentialism concerning racial, gendered, or sexual identities. To grow up is not a linear development into one's true self, but an ongoing, reversible, and often fragmented process. The three-fold structure of the narrative is also apparent in the film poster, which shows the three versions of Chiron in a collage of the three actors all in one face. Moreover, the film

"evokes clichés of African-American masculinity in order to shatter them" (Scott "Moonlight" n. pag.) and, hence, breaks with cinematic conventions of representing BIPOC and LGBTQIAN+ individuals. Archetypes such as the African American gangster or the drug dealer are transgressed by an emphasis on their solicitude, emotionality, and vulnerability. Without generalising the experiences of the characters, the film "dwells on the dignity, beauty and terrible vulnerability of black bodies, on the existential and physical matter of black lives" (Scott "Moonlight" n. pag.). Water, and the sea in particular, serves as the film's predominant metaphor for the fluidity of life. Accordingly, the film constantly highlights its own "open-endedness, its resistance to easy summary or categorization" (Scott n. "Moonlight" pag.). Like *Brokeback Mountain*, *Moonlight* suggests another watershed moment in the history of LGBTQIAN+ filmmaking. While *Brokeback Mountain* narrowly missed the Award for Best Picture at the Academy Awards in 2006, *Moonlight* achieved full success in 2017. It was nominated in eight categories and won the Awards for Best Supporting Actor, Best Adapted Screenplay, and above all, for Best Picture. The award ceremony caused a sensation, because at first the presenters Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway held the wrong envelope in their hands. In this historically unique incident, the film *La La Land* was mistakenly named as the winner. While the film's crew was already on stage giving their acceptance speeches, the mistake was noticed and *Moonlight* became the first LGBTQIAN+ film to win the award for Best Picture. This underscores that LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters are now firmly established within mainstream Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, it became one of the most prominent examples of more recent films, such as *The Danish Girl* (2015), *Carol* (2015), *Bessie* (2015), or *Vita and Virginia* (2018), which do not focus on heteronormative, white, or gender-conforming cis-men and thus might indicate newer paradigms in queer cinema.

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