“ALLES IST NUR WÖRTER”: THE CRITIQUE OF GERMAN HISTORY IN MICHAEL STOCK’S \textit{PRINZ IN HÖLLELAND}

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

During the 1990s Queer Cinema exploded onto the independent film scene in North America. Most film festivals at the time featured several queer films that broke the boundaries of film-making techniques, conventional narration, and what was considered acceptable by mainstream audiences. By openly discussing topics such as homophobia, prostitution, and AIDS, these films represented a shift in the perceptions of homosexuality and gender by directors, critics, and audiences at large. These films were received enthusiastically in North America, yet the influence of German Queer Cinema on such movies was overlooked. Some critics made the connection between the two cinemas but never delved deeper into the possible influences that German film had on American directors. Why were the movies of Fassbinder, von Prunheim, and Treut, who made groundbreaking strides throughout the 1970s and 1980s, of no consequence to American critics? The reason lies in the fact that although Queer Cinema tries to be transnational, it is still very much rooted in the politics and social environment of the country in which it is made.

In order to explore German Queer Cinema, I will research the long history of queer films in Germany, which spans the history of film itself. By looking at the history of queer film, one can gather vital insight into the social situation of homosexuality and gender of that time. I will pay particular attention to the works of German Queer Cinema in the 1970s and 1980s to see how the particular social situation in Germany led to the explosion of revolutionary films during this time. Most importantly, I will look at Michael Stock’s 1993 film, Prinz in Hölleland, and explain its portrayal the political and social problems of post-Wall Berlin and Germany.

This film will serve as the cornerstone for my argument that German Queer Cinema is at its core a critique of society. Not only does this film delve into the social and economic
complications for queer people in early 1990s Germany, but it also takes aim at Germany’s larger cultural history. By using a fairy tale to present the story of two queer lovers, the film utilizes centuries of German culture to explain the problems of drugs and homophobia in modern Germany. *Prinz in Hölleland* goes even further into German cultural history by paying homage to the Medieval and Renaissance-era works of satire by having a court jester character who points out the faults of people and society.

*Prinz in Hölleland* marks a turning point in Queer Cinema. As the new millennium neared, queer films entered the mainstream. Although the problems of homophobia are still discussed in German films, the larger cultural critique that was so central to Michael Stock’s work has given way to a much more narrow temporal and spatial view of queer issues. By looking at this film and its predecessors, we can begin to understand how Queer Cinema allows for a strong critical perspective of modern life and how the past shapes our views of the world around us.
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Chapter 1: The History of German Queer Cinema

In the September 1992 edition of *Sight & Sound* B. Ruby Rich published an article about the new wave of independent queer films which were receiving praise from numerous mainstream film festivals. She called this recent movement ‘The New Queer Cinema,’ as many of the films were distinct from past manifestations of queer film by utilizing postmodern theory and more progressive concepts of sexuality that formed the foundation of gender theory in the 1980s from scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. These films portrayed sexuality in much more fluid ways, “definitively breaking with older humanist approaches” (Rich 32). Many of these movies are American films made in the late 1980s and 1990s such as Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) and Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* (1992). These works span the genres of film from drama to documentaries to crime. Despite these radically different types of films, they were all united in being “irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive” (Rich 32). The film festivals at Toronto and Sundance in the early 1990s were a showcase for many young independent directors of the New Queer Cinema.

Why was there a sudden fervor about this new wave of queer film? Queer films had been made well before the early 1990s, albeit with rather limited or stereotypical portrayal of gay and lesbian characters. John Schlesinger’s 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy* told the story of Joe Buck, a naïve young man who experiences several heterosexual and homosexual encounters in New York City. Many of the gay characters in the film fit the then typical perceptions of homosexuality: exclusively male perverts who perform sexual acts in shadowy places such as a movie theatre or a dirty hotel room. This perspective of homosexuality resonated throughout cinema even after the Stonewall riots and the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The films of John Waters stand out among the gay films as they are not gay, but queer, featuring drag
queens and lesbians. These films received some underground attention, enough so that New Line Cinema picked up *Desperate Living* in 1977 for a larger distribution. Many well-respected writers, actors, and other artists were known to be gay, although many chose not to reveal their sexual orientation. Allen Young notes in the 1970s that “gay achievements” are irrevocably tied to the arts in what he calls the “famous gays syndrome” (24). He ties the popularity, or rather the intrigue, of gay artists to “sensationalism:” knowing that a celebrity is homosexual is cause for discussion. Queer cinema was reserved for the perverse minor characters of major motion pictures. Even when queer characters were given agency in films, such as in John Waters’ *Pink Flamingos*, the motion pictures did not see large screenings.

However, much of that changed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The New Queer Cinema of Van Sant and Araki portrayed original, queer characters to a large and rather receptive audience of both underground and mainstream critics. No topic was considered taboo and no historical figure or era was untouchable. Films like Derek Jarman’s *Edward II* (1991) explicitly depicted homosexual relations in a sixteenth century setting, showing that homosexuality is not just a modern occurrence. Violence towards the gay characters in the film is clearly shown. S. Ruby Rich writes, “Homophobia is stripped bare as a timeless occupation, tracked across centuries but never lacking in historical specificity” (32). For the first time, a wide audience of mainstream movie goers was exposed to homophobia and violence against marginalized groups. Another influential film in American queer cinema was Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* (1992), which tells the story of two male lovers, both HIV positive, who murder a homophobic police officer and continue on a cross-country trip, constantly shouting the motto, “Fuck everything.” The openness in which the characters’ infliction with HIV is discussed in the film was quite revolutionary for the time, as it was still stigmatized from within and outside the gay community.
(Forstein 45-46). To add to the dystopian aura of the film, Araki used film celluloid from the 60s and 70s which gave the film a grainy, dirty look (Rich 34). The film itself physically reflects the impoverished nature of the characters. But one of the most important characteristics of New Queer Cinema was that it was no longer about ‘gay’ film, but ‘queer.’ Themes ranged from young, homosexual male youths to lesbian relationships to transgender topics. Many of the male directors at the time already won praise at film festivals in the early 1990s. This does not, however, mean that women directors were absent in New Queer Cinema; their creations were also shown and hotly debated, such as Su Friedrich’s 1991 short film First Comes Love (Rich 32).

With these American films garnering critical acclaim at many international film festivals, were European directors creating queer film? Did these new, young, and queer American directors have anything in common with their contemporary European counterparts? There was a relationship between the two continental cinemas, but the connection was more one-directional than one may expect. Queer German films of the 1970s and 1980s had a tremendous influence on the much-talked-about North American films of the early 1990s. However, scholarship on queer cinema in North America has been reluctant to acknowledge the precedent set by queer German cinema since the Weimar Republic. Even S. Ruby Rich mentions many famous German directors of gay and lesbian films, but never admits to the foundations that they set for queer directors around the world.

Queer cinema in Germany has a long history spanning nearly the history of cinema itself. After World War I, the Weimar Republic and its thriving cities, particularly Berlin, became international culture centers. Some historians and cultural scholars have pointed to Weimar Germany’s cultural explosion to moral degression. The modern city was seen as a contemporary
Sodom and Gomorrah, with its thriving subcultures populated by sexual minorities. For many, this devolution in morality was a reaction to Germany’s defeat in World War I and the challenges that came with its newfound democracy. Women and minorities were able to participate in the culture and politics of the new republic, and for the conservative observer, this was proof of society’s collapse (Grundmann 63). The most visible subculture in the urban setting of the Weimar Republic was perhaps the gay scene, which was closely tied to Germany’s jazz scene. The lively gay scene in Germany’s major cities was often a theme in film, which was still in its infancy. The new possibilities in personal expression, be it political or sexual, were quickly used by film for consumption by mass culture in Weimar Germany.

One of the first examples of queer film around the world is Richard Oswald’s *Anders als die Andern*, which was written by the foremost sexual theorist of the time, Magnus Hirschfeld. This film, which focuses on a homosexual relationship between two male characters, was released in 1919. Many of the themes in the films reflect Hirschfeld’s now outdated theories on gender and sexuality (Hill 321). Nevertheless, *Anders als die Andern* takes a big step forward in the portrayal of queer themes in German cinema. The story revolves around the relationship between Paul, played by Conrad Veidt, and Kurt, played by Fritz Schultz. The characters meet at a gay masquerade. The explicit nature of their homosexuality was “largely nonexploitative” (Grundmann 63) due in part to Hirschfeld’s desire to have this film be an emancipatory work, displaying the political treatment of homosexuality under the Weimar Constitution’s notorious Paragraph 175, which allowed homosexuality to be a punishable crime. Hirschfeld plays a role in the film as a scientist, who helps the distraught Paul come to terms with his sexuality. This part in the movie is based on Hirschfeld’s actual work in the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. He comforts Paul and stresses that his feelings for Kurt are neither amoral nor a mental illness, just a
“variation in nature.” The film fails to create a distinct queer discourse, however, by stressing that “homosexuals, too, can be useful to society” (Grundmann 64). The homosexual characters in Anders als die Andern are basically middle-class figures, who want to show that they are just like any other bourgeois family. The film villainizes the working-class people through the antagonism of Franz Bollek, a male prostitute, who attempts to blackmail Paul for knowledge of his homosexuality.

Anders als die Andern is a foundational work in queer cinema not just for being one of the first openly gay films, but also introducing ‘camp’ to the movies by showing grandiose scenery and a simple storyline (Grundmann 64). As stated before, the two lovers meet at a gay masquerade ball, which lavishly depicts Berlin’s vibrant, albeit underground gay subculture. The costumes at the ball show the gay scene’s liveliness—large top-hats, outlandish vests and shirts, but also the subculture’s materialism and obsession with the image. The scene is overwhelming; many people are walking around while a band plays in the background. However, to say that the masquerade ball is purely a straightforward representation of the gay culture’s fixation on appearance would be superficial. The masquerade hides the participants’ identities, showing that there is an element of shame and a desire to remain undiscovered. Politically speaking, this masking of identity is a reaction to Paragraph 175 of the Weimar Constitution. The title of the film stresses the fear that many homosexual males felt during the Weimar Republic: that they were different and would become “the other” (Prickett 148). This fear is realized in the plot, as Bollek attempts to blackmail the protagonist by revealing his homosexuality.

The Weimar Republic experienced a relative explosion of films relating to nonnormative sexual and gender themes. Carl Theodor Dreyer’s 1924 Kammerspielfilm, Michael, based on the 1902 novel by Danish author Herman Bang, Mikaël tells the story of an older artist, named
Claude Zoret, who falls in love with one of his younger male models, the eponymous Michael. Although the romance between the two men is “implied” (Grundmann 65), the nature of their homosexual relationship becomes explicit and can be summarized in the last words of the film, “Jetzt kann ich ruhig sterben, denn ich habe eine große Liebe gesehen,” which Zoret utters as he dies. But the love affair between the artist and model is complicated by Michael’s relations with the Princess Zamikow. The fading aristocracy of the turn-of-the-century setting depict a bored and stagnant bourgeois society. Some film scholars see the relationship between Claude and Michael as typical of how many Germans critical of homosexuality saw gay relationships, “the pairing of an older, effeminate man with a young and eager élève” (Grundmann 65). This pairing of the effeminate artist and the Adonis-like muse enforces the perceived predatory nature of homosexuality as Claude’s love of Michael becomes an obsession.

Towards the end of the Weimar Republic one of the most explicit and most frequently discussed films about homosexual relations was released, Madchen in Uniform, by Leontine Sagan. Released in 1931, Madchen in Uniform shows a transition from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich in the plot and mise-en-scène. The film takes place at an all-girls boarding school for the daughters of military officers. The school has a militaristic disciplinary code that requires the young women to abide by the headmistress’s motto “Through discipline and hunger we will become great again- or not at all.” The main character of the film, Manuela, quickly falls in love with the kind teacher, Fräulein von Bernburg. She is the foil to the headmistress and all of the girls at the school adore her. Manuela is told by another student that all the girls have a strong affinity towards the kind teacher, but that they at the same time feel uncomfortable around her. This discomfort comes from von Bernburg’s gaze. The same student that explains the other girls’ affection toward von Bernburg also remarks how the teacher will cast an evil look their way, but then will quickly show kindness and compassion to them in an “uncomfortable” way. Von
Bernburg’s gaze at the young Manuela finally climaxes at a school performance. After noticing that von Bernburg has been staring at her throughout the play, Manuela professes her love of von Bernburg in front of the entire student congregation while intoxicated. After her confession, Manuela is condemned to isolation, making her love a type of contagious illness. When Manuela attempts to communicate with von Bernburg, she is rejected and decides to commit suicide. While walking up the stairs to jump to her death, she recites the Our Father, showing her submission to the patriarchal standards which the boarding school enforces.

The role that von Bernburg plays is not so much that of an altruistic mentor, but a proto-fascist leader who “keeps their [the students’] gaze focused on herself in order to hide the negative aspects of the tyrannical school regime” (Barker 87). She seduces the other students to adhere to the strict rules of the boarding school. While the young women all despise the headmistress for her harsh treatment, they admire von Bernburg, even though she forces the students to adhere to the rules as well. The girls love von Bernburg so much that they do not want to disappoint the teacher and are always trying to receive her approval. According to Jennifer Barker, von Bernburg represents the tyrant by means of her gaze. Her gaze enthralls Manuela, out of love and fear, so much so that she cannot help but declare her love publicly to avoid disapproval, “thus visibility becomes a source of both anxiety and pleasure, as the tyrant’s subjects are constantly seeking to increase happiness and avoid reprimand” (Barker 87).

Two years after the 1931 release of Mädchen in Uniform, the Nazis came to power in Germany, ending the Weimar Republic and its vibrant subcultures of gay, lesbian, and other queer persons. This dramatic shift in power not only ended production of queer films, but also physically destroyed many reels of films. All copies of the 1919 original version of Anders als die Andern were destroyed soon after the rise of the Third Reich, along with many of Magnus
Hirschfeld’s works. The only surviving copy of *Anders als die Andern* after the loss of all the German copies was found in Russia with Ukrainian subtitles with heavy editing. No complete version of the film survived. The Nazis’ ideology of strict patriarchy and heteronormative domestic values violently suppressed homosexual relations and nonnormative forms of gender expression. During the 1930s, homophobia was not limited to the fascists. Many Social Democrats showed signs of it as well, denouncing Ernst Röhm, leader of Hitler’s SA, as a homosexual as early as 1931 (Micheler 105). After Röhm’s assassination in 1934 by the Nazis, Hitler gave a speech to the Reichstag, stating that Röhm and others of a “similar predisposition” were part of a “homosexual clique” who plotted to overthrow the government (106). This definitively ended the period of gay expression in the arts and began a decade of persecutions.

The years after Germany’s defeat in World War II saw a new brand of film focusing on themes of de-Nazification and urban destruction. The *Trümmerfilm* showed the current issues facing many Germans after the war, including homelessness, reconstruction, and ultimate reconciliation. In many of these films, such as *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (1946), this ultimate reconciliation is achieved through domesticity. The main character is a lost and alcoholic man who settles down after meeting a young woman who tidies up his apartment and cooks his meals. This was a popular theme in West German movies and culture, which became decidedly more conservative during the leadership of Konrad Adenauer. The rebuilding of Germany was founded on familial values with “loving and providing fathers” (Whisnant 365). The homosexual, whose preference for the same sex circumvented heteronormative relations of home and family, was considered to be a threat to these values. During this time the idea of homosexuality as sickness and contagion spread virulently through the political and scientific sphere (Whisnant 369). Homosexuals were seen as particular threats to the country’s youth according to Richard
Gatzweiler, whose 1951 *Das dritte Geschlecht. Um die Strafbarkeit der Homosexualität* depicted homosexuality as a disease that could easily be contracted by the nation’s young boys, who were susceptible to the predatory older homosexuals. West German cinema of the mid- to late 1950s was dominated by the *Heimatfilm* which also emphasized the importance of traditional values and the family while simultaneously avoiding representations of the Third Reich.

The staunch conservatism of the 1950s in West German culture and politics met strong opposition as the 1960s progressed. The year 1968 was a watershed year for many Western nations. Students, workers, and civil rights activists took to the streets to protest war and political oppression. In West Germany, the protests of 1968 were not just confined to the realm of street demonstrations but also permeated film. The Young German Cinema movement questioned traditional discourses of authority and critiqued middle-class ethos. Films such as Volker Schlöndorff’s *Der junge Törless* (1966) and Ulrich Schamoni’s *Alle Jahre wieder* (1967) had a significant influence on future German films by disregarding the last generation’s *Papas Kino* which “which still reeked of Nazi blood and soil” (Moeller 125).

A related but stylistically and thematically different movement in German cinema was the New German Cinema movement, which searched for new and experimental representations of social configurations. Directors such as Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders led the New German Cinema to critical acclaim. Most important in the context of queer cinema are the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Rosa von Praunheim. Their films were some of the first since the Weimar Republic to explicitly tackle theme of homosexuality and gender nonconformity. Films such as Fassbinder’s *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (1975) and Praunheim’s *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* (1971) showed West Germany’s gay culture in realistic and gritty terms. The films of the Weimar Republic put homosexuality into middle-class themes of
monogamist relationships. Fassbinder and von Praunheim, by contrast, showed the often harsh truths of queer people in the 1970s by openly displaying male prostitution, bath houses, and gay bars.

Fassbinder’s *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (1975) tells the story of a young carnival worker, Franz, who begins prostituting himself to earn money. The film shows many aspects of gay culture that would have been ignored, or even discouraged, by many people not accustomed to West Germany’s gay scene. Franz cruises public restrooms and visits gay bars in order to solicit himself. Being homosexual, Franz is a social outcast, who must visit marginal areas in society in order to find other gay males. Working at a carnival also places his legal occupation on the margins of society. The fascination with peripheral characters who are given agency sets Fassbinder and other New German Cinema directors apart from their predecessors. Homosexuality and poverty are closely intertwined in *Faustrecht*, which explains the main character’s willingness to perform sexual acts for money. Other gay characters in the film are more financially stable, such as Eugen, who becomes Franz’s lover. Eugen himself, however, is evicted from his apartment for being homosexual. Having money does not guarantee a stable life for gay characters.

Rosa von Praunheim, who worked at the same time as Fassbinder, is a landmark director for New German cinema and queer film in general. His most famous work, *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* (1971), significantly changed the gay rights movement in West Germany. The film was screened around the world and was particularly popular in the United States, where the Stonewall riots from 1969 were still fresh in many people’s minds. Von Praunheim is no stranger to controversy, as he commonly refers to his films as *Schwulenfilm* in a derogatory way to emphasize the marginality of the characters in his
movies. *Nicht der Homosexuelle* follows the story of young Daniel as he travels around the various gay subcultures in West Germany. He first meets Clemens, with whom he quickly forms a relationship. Their middle-class lifestyle parodies a heterosexual marriage. Soon Daniel becomes discontent with the mundane and monotonous Clemens and is picked up by an older, wealthy designer. Again, the young Daniel is weary of the rich and demanding lifestyle and decides to make a living at a gay café. During his tenure at the café Daniel becomes more involved in various underground gay scenes: leather bars, pickup parks, and hustlers in bathrooms. None of these areas offer Daniel comfort until he happens upon a transvestite bar where he meets others who are critical of the gay culture in West Germany. They openly discuss the problem of being in the closet and how gay men only reveal their homosexuality in marginal areas, such as parks and bathrooms. Daniel’s new friends wish to openly show their homosexuality in public spaces. In order to accomplish this, they wish to organize an emancipation movement for all queer persons. Although in the film, the characters do not form an emancipatory group, the ending is a call to action directed towards the audience to get out of the dimly lit parks and bath houses and into the streets to advocate gay rights.

The films of Fassbinder and von Praunheim were the only widely-screened gay films in West Germany for some time. As representatives of New German Cinema and the vanguard of queer films in West Germany they wished to intertwine political and social themes through radically new filmmaking techniques. *Faustrecht der Freiheit* portrays the city as a claustrophobic apartment. Even the outdoor scenes seem to take place in an apartment; the horizon is not visible and the background irrelevant. The film shows “the social dyspepsia” (Eder 1975) and asphyxia of the urban middle-class. Von Praunheim’s *Nicht der Homosexuelle* features no direct dialogue, instead utilizing voice-overs to convey the meanings and emotions of the
scenes. The voice-overs remind the audience that this is not a documentary. In journalistic documentary style filming, voice-overs work to guide the audience through the film and explain situations which may not be readily explained via image. The narration is supposed to be omniscient and reassuring to the audience so that the listener can trust the speaker (Darke 2012). However the voice-over in Nicht der Homosexuelle makes the audience doubt the trusting narrator, who takes on a caustic and vicious tone. The untrustworthy narration creates a Verfremdungseffekt by allowing the audience to call the voice-over into question. It reminds the audience that this is a film and “that cinema is a technical construction that mechanically weds sound to image and hence cannot be taken as mimetically reproducing reality” (Kuzniar 97).

Taking the voice away from the actors calls their agency into question. The voice-overs often take a negative tone with the characters; the word Schwule, which a derogatory word for a homosexual male, is, for example, used ninety times in the film (Kuzniar 97). The alienating dubs are a constant reminder that social constructions and not individual choice often affect the actions of people.

Monika Treut’s 1988 film Die Jungenfrauenmaschine steps away from the political aspects of gay liberation and into self-liberation. This film delves into the lesbian culture of San Francisco through the perspective of a German woman, Dorothee. The main character travels to the United States in order to find her mother, but while in San Francisco she meet the aptly named Susie Sexpert. Susie tells Dorothee to visit a lesbian strip show and there the German woman meets the drag king, Ramona, with whom she falls in love. Treut’s film displays a radical shift in gay/lesbian identity. By falling in love with Ramona, Dorothee does not become a lesbian, nor does it change her past heterosexual experiences. This diverges from previous discourse on the subject of homosexual identity. For many the concept of essentialism defines
many features of human interaction such as sexuality. Essentialism in modern sociological discourse can be defined as “certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, universal, and biologically determined” (DeLemater & Hyde 10). In the area of sexuality this means that one’s orientation is evolutionarily determined, thus biologically fixed and unchanging (12). This would mean that one’s homosexuality is determined genetically. However, Monika Treut’s protagonist disrupts this notion. Although she had heterosexual experiences in the past, her romance with Ramona shows that her sexuality is not determined, “[the] protagonist comes out only in the sense that she experiences lesbian desire and sex” (Straayer 27). Here the importance of sexuality is experience and not identity. By travelling to new places and meeting new people, Dorothee discovers new feelings within herself, but does not ignore her past experiences.

New Queer Cinema in North America was influenced by directors outside of Hollywood, who were not opposed to using new filming techniques such as nonlinear stories. Many of these directors were German pioneers such as Rosa von Praunheim. The most important connection between German and American queer cinema is not in the filming techniques, but the treatment of the theme of homosexuality itself. For German cinema the ‘coming-out story’ was never a large topic in films, although the works of von Praunheim feature a social coming-out of the larger gay community. The films of Fassbinder and Treut show gay culture through the social context that the queer characters experience. After the first showing of Van Sant’s My Own Private Idaho, a film which portrays the life of a male prostitute in the United States, Rich states that this film, “securely positions him as the heir-apparent to Fassbinder” (32). With Van Sant earning comparisons to Fassbinder, it would not be a surprise that the showing of Su Friedrich’s First Comes Love, a film about the ambivalence of North American homosexuals towards the institution of marriage, in Toronto of September 1991 was attended by Monika Treut, another
German director active in New Queer Cinema, who also participated in a panel of filmmakers (Rich 32). Since the New Queer Cinema of the United States, which garnered much praise, was seen as the “heir” to German queer cinema, it would be expected that much would be written about these German filmmakers. Indeed the works of Monika Treut have been critically analyzed by many queer theory and cinema studies scholars¹ but these were years after the dramatic entrance of New Queer Cinema onto the North American film scene. In 2000, Kuzniar declared that the films of Monika Treut were “running an edge ahead of the American New Queer Cinema directors of the 1990s” (90). But Kuzniar realizes that, during the heyday of American queer film, German queer directors were neglected. One of the most prominent figures in German queer film and queer rights activist, Rosa von Praunheim, who had made his mark on the German gay rights scene some twenty years before Araki’s and Jarman’s films, was overlooked by many filmmakers and critics in North America. Kuzniar goes as far as to say that Rosa von Praunheim was “the bridge between it [New Queer Cinema] and its largely unrecognized predecessor, the New German Cinema” (91). The reason for this lack of attention could lie in the difficulties of showing independent films before the digital age. But Kuzniar points to another reason that separates German Queer Cinema from American New Queer Cinema: radically different political atmospheres and homosexual cultures. Queer films in America focus on the “coming out” story, where the character comes to terms with his or her sexuality. German queer cinema, according to Kuzniar, was always openly gay (18). The coming out story, which is a popular trope in American films and television is “largely foreign” to German films. The cinema of Germany has focused mostly on depicting the queer characters in terms of society and the environment, because they are already “out of the closet.”

¹ Gemünden, 1993; Straayer, 1993
Chapter 2: *Prinz in Hölleland* and German Queer Cinema

Michael Stock’s 1993 film *Prinz in Hölleland* is one of these German films which relate queer characters to their social situation. The early 1990s were a particularly traumatic period for many people across Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent unification of East and West Germany significantly altered over forty years of political, economic, and social separation in Europe. Nearly half a century of military rivalries and political antagonism between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, especially the United States and the Soviet Union, gave way to a dramatic shift in power from economically planned, Communist governments to free market capitalist states. But the shift in power during this time had more than military consequences. The transition caused economic depression for many former communist states (Jalles 278). In former East Germany, there was also a noticeable distrust of government and authority during the years after the unification (Yoder 201). Economic and political uncertainty marked the early 1990s. *Prinz in Hölleland* explicitly displays these uncertainties through filmmaking techniques and unconventional storytelling that follows in the footsteps of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Rosa von Praunheim. The film exposes inequalities and discrimination in the post-1989 world through the perspective of several queer characters. As is common among German directors of queer films, the social and cultural context, in which the characters find themselves, is observed and critiqued. In *Prinz in Hölleland*, the situation, in which the queer characters live, is early 1990s Germany. However, this film engages with a much larger context, that of German cultural history. In order to critique German culture, the film subverts the 19th century fairy tale by introducing two gay characters. It also pays homage to the Medieval and Early Modern works of satire by having a court jester, or Hofnarr, guide the plot and characters through the film. The film never strays too far from the modern context though, and places these monuments to German
cultural history in post-1989 Berlin.

Michael Stock’s *Prinz in Hölleland* was a low-budget independent production mixing gritty reality and fanciful fiction. The film did not receive a wide release, due in part to its explicit depiction of suicide, but was screened at several film festivals in Germany (Kuzniar 174). This film can be seen as Germany’s response to the flourishing of American queer films during this time and the post-1989 revival of Fassbinder and von Praunheim. The New Queer Cinema described by Rich brought new insights into film by utilizing recent advances in queer theory. *Prinz in Hölleland* is an example of the intersection of German queer cinema with German culture. The unconventional and often displeasing themes in the film bring attention to failures in German culture and society.

*Prinz in Hölleland* takes place during the transition phase of German unification after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The characters in the film represent various people who were affected by the economic and social changes of the early 1990s. Many of the main characters display gender or sexual nonnormativity. Because of their nonconformity, they suffer discrimination from outside and within their group of queer characters. Along with the social problems they face, many characters also suffer from drug addiction, which had been a problem in the decades before the unification in 1990 (Wille 1987). The characters’ addiction, coupled with the problems of poverty and homophobia, puts the film into a distinct frame of 1990s Germany.

The main protagonists of the film are the gay couple Stefan and Jockel who are squatters in Berlin. Jockel is addicted to heroin and often prostitutes himself in order to support his addiction. His boyfriend, Stefan is generally supportive but is critical of Jockel’s drug use. Jockel’s drug addiction worsens as his relationship with the drug-dealer Micha becomes more
sexual. Micha introduces him to the drug-supplier to whom Jockel begins prostituting himself. Stefan and Jockel fight more often as the film progresses and despite the help from their friend Firlefanz, the jester, the lives of the two lovers falls apart. Jockel’s drug-addiction worsens and Stefan begins drinking heavily, which causes his personality to be more combative and angry. Micha suggests that they go on a day trip in order to relax and repair the belligerent atmosphere among his friends. During the trip, Jockel is violently beaten by Neo-Nazis and is taken to the hospital. After he returns from the hospital, he and Micha go on one last heroin binge, but the drug is laced with rat poison. After seeing how his help and advice could not stop Jockel from dying, Firlefanz commits suicide after shouting, “Wörter! Alles ist nur Wörter!”

The film opens with Stefan and Jockel lying in a park during the day, drinking beer, and mocking many of the tourists that they see. Stefan says in a mocking voice the names of various tourist attractions in Berlin that many people visit: the Reichstag, the Brandenburg Gate, etc. He adds that people only see what they want to see and ignore other, less traditional parts of the city. This scene places the characters in a particular social context; they are outside of the secure and conventional areas of Berlin. They are neither tourists nor business workers. While the tourists hurry from one museum to the next and the workers rush to their jobs, they are laying in a park away from the congestion of the main streets and the long lines of the monuments. While tourists visit the city and other residents hurry to their jobs or go to department stores to buy expensive clothes, Stefan and Jockel lie down together and watch them, as Jockel states that his mother reminds him of the materialistic and consumerist lifestyle that they witness. Although this is a small detail that Jockel says as an aside, it tells the audience that Jockel may have come from a middle-class family.

They venture through the city but in opposition to the tourists and shoppers, they explore
ruined buildings and graffiti-covered bridges. They precariously cross one bridge, showing their fragile position in society. As they journey through the deindustrialized areas of Berlin, the film moves back into the heart of the city. On a busy street, a small group of protestors is demonstrating. The rally gives a glimpse of the ever present discontent among people at the current social paradigm, but the modest size of the demonstrators also shows the lack of interest among the majority of people in the problems that some people face. The protesters hold banners against racism and right-wing extremism, those discriminatory attitudes which will bring much trouble to the characters in *Prinz in Hölleland*. On that same street, another character called Firlefanz, who is dressed as a medieval court jester, leads a group of people wearing leather jackets and torn jeans across Berlin. The jester carries with him a red carpet which he unfurls across the street to allow his followers to cross. The court jester and the red carpet call to mind medieval court life with his punk-rock companions being the royalty. He leads these people down an alley and performs a puppet show for them.
Chapter 3: *Prinz in Hölleland* as a Fairy Tale

The puppet show performed by Firlefanz, the jester figure in the movie, tells of the eponymous ‘Prince’ and his love for the miller’s son. Firlefanz’s performance parallels the story of Stefan and Jockel. The camera switches from the two young lovers back to Firlefanz as he narrates the fairy tale. The prince is banished from his father’s kingdom as punishment for his love. He and the miller’s son go into the enchanted forest, or Hölleland, to escape the king. They live peacefully in the forest until the evil wizard corrupts the prince with his magic powder. After many complications, the miller’s son is able to save the prince from certain death. After the king hears the trouble that his prince went through and how the miller’s son saved him, he accepts their love and they are welcomed back to the kingdom. The camera makes a connection between the fairy tale and the relationship between Stefan and Jockel. Jockel alludes to his wealthy upbringing and, like the prince in the story, is under the influence of drugs, which severely hampers his relationship with Stefan and his health. Stefan plays the part of the miller’s son, who takes care of the prince. The real life counterpart to the evil wizard who provides the magical powder for the prince is introduced soon after the fairy tale is told by Firlefanz. This is Mischa, who is the drug dealer for Jockel. His relationship with Jockel is complicated as the dealer-addict relationship becomes more sexual. Mischa acts as Jockel’s pimp when money is short. As the movie progresses, it is clear that the fairy tale analogy of Stefan and Jockel’s relationship does not entirely correlate. In the fairy tale, the prince is saved by the miller’s son, but Jockel and Stefan grow further apart as the drug addiction becomes more serious.

Firlefanz’ version of the fairy tale and its reflection by the other characters in the film calls attention to certain tropes and story conventions that affect audiences’ perception of reality. This disparity between the fairy tale and the film world works on two levels, the first being that
life is not a fairy tale. Not all of the Grimms’ fairy tales deploy the happily ever after convention, but those stories that are retold today through children’s books and film adaptations have the happy ending trope, such as Rapunzel and Cinderella. In Rapunzel, the evil sorceress takes the daughter of a man and a woman as punishment for taking and eating her herbs and flowers. The daughter is locked in a tower for many years by the sorceress until a young prince hears her beautiful song and visits her. Once when the sorceress climbs Rapunzel’s hair, the girl states how heavy the witch is compared to the young prince. Rapunzel is banished to a barren land and the prince climbs the tower to see the sorceress in his lover’s stead. While escaping the witch, the prince jumps from the tower and is blinded by the thorny bush that he lands in. After the two struggle to survive, they happen upon each other in the wasteland. Rapunzel’s tears heal the prince’s blindness and “they lived happily and contently for a long time thereafter” (Zipes 49).

The fairy tales in the style of the Brothers Grimm ‘normalize’ heterosexuality (Lester 57). The trope of the princess being rescued by the handsome prince tells the audience, who are presumably children, that the solution to problems is a monogamous male-female relationship with little or no agency given to the feminine characters. The age when same-sex attraction becomes evident to individuals is placed at around puberty or earlier by Caitlin Ryan, a social worker who helps LGBT patients. Others believe that homosexual feelings may be realized by even younger children at around the age of nine, before the onset of puberty (Shenitz 103). This is critical for understanding the morality of fairy tales, as they are mostly told to children. For some scholars this is the time when individuals who experience homosexual emotions realize that the attraction is ‘wrong.’ The immorality is ‘indoctrinated’ (Lester 57) at early ages for children to teach them that the happy endings only come through a male-female relationship. The retelling of nineteenth-century fairy tales that primarily present heterosexual relationships
reinforces the “immorality” of same-sex attraction in the present.

The fairy tale that Firlefanz tells subverts the heterosexuality of the traditional style and opts for a relationship between two men. The prince is severely punished by his father, the king, and is banished from the kingdom. The setting is familiar, an unnamed kingdom and a dangerous forest, but the themes are radically different. The young prince is rescued by a miller’s son, which also engages the typical issue of socio-economic class. The prince was born into the aristocracy. His future was decided by right of his father, the king. Much was at stake when he told his father about his love for the miller’s son. Although being a miller was not necessarily an impoverished occupation, it required more handiwork than a monarch. The father is as important for the miller’s son as he is for the prince; he is, after all, referred to as the miller’s son. The resolution at the end comes with a reconciliation of father and son and the acceptance of the son’s love for another man. The potential for a happy ending in a homosexual relationship amid homophobia shows that there are possibilities for new interpretations of the 19th century fairy tale.

The plot of the Rapunzel story can be compared to the puppet show given by Firlefanz. An innocent character (Rapunzel and the prince from the Firlefanz story) is punished by a vengeful magician (the sorceress and the wizard) but is ultimately rescued by the love of his or her life (the prince from Rapunzel and the miller’s son from the Firlefanz). Some elements of the stories are different. The endings, however, place the two characters together and thereby follow a similar pattern. This story line explains that through trial and hardship a solution will always arrive, usually in the form of a love interest or as Lester sees it, a heterosexual marriage. The ending for Jockel and Stefan is radically different from the other two fairy tales. The two lovers drift apart as Jockel’s heroin addiction becomes more life-threatening. Even as Jockel’s situation
is dire, Stefan does not give his boyfriend the support he needs, as they often argue with each other. Firlefanz, the storyteller, tries to aid both, but his words go unheeded. Jockel and Firlefanz both die at the end, with Jockel dying from heroin laced with rat poison and the jester committing suicide as his help was fruitless.

Another fairy tale trope that Firlefanz’s story adapts is the banishment of a child. Stories such as ‘The Magic Table’ (“Von dem Tischchen deck dich, dem Goldesel und dem Knüppel in dem Sack”) exhibit the theme of paternal disapproval and the struggle to gain acceptance in the family. In the Grimms’ fairy tale, the father has three sons. He asks each of his sons to feed the family goat. Each son does as his father wishes and feeds the goat until it tells them that it cannot eat anymore. When each of the sons returns to the father, the goat says that it is hungry and that the son led it to fields with no grass. Disappointed in his sons, the father banishes them from his house one by one. After the father tries to feed the goat in the lush field and the goat yet again claims that it has not eaten, he realizes that his sons were innocent. His sons each take on different trades in order to make a living. The oldest son becomes a carpenter and receives a magic table that provides endless food and drink. The second son trains as a miller and receives a mule that can spit gold from its mouth and behind. Both sons are swindled out of their prizes by a greedy innkeeper before they can show their father the magic rewards. The third son receives a magic club for his work as a turner, which protects him from enemies. He uses the club against the thieving innkeeper and gets his brothers’ prizes back. When he returns to the father and shows his brothers’ and his own magic, the father reconciles them all and they live happily ever after. In the fairy tale that Firlefanz tells, a similar ending occurs. The son, who was banished because of his homosexuality, returns into the loving arms of his father. After seeing how the miller’s son cared for the ailing prince, the father accepts his son for who he is. The parental
figures for Jockel and Stefan are absent in the film, which leaves the audience to believe that the two lovers have been abandoned by their families. The only biological family present is Micha, Sabine, and their son, Sascha. Constantly arguing among themselves, Micha and Sabine appear to put their fights before the well-being of Sascha. Although Sabine does show more affection to the young boy than Micha, the family cannot provide the security and protection that Sascha desperately needs in the city.

Fairy tales usually employ a dangerous forest or some other remote geographic location, such as the wasteland in Rapunzel. The forest is a place full of danger, darkness, and the unknown. In the 19th century when the Grimms’ fairy tales were collected, being lost in a forest could have been a life-threatening experience. Roads were unreliable and nonexistent in many places even outside of the forests. Forested regions would have been sparsely populated so there was little possibility of finding help. These unknown territories represent the hidden aspects for society. The forest for example is an underdeveloped space and therefore functions as the antithesis of modern civilization. The wasteland, to which Rapunzel is banished, lacks the resources of modernity. It is a barren land devoid of other people. In Hänsel and Gretel, the forest is unnavigable, allowing the father and the mother to abandon the children there. When the two try to find their way back, they come upon a house made of bread with windows made of sugar. An old witch lives there and she attempts to eat the children. They outsmart her, however, and throw her into the oven, in which she attempts to cook them. In her house Hänsel and Gretel find many jewels and pearls. They return home with the jewel, become wealthy, and live happily ever after.

According to Bruno Bettelheim, the forest in fairy tales has strong connections with the external life and the subconscious. For him, entering the uncivilized, wild forest represents a
person’s forsaking of the family, “having given up the organization of his life which the parental home provided” (Bettelheim 94). The difficulty of surviving the forest comes from adversity of having to survive on one’s own. For children in fairy tales, this difficulty of surviving in the woods is most apparent, because they have “not yet built up the inner structures which we develop only under the impact of life experiences” (94). This means that the forest also serves as a symbol for our subconscious. One has to navigate through one’s self in order to survive the hardships of the outside world. Hänsel and Gretel had little choice, as they were abandoned by their parents. The same is true for the prince in and the miller’s son. The characters of Stefan and Jockel are living this fairy tale theme. They leave the protection of the family house and enter the dangerous parts of the city. The city in Prinz in Hölleland and the forest in the fairy tales, such as Hänsel and Gretel, share many similarities, both internal and external.

The forest in the Grimms’ fairy tales (as well as the forest in the Firlefanz story) and the industrial wasteland, in which Stefan and Jockel live, externalizes the individual’s feelings of being lost. Stefan and Jockel have no clear future. Both are struggling with substance abuse problems and their relationship is no longer as close as it was at the beginning of the film. They are disoriented in the city and cannot find a way out. The forest in the Grimms’ fairy tales is an unnavigable landscape for Hänsel and Gretel. The forest prevents the characters from reaching their goal (Bettelheim, Zipes), which is returning to the protection of their home in Hänsel and Gretel. In the Firlefanz story, the protection of the familial home is what the prince and the miller’s son strive for. When the miller’s son rescues his lover, it is the acceptance of the father that resolves the conflict. For Stefan and Jockel, there is a small hint of the paternal home, when Jockel mentions his mother, but they never show a desire to return. There is no safe haven for the two. Being lost in the city with no clear destination means that the characters will not have a
happy ending, “the forest provides them with all they need, if they know how to interpret the signs” (Zipes 73). The city provides Stefan and Jockel with what they need, but unfortunately they do not know how to interpret the signs and are led astray by the drug dealers and criminals.

Forests symbolize a character’s journey through difficulties, but also represent the subconscious. During one’s journey through the forest, one learns not only how to survive, but one’s strengths and weaknesses, “the heroes of the Grimms’ tales customarily drift into the forest, and are rarely the same people when they leave it” (Zipes 73). Hänsel and Gretel, who were helpless and expendable in their parents’ house, defeat the evil witch and bring treasures back to their father. The prince and the miller’s son also survive the ensnarement of the wizard and come back to the king a happy and stronger couple. The forest serves as a turning point in their lives, as they delve deeper into their own identity. Bettlheim posits that “the near-impenetrable forest in which we get lost has symbolized the dark, hidden, near-impenetrable world of our unconscious” (94). The characters enter the forest as children, if not physically, then mentally. Stefan and Jockel may be adults, but they have not figured out a strategy to survive the city. Their failure is linked to their “underdeveloped personality” (94), which does not expand or progress in the film. They do not resolve conflicts between themselves and the communication is dishonest. The story of Stefan and Jockel is the fairy tale situation of the hero succumbing to the forest and the evil inside. They do not bring the father jewels and riches from their journey in the forest, but instead fall prey to the witch with her bread and sugar house.

In the story The Riddle (original title Das Rätsel) by the Brothers Grimm, a prince and his servant travel through a forest full of dangers and mystery. Looking for rest they stop at a small house but are warned of the witch that lives there. A young woman tells them that the witch poisons the food and drinks that she offers her guests. The prince and his servant are able to escape the deadly witch, but not before their horse is accidentally poisoned. The forest is yet
again an area of uncertainty, where evil women still practice “their godless deeds” (Riddle). It is the foil to the monuments of civilization: agriculture and urbanity. These forests have not been ploughed by farmers, nor have places of government or commerce been constructed there. The only inhabitants of these forests are evil witches and corrupt innkeepers. They offer hospitality on the surface, but like the forests, in which they live, they have deeper and darker motivations.

This fear of the lack of modernity or civilization is witnessed in *Prinz in Hölleland*. The tourists, who are new to the city, wish to visit only the safest, already explored parts of Berlin. Because of this, they only see the attractions in the center like the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate. They ignore the industrial wastelands that would have been largely present and visible in the early 1990s. These desolate places in the city are even more upsetting in modern life because of their proximity to the city center. The characters in *Prinz in Hölleland* live in an abandoned construction site as squatters. They are the characters outside of the normative spaces within the city, there are drug-addicts, gay and lesbian persons, and homeless youth. The characters such as Stefan, Jockel, and Sascha ( Micha’s son) are similar to Hänsel and Gretel; they are lost in the forest of the city and are preyed upon by drug-dealers and Neo-Nazis, who represent the dangers of Berlin. The wasteland of the squats is not the opposite of civilization, but its dilapidation. It shows the failures of economic expansion and reveals the dark side of the city. The drugs and alcohol that Jockel and Stefan use represent the dangers of a consumerist society. Immediate gratification comes not just in the shopping malls and fast-food restaurants; it can also be seen in the readily available supply of drugs in the city.

For the Brothers Grimm, forests were not just keepers of dark secrets and people, but also sites of essential truths about German culture and history. Since these forests were the opposite of modernity, they would somehow preserve the German people’s past, untouched by the
changes of the century and of foreign occupation during the Napoleonic Wars (Zipes 67). The forest was at first dangerous and untamable for the characters in many of the fairy tales. Hänsel and Gretel were afraid when they were left to perish in the forest. The prince and his servant would have been poisoned by the witch had they not heeded the advice of the young woman who already knew the hazards of the woods. The forest is dangerous only for those who do not know it, because they are accustomed to modern life, the farm, and the town. Once the characters learn how to protect themselves and find their own strengths, they can survive. Hänsel and Gretel save their father from poverty. The prince survives the evil witch and, because of his experience in the forest, is able to marry a beautiful young princess, “The forest provides them with all they will need, if they know how to interpret the signs” (Zipes 73). If the forests represented an untouched Germanic origin for the Brothers’ Grimm, than the industrial wastelands embody Germany’s present and future. The forest is lush with sustenance and answers for those lost in it, however the abandoned outskirts of the city provide those who are lost with only drugs.

The audience of the fairy tale story consists of the punks and drug addicts that Firlefanz leads around the city. They show little interest in the story, despite the fact that they followed the jester to this alley. Many of them use the time to sell and buy drugs, completely ignoring the story. The wasteland does not provide any truths nor hold any answers. The city’s outskirts and narrow back streets do not nourish the inhabitants, only a place to hide. Firlefanz performs the puppet show in a dark alley, a site of darkness and dubious dealings. The story would have been relevant to the audience of drug addicts, as the prince nearly dies after consuming large amounts of a wizard’s magic powder. Sascha, the young boy, is the only listener who shows visible concern to the fairy tale. He is able to find a way out of the urban forest, but the drug addicts are unfortunately trapped inside. They ignore the signs of danger that Firlefanz explains through the
fairy tale. The city does not provide them with the answers but the storyteller fruitlessly tries to rescue them. He leads them through the city guiding them across the busy street with the red carpet he lays out before them. Firlefanz does everything he can to show the drug addicts that there is still a chance to leave the forest, if only they follow him away from the witches and wizards. His warning is not heeded, but it is not the last time that the fool’s advice is overlooked.
Chapter 4: The Figure of the Court Jester in *Prinz in Hölleland*

Besides the two lovers, whose lives are compared to the fairytale, one of the most enigmatic characters of the film is the one who tells the fairytale- Firlefanz. Among the squatters and punks that take up residence with Stefan and Jockel, Firlefanz stands out. He dresses as a medieval court jester, complete with cap, pointed shoes, and multicolored dress. His stockings and face make-up give him an androgynous appearance. Like the jester in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, Firlefanz is a flamboyant and animated character with a quick wit (Otto 23). Firlefanz tells the story of the ‘Prince in Hell.’ Telling stories was an important function performed by jesters since pre-Christian times in Europe (7). Jesters were, however, not only entertainers, but also advisors and critics of courtly life in Europe. They did not conform to social norms of the time, and because of this, they offered a different perspective of reality than that presented by kings and nobles. Firlefanz functions as a jester in this movie. He is not just comic relief in an earnest environment, but a voice of reason for people who cannot see their life from a different perspective. Even the words ‘jester’ and ‘fool’ in English and *Hofnarr* in German do not capture the complex relationship that jesters had in the European court.  

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2 The words ‘jester’ and ‘fool’ are not inseparable in their meanings in the English language, even though they both refer to the entertainers of royalty. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word fool can have several meanings, the first of which means “One deficient in judgement or sense, one who acts or behaves stupidly, a silly person, a simpleton” (“Fool”); the second definition means “One who professionally counterfeits folly for the entertainment of others, a jester, clown, fool.” By contrast, the word jester has the meanings of “A mimic, buffoon, or merry-andrew; any professed maker of amusement, esp. one maintained in prince's court or nobleman's household” or “One who jests, or speaks or acts in jest; a person given to uttering jests or witticisms; a joker” (“Jester”). The second definition of a ‘fool’ approximates the meaning of ‘jester’ but even the two definitions of ‘jester’ do not entirely capture the complex role that they played in the European court. Indeed, the definitions completely ignore the fact that jester were not only entertainers and merry-makers, but also advisors and critics of courtly life. In German the word for the ‘court jester’ is *Hofnarr* which means “Spaßmacher und Unterhalter an einem Hof” (“Hoffnarr”) a much more neutral definition than the English.
Firlefanz is introduced in the film as leading a group of punks across Berlin through busy streets and past groups of demonstrators. His demeanor is carefree and flamboyant; his lighthearted personality contrasts sharply with the serious crowds in the city. The name ‘Firlefanz’ is not a name without meaning. In today’s definition, it means “überflüssiges oder wertloses Zeug; Tand, Flitter” (“Firlefanz”). The word originates from the Late Middle High German firlifanz, which meant a funny dance with jumping. He lives up to his name and skips along with a red carpet under his arms; his followers share his animated disposition. This shows the first and most obvious role of the jester character as the agent of laughter and mockery. Seeing him prance along the streets of Berlin while residents go about their daily activities mocks their apparent seriousness in business. The shoppers with their bags of clothes and the workers with their briefcases are oblivious to the jester walking past them. Here the juxtaposition of consumerist culture and the alternative punk culture of Firlefanz’s troupe shows the different ends of the social spectrum in Berlin. On one of the streets demonstrators hold signs and banners protesting racism and neo-Nazi violence. Their leader holds a megaphone to his mouth and shouts chants to his fellow protestors. Again Firlefanz plays a foil to the serious residents of the city. Firlefanz is an uncanny character in the film. He stands out not only among the workers and shoppers, who are clothed in the latest fashion, but also among the punks that follow him and wear black jackets and torn jeans. The followers of Firlefanz also stand out from the crowds as they are visibly different from the shoppers. They pay no attention to the protesters as they walk by, telling the viewer that they are apolitical. The leader of the group is leading them away from the city, both the wealthier, materialistic part and the radical, political groups. The prancing jester amid a post-1989 Berlin with its graffiti and gray walls is an unsettling sight because he is a part of the social context while remaining apart from it.

The role of a jester is first and foremost entertainment (Otto). Firlefanz leads his followers
into a narrow alley and performs the puppet show that explains the *Prinz in Hölleland* fairytale. While he is telling the story, it becomes clear that the people in his audience are mostly drug-addicts, as seen by their nervous twitches and exhausted appearance. The spectators of the puppet show are clearly buying and selling drugs and are not paying much attention to Firlefanz’s story. They hold their heads in their hands and wait for the dealers to dole out their drugs. His fairy tale has little effect on the audience, except for Micha’s young son, Sascha. Firlefanz’s part as an entertainer among the punks and drug addicts of the city is useless. Perhaps the jester knows this as he is no longer seen with this group of outsiders again. The fairy tale is relevant to their situation, as the prince is near death from his use of the sorcerer’s magic powder. Nevertheless, the audience continues to deal drugs while Firlefanz warns them about the dangers.

While the audience looks downtrodden, Firlefanz is illuminated with maniacal joy as he narrates the story of the prince. The expression on his face is nothing short of unnerving, given the circumstances of his performance. He smiles and laughs during the fairytale, which he tells in a sarcastic and condescending tone. Firlefanz gives the king a low voice and speaks the prince’s lines with a sardonic and exaggerated high-pitched voice, while the miller’s son has no speaking parts. Firlefanz uses a voice-over, which is reminiscent of von Praunheim’s *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt*. It serves not only as a way to distinguish the characters of the prince and the king, but it makes the audience question the validity of the narrator. The voice-overs in *Nicht der Homosexuelle* are offensive and do not function as normal narration work in documentaries. The narrator of a film should be an omniscient and omnipresent figure in a documentary. The voice is supposed to reassure the audience that the information presented is true. Trust is a large factor in the relationship between the narrator and the audience. However, the narration in *Nicht der Homosexuelle* is disjointed and
condescending. The narration functions to distance the audience in both films as a sort of *Verfremdungseffekt*. The exaggerated voiceovers cause doubt among the audience as the narrator is no longer all-knowing and trustworthy. Because of this, the audience of Firlefanz’s tale is not able to sympathize or connect with the characters. The sarcastic tone of Firlefanz’s narration does not allow the audience to put trust into the fairy tale.

Firlefanz critiques late twentieth-century society while mocking it, thereby acting like the fool at court during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Folly, which shares the same etymological root as ‘fool’, was a popular form of critique during this era. Such important works in the Western literary canon as *Das Narrenschiff* (Latin title: *Stultifera Navis*), published in 1494 by Sebastian Brant, and *The Praise of Folly*, published fifteen years later by Desiderius Erasmus, use the jester to critique contemporary culture. Brant uses a pun on the Latin word *navis*, which means both ‘ship’ and the ‘nave’ of a church, to denounce the current state of the Catholic church. Michel Foucault discusses *Das Narrenschiff* in his seminal 1964 book, *Madness and Civilization*. According to Foucault, during the Renaissance the ‘mad’ were considered to be wise and perceptive, due to their eccentric demeanor. They were thought to be rational but in a different way; they functioned as the conduit between this world and another. Erasmus uses the personification of Folly to criticize institutions. These works were popular but nonetheless controversial in their critique of the Catholic church (Stolt 2005). It is no small coincidence that the Protestant Reformation, which would begin in 1517 with Martin Luther, followed these works of criticism. This type of satire was largely tolerated due to the pervasiveness of mockery in Medieval humor and entertainment. No one figure of the Middle Ages embodies satire more than the court jester, who had the privilege to criticize even the powerful monarchs, “present indirect and even forthright mockery of universal human foibles and more precisely aimed critical advice,
sharp edges softened with colorful and witty wrapping, that prevents the jester from being relegated to the general ranks of court entertainers” (Otto 101). The problem or perhaps the advantage of folly is that it can, and often does, speak the truth, albeit in a humorous manner. Firlefanz is tolerated among the people of Berlin, the punks, and the squatters due to his ability to speak truth and folly at the same time. His function is to tell people what they may not want to hear and say it in a way that does not offend them.

The jester not only serves as an entertainer but also as an advisor, a position in the court which few others were given. The kings and queens of Europe were not opposed to the idea of seeking advice from a jester- indeed the words of a jester were often taken with great respect because “[p]oets and jesters are able to present a different angle or interpretation of reality” (Otto 13). Emperor Charles V trusted his jester, Zuñiga, enough to allow him to sit on councils. Zuñiga’s words were so well respected by Charles V that the jester’s perspectives on certain people greatly influenced Charles’ decisions. Henry VIII also thought highly of his jester, Will Somers. The King of England would often ask Somers his opinion on court appointments and land disputes (Otto 107). Firlefanz’s role in the film matches the position of the jester in the courts of Charles V and Henry VIII. In appearance, he is outlandish and irreverent. But he acts as an advisor who helps the other characters, such as Stefan and Jockel, due to his unconventional lifestyle.

After Stefan’s and Jockel’s relationship seems to be at an end, they go to a bar. The tavern is a safe place for many of Berlin’s queer people, as seen by the drag queens and kings drinking and singing. Stefan, who is upset about Jockel’s continuing drug addiction, becomes belligerently drunk and begins to force himself on one of the drag queens. She tells Stefan to leave, but he assaults her. During the scuffle, he pulls off her wig to the bar owner’s disapproval. He is thrown
out of the bar, the last open refuge for him. However, Firlefanz is there to carry him back to the trailers, which lie far away on the outskirts of the city. The jester steadies the inebriated Stefan on his shoulder while still offering a sense of satire and irony. Here Stefan is shown to be hypocritical - he is simultaneously reprimanding Jockel for his heroin addiction and sexual escapades while he himself is drinking heavily and violently attacking patrons of a bar. Neither Stefan nor Jockel are acting in a rational way. Firlefanz, however, performs a reasonable act when he offers practical help and rescues his friends from a dangerous situation. The story of Stefan and Jockel is starting to diverge from the fairy tale of the prince and the miller’s son. The miller’s son helps the prince with his deadly enchantment and saves his life, but Stefan and Jockel are growing further apart.

The drug-selling among Firlefanz’s audience demonstrates the dark side of the consumerism embodied by the shoppers on the street. The drug-addicts are dependent on heroin in the same way that the shoppers are addicted to material items. Neither form of addiction is healthy and both are dangerous to the person and society in general. The drug addiction that is debilitating Jockel is destroying their relationship. The drug trade is an economy in its own right. In the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the drug trade exploded throughout Europe as many former Soviet bloc governments were ill equipped to deal with the problem. The newly united Germany was a focal point for the drug trade in the early 1990s (Lee 1993). The transformation of communism to free market capitalism in Eastern Europe brought new opportunities for the trade of drugs, especially heroin. The drug economy in Prinz in Hölleland works in a similar fashion as the shoppers’ consumerism in the city. The drug addicts have a dependency on heroin that can only be satisfied with larger and more frequent consumption of the drug. As the unification of Germany allowed for easier access to drugs, the demand for material items spread to the illegal substances.
Firlefanz’s role is much more complex than a mere advisor or a storyteller. He also plays an important role in the physical well-being of the other characters. In the impoverished area of Berlin where the movie takes place, social and mental stability are not the only aspects of life that are malnourished. The physical health of the characters is often in danger. Jockel is addicted to heroin, Stefan becomes an alcoholic, and many freely engage in sex and use unclean syringes during a time when AIDS ravaged gay communities around the world. Although the topic of AIDS is noticeably absent in the film, the fact that it is never mentioned further shows the recklessness of the characters (Kuzniar 176). Despite Firlefanz’s unconventional appearance and antics, he is a rather reserved character when compared to his friends. He abstains from drug and excessive alcohol consumption and has no sexual inclinations whatsoever. He stands out from the other characters because he refrains from irresponsible actions such as drug use and sex. Firlefanz acts in a more rational way than Jockel, Stefan, and Micha because of his abstaining ways and his willingness to help his friends, who are so often fighting among themselves that they cannot support one another.

Firlefanz offers support to other characters who are in need of help. Micha, the drug-dealer, has a young son, Sascha. Because of Micha’s work in the drug trade his son is neglected and often left alone. The jester becomes a father figure for the young boy, but not in a heteropatriarchal manner. In one of the opening scenes, Firlefanz is hanging from the gallows with a sign that says ‘Prinz in Hölleland.’ His body swings from the pole lifelessly, foreshadowing the very last scene of the film. Micha’s son, Sascha, tries to steal the jester’s costume, but Firlefanz suddenly wakes up, and reprimands the young boy by telling him that he has to at least leave him with one of the shoes. He allows the young boy to take the other shoe, allowing Sascha to literally follow in his footsteps. The relation between Firlefanz and Sascha is completely asexual. The young boy did not inherit Firlefanz’s powers through lineage, but
through a decidedly social heritage. Sascha, wanting to escape the harshness of his life, becomes Firlefanz’s protégé, in order to learn the ways of the outsider. As the relationship between Micha and Sabine, Sascha’s mother, becomes increasingly stressful, the son finds refuge in Firlefanz’s world. He watches Firlefanz’s fairytale story with eagerness, and gladly accepts the puppet of the prince as a gift from the jester. Sascha becomes fascinated with the story of the prince and the miller’s son, not out of curiosity, but out of necessity: “Sascha, forced to live in a fairytale world that kindly filters reality, can be said to inherit the jester’s madness” (Kuzniar 179). The jester’s madness should not be seen as debilitating or harmful to others, but a subjective madness placed on him by society. He rejects social conventions and flaunts his own way of life. By doing so, he avoids the materialistic lifestyle of the shoppers on the street, but also the reckless sex and drug abuse of his friends. The fairy tale allows Sascha to escape the difficult situation that his parents have put him through but Firlefanz’s world of ‘madness’ enables him to leave reality entirely. The life of the jester is a way of survival in the world of poverty, drugs, and violence. He carries the puppet with his as other children would carry a doll or teddy bear. Sascha finds the fairy tale to be uplifting as it parallels his unhappy family life while also giving him hope that a happy ending could still happen with his own life.

Firlefanz holds the gift of foresight; he is a visionary figure. He reads Tarot cards and deals the hanged man and the jester cards one after another, which foreshadows his own demise. While talking to Stefan, Firlefanz says that everything is motivated by vanity, but when Stefan asks him to explain himself, the jester ignores him. When Firlefanz and Sascha go on a trip with Jockel, Stefan, and Micha, they stray away from the others to go on top of a small overlook. During the stop, Jockel goes to the bathroom alone and is assaulted by a group of Neo-Nazis. Stefan and Micha are unaware of the attack, but the puppet of the prince, which Sascha holds,
begins bleeding. Sascha immediately exclaims, “Der Prinz verblutet!” to Firlefanz and they run down the tower to save Jockel. Although they are too late to rescue Jockel from the beating, they nevertheless save him from certain death. The power of foresight that Firlefanz displays throughout the fairytale becomes obvious. Sascha, the owner of the puppet from the fairytale performance, has inherited the gift of foresight from Firlefanz. The puppet of the prince which displays physical harm done to its real-world counterpart shows that the characters in reality are similar to dolls. They do not act on their own accord, but are motivated by outside forces. Jockel’s actions are driven by his addiction; Stefan is influenced by his anger at Jockel.

The clothes that Firlefanz wears cannot be accurately called a costume as he is unable to take them off; his outfit is a part of him. Being a jester is not simply a performance but Firlefanz’ identity. It gives him his powers as a nonconforming character, “his costume is not a masquerade that he could abandon at will” (Kuzniar 179). The jester’s outfit also acts as a suit of armor, distancing him from his surrounding. Firlefanz is impervious to the problems that plague the city and the characters as long as he wears his outfit. It makes him an outsider, different from the outfits that everyone else wears. Because of it he is not susceptible to drug and sex. Near the end of the film, his clothes begin to tear and fade; his makeup becomes dull and washed out and it is clear that Firlefanz is physically and mentally dying. The suit of armor that the jester has worn throughout the film has slowly disintegrated as the problems of his friends become increasingly dire. Despite his best attempts to avoid the drug abuse and sex that the others engage in, he is still affected by their failures. His friends do not heed his advice; as his words go unheard, he becomes weaker. Indeed at the end of the film, he commits suicide after shouting “Wörter! Alles ist nur Wörter!” His words have had little effect on the lives of his friends, and despite the help that he has given them he cannot save them or himself. However, his story did help the young
Sascha escape the city because he listened. Stefan, Jockel, and the drug addicts did not and they succumbed to the dangers of the city. Firlefanz’s death may have been obligatory in order for Sascha to inherit his clothes, and thus the jester’s reality and carry on his mission to lead the lost people of the wastelands to safety.

There are hints and clues as to the past of Stefan and Jockel, but little history is given of the life of Firlefanz before the movie. This adds to the character’s mystery. Since his jester outfit is not a costume or disguise, one is left to believe that Firlefanz was always as he is. He never wears any other clothes. Firlefanz in not so much a ‘character’ as he is a ‘type.’ He is the typical outsider that speaks the truth about the inside. This is a characteristic attributed to the jester- the nonconformist that can see the world for what it really is (Otto 32). Jesters could have had any profession before taking up the motley fool’s garb. During the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period in Europe, jesters could come from families of actors, singers, or other jesters. Some had completely unrelated trades, such as Claus Hinße, jester to Duke Johann Friedrich of Pomerania, who was a cow herder (Otto 4). Others were people who were in need of protection; the opportunity to work in the court of a monarch or noble offered them that safeguard that they so dearly required, such as Archie Armstrong of Scotland, who was a convicted thief of livestock (Otto 4). Still others may have had some physical disability such as achondroplasia or kyphosis and would have found it difficult to work in another field. Francis Bacon wrote that ‘dwarves’ and ‘hunchbacks’ used their humor to escape the repugnance that many people would have shown to their condition (Otto 23). Although Firlefanz appears to be a healthy person, “a fool could also be anyone who did not conform to a particular set of norms- a category not limited to medieval notions, having existed in some totalitarian state psychiatric wards” (Otto 32), he is nonetheless an outsider in the modern world. Firlefanz’s history is lost in the film, but this shows
the importance of the present time in the film. Regardless of the jester’s past life, he lives in the present and works to help the ailing characters in the film. Because of his outlandish presence, he holds up a mirror to society, “he is so close to this despairing reality that he needs a mask to protect him, to deflect the other’s gaze, and yet also to represent this surface where inner and outer collide” (Kuzniar 179). The jester is often depicted as holding a mirror, none more so than the jester of German folklore, Till Eulenspiegel (Owl-mirror). Eulenspiegel earned the nickname due to his immense wisdom, like that of an owl, and his ability to show things as they really are, like a mirror. A cartoon of him by Rudolf Warnecke shows Till with his trademark mirror in hand with a mischievous smirk (Otto 39). This is quite similar to the personality of Firlefanz, who was likely based on the character of Eulenspiegel. His actions and appearance are indeed out of place in 1990s Berlin, but he is a foil to the other characters. Even the outsider character who cannot be seduced by drugs or sex is unable survive the tribulations of living in poverty during the 1990s. As his friends die from their addictions, his purpose, to advise and entertain, is no longer needed. The jester, who was both a trusted councilor and a satirist, cannot live without an audience.

For all the positive connotations that jesters had during the Early Modern period, they were not always highly regarded. The jester did not always enjoy the favor of royalty in Europe. During the Middle Ages, fools were often seen as servants of the devil in Christian views (Otto 32). As singing and dancing rituals were often frowned upon in more religious circles, the activities that were irrevocably tied to jesters were also seen as works of the unorthodox. Although Firlefanz is far from the devilish deeds that Medieval thought would attribute to the nonconformist, he still occupies the status of an outsider of society.

Perhaps the most idiosyncratic attribute of Firlefanz is his asexuality. In a world where people are categorized according to the sexual acts they perform Firlefanz is an exception.
Having no visible sexuality, the jester is outside the dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual. Being a sexually ambiguous character who is not addicted to drugs, one would think that Firlefanz would overcome the problems that plague his friends. However, the fate of the jester does not mirror his benign disposition. His outfit emphasizes his androgyny, “his dress suggests a queer gender performance, neither male nor female, child nor adult, real nor fictional” (Kuzniar 177). This further places Firlefanz as an outsider. His gender performance is unlike that of the other major characters, even though, there are many drag kings and queens at the bar that he and Stefan go to. The jester seems to have no connection with them, but his gender performance is different from theirs. Firlefanz’s gender leans towards androgynous, not completely male or female. In a world divided by binaries of many kinds- male and female, rich and poor, left-wing and right-wing, Firlefanz disregards all binaries and creates his own identity, a world with no categories.

According to Kuzniar, Firlefanz’s androgyny represents “the utopia of a third gender” (177), however this performance is neither a utopia for the jester nor a ‘third’ gender. Firlefanz commits suicide before the end of the film, admitting that what he has attempted to do throughout the film, that is, be a nonnormative example for the others, has failed, as they have not fully understood him. Furthermore, the idea of a third gender renders Firlefanz’s performance meaningless, as a third gender affirms binaries. In order to fully recognize the jester, he must be understood as a character without a gender. Because of his life outside the binaries of gender and politics, Firlefanz becomes a tragic character, one who struggles to transcend normativity but ultimately fails.

Firlefanz’s outfit gives him the protection he needs to survive the problems of sex and drugs in the city, but it also gives him gender camouflage. Throughout the film and in the
literature about *Prinz in Hölleland*, the jester is always referred to as male. His outfit and makeup, however suggest androgyny, or a blending together of the genders. According to Judith Lorber, the concept of androgyny is not so much emancipatory, as it is limiting because “androgyny assumes fairly clear masculine and feminine attributes that can be amalgamated- without changing them” (144). Firlefanz’s body may show an amalgamation of masculine and feminine characteristics but he certainly changes them. This radically dismantles the male and female dichotomy. He accomplishes this by reminding the audience that gender is not ahistorical. That is not to say that Firlefanz himself is without a history. He appears to be a relic of a time long gone, a jester, but he succeeds in this modern setting. By disorienting modern notions of gender and appearance, Firlefanz stands outside the norms of the city and by being outside, he avoids the dangers. His jester outfit tells a story, which explains that our notions of gender and sexuality have not always been static. It is the site of historical and cultural critique by forcing the view to reconsider the perceptions of gender. If this jester is neither man nor woman, then his outfit would certainly imply the gender performance, like the drag kings and queens in the bar. However his outfit leads to further questions about gender, which lay in the fact that the jester is an outsider character, and has always seen the world from a different perspective. Because of this, the audience rethinks the modern conventions of gender through the ambiguous jester, a historical figure. Since Firlefanz’s appearance as a jester is recognizable immediately, his performance calls into question the historical significance of gender binaries and the nonnormative.

Kuzniar argues that Firlefanz’s gender performance is reminiscent of “childhood innocence” and an example of “Romanticism” (177). This comment links two important aspects of the jester. His asexuality and child-like lightheartedness explains why Micha’s young son, Sascha, becomes quickly attached to and infatuated with Firlefanz. When the young boy watches
his father have sex with Jockel as a “disgusted third party” (Kuzniar 179), the asexual life of the jester becomes and “idyllic escape” (179). The depiction of sexual relations in Prinz in Hölleland is always uncomfortable and impersonal, indeed even when the relationship between Stefan and Jockel is going well, they do not engage in a sexual relation on camera. Although the negative depiction of sexual acts has been noted by Kuzniar, the theme has not been deeply researched. As a post-HIV film, the reckless needle sharing and unprotected sex may remind the audience of the specter of the virus without having to mention it, to which Kuzniar alludes (176). Sascha’s friendship with the childlike jester enables him to escape the reality of the adults that surround him.

The “Romanticism” of his performance refers to the nostalgia of his performance, of a time before the problems that plagued the 1990s. For Firlefanz this is nostalgia of a time when the words of a jester were held in high regard, and the unheard voice of a jester was considered an omen, “the advice of a jester was not always heeded, and this occasionally led to disaster for the ruler” (Otto 110). In this sense, Firlefanz is similar to Franz Kafka’s Hungerkünstler, an artist whose public interest is faltering due to the changing society. The hunger artist, whose profession is based on public starvation, has roots in the Middle Ages. During this time, fasting was considered a saintly deed (Gooldin 28), not too dissimilar with jesters who could see the world from a different perspective. Not only were these professions highly regarded, but also much more appreciated during the Middle Ages. The artist was much closer to the community, as governments were weaker on the larger, national level, but stronger on a more local level (Rader 307). The artist of this time would have been much more appreciated by the small community as he or she would have provided service that no one else could have. However, the rise of the city and industrialization made the relationship between the artist and the larger community more
impersonal (307). For people such as the hunger artist, their entertainment value greatly decreased as more exotic shows became available, such as the panther in Kafka’s story. The hunger artist goes unnoticed before he dies, as public interest in his art faded. He is quickly replaced by a livelier panther, which becomes a favorite attraction at the circus. Firlefanz suffers a similar fate. His profession is rendered useless, as the jester’s personal and intimate critique no longer has the power to affect quickly changing city life of the late 20th century.

Firlefanz’s performance of a lost profession reminds the audience of a time when satire and advice could be blended together to help others. Jesters had an uncanny ability to survive difficult situations due to their personality, “an ability to grin and bear [which] is more frustrating to an attacker than stolid stoicism (Otto 133). Firlefanz is often able to show his own weaknesses in a humorous way. After Jockel is beaten by the Neo-Nazis and leaves the hospital, it is Firlefanz, not the injured Jockel that is being pushed in a wheelchair. This irony serves more as foreshadowing than humor however, as Firlefanz will soon commit suicide. Firlefanz had no attacker, no physical hindrance like a drug addiction. Firlefanz disproves Otto’s statement about the tragedy of the clown, “the notion that the mask of the merrymaker hides a deep sadness is a modern myth- the jester sees all sorrow but does not necessarily embody it” (135). Firlefanz does embody the pain and suffering of his friends. The mirror that he uses to show people reality cannot show his friends the dangers of their lives. Because his mirror cannot reflect their sorrows, he internalizes it, and words of advice are useless.

The end of Firlefanz in the film, which shows the jester’s excrement after his death, was very controversial. Director Michael Stock refused to edit this ending and because of this, his film would not be accepted by a major distributor (Kuzniar 179). His resistance is what sets queer films apart from major films. The film was not made to please every viewer, but to portray
gay characters in their social situation. The characters were abandoned by their family and society at large and had to try to survive in the dilapidated industrial parks. Michael Stock grimly shows the difficult reality of queer persons in Germany. Taking cues from Fassbinder, Rosa von Praunheim, and Treut, the meaning of queer cinema is not to purely entertain, but to teach, and inform. Perhaps the audience of drug addicts ignoring the signs in Firlefanz’s puppet show was meant to be a warning for viewers of queer cinema: do not disregard the story of a film, because it has all the answers one searches for, if only we “know how to interpret the signs.”
Conclusion: Queer Cinema Since *Prinz in Hölleland*

In the years since the release of *Prinz in Hölleland* German queer cinema has been consistently productive. These films in the last two decades are a statement to the progress that LGBT films and persons have made. They have spanned the genres of drama, comedy, and thrillers while always paying homage to the works of their predecessors. Monika Treut has continued to make films with *Gendernauts* in 1999 but has recently made a documentary about cooking in Taiwan in 2012, *Das Rohe und das Gekochte*. As many directors branched out into different projects like Treut, other directors have brought queer themes onto the silver screen.

Some of these films have continued the work of von Praunheim by intertwining queer life with politics. Angelina Maccarone’s 2005 film *Fremde Haut* tells the story of a lesbian woman, Fariba, from Iran who flees to Germany to avoid political persecution. To assure her admittance into the country, she takes on the appearance of an Iranian man who was allowed entrance, but had passed away. While living in Germany, Fariba finds that, having left Iran for fear of being punished for who she was, her new home also has many forms of discrimination, such as racism and transphobia. Despite falling in love with a kind-hearted German woman, the intolerance within Germany, and its immigration laws send her back to Iran. Like *Prinz in Hölleland*, this film explicitly critiques German culture.

Max Färberböck’s 1999 film *Aimée & Jaguar* works queer themes into Germany’s Nazi past by using the true story of lesbian love in the Third Reich. Two lesbian lovers, one a Jewish woman hiding her identity and the other married to a Nazi officer, start a love affair. This film harkens back to the queer films of the Weimar Republic, such as *Mädchen in Uniform* with its forbidden love, a public show of affection, and then ultimately tragedy. The Jewish woman, Felice is sent to a concentration camp after being discovered, but her German lover still keeps in
contact with her. *Prinz in Hölleland* is particularly noteworthy while talking about this film, as the Neo-Nazis that attack Jockel show us that Germany’s past is still threatening the freedom of people today.

Other films shy away from explicit politics, such as *Agnes und seine Brüder*. This 2004 film by Oskar Roehler, who received critical acclaim for his 2000 film Die Unberührbare, shows the lives of three siblings, one a transfemale. Starring already established actors such as Moritz Bleibtreu, the movie received several nominations at German film awards. Stepping away from the experimental filming techniques of Monika Treut and Rosa von Praunheim, many queer films today have become recognizably similar to other film genres, such as modern comedies and dramas. Although these films continue the tradition of politicizing queer cinema, the way the films are shot are much more down to earth and the characters more realistic. This shows a transition of queer culture in Germany. The films of the 1970s and 1980s were films which struck a particular chord with gay and lesbian audiences. Gay men would have understood the various underground scenes in Germany which are featured in *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* and people interested in flourishing gender studies scholarship would have greatly enjoyed the exploration of sexuality in *Die Jungfrauenmaschine*. Queer cinema is a reflection of the social situation and the themes, characters, and setting define the contemporary social and political climate. Today’s queer cinema reaches a much larger audience than that of previous decades. *Prinz in Hölleland* can be seen as one of the last queer films in the style of Rosa von Praunheim, a movie which describes current events through complex and unorthodox methods. As the turmoil of the early 90s ended, more conventional movies began being made about queer topics. Indeed, stylistically queer films in the last decade have much more in common with the films made in the Weimar Republic than films made
twenty years ago. Being able to reach a larger audience, films of the queer cinema have become more similar to mainstream films. Audiences must still see that queer cinema is in itself a critique of normative culture. However cinema has changed, *Prinz in Hölleland* remains an exposition not only of the social and political climate of the 1990s, but a critique of German history.
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