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Queering the Iron Curtain: Spaces of Otherness in British and Eastern European Cinema

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QUEERING THE IRON CURTAIN
SPACES OF OTHERNESS IN BRITISH AND EASTERN EUROPEAN CINEMA

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Én Feldmann Fanni teljes felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy a benyújtott értekezés önálló munka, a szerzői jog nemzetközi normáinak tiszteletben tartásával készült, a benne található irodalmi hivatkozások egyértelműek és teljesek. Nem állok doktori fokozat visszavonására irányuló eljárás alatt, illetve 5 éven belül nem vontak vissza tőlem odaítélt doktori fokozatot. Jelen értekezést korábban más intézményben nem nyújtottam be és azt nem utasították el.

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Introduction

Towards thinking imp*a*ratively, beside the Iron Curtain

The title of this dissertation, *Queering the Iron Curtain*, already evokes concepts that are in themselves problematic and should be problematised: on the one hand queer and, on the other hand the East-West binary demarcated by the border which used to be a physical iron fence and which still lingers on in the form of mental, political, socio-cultural, discursive and hierarchical divisions within Europe. In order to follow through with the promise in the title and undertake a thorough investigation of the relationship between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe through the prism of queer, first, we need to define what queer, Eastern Europe and Western Europe mean in the context of the dissertation, and how they relate to each another. Bearing in mind that they are at the same time geographical, social and political realities that people inhabit, I approach the West and East within Europe as cultural, spatial and discursive constellations, which necessitate a reflection on seemingly established and naturalised structures of power, knowledge, discourse and identification.

When it comes to the actual geographical and geopolitical reality of space, Great-Britain in this dissertation is the symbol of Western Europe. Although this choice is not unproblematic, Great-Britain is one of the countries with the longest history of colonisation, imperialism, and, since the mid-20th century, it has been negotiating politically, socially and theoretically a complex, and oftentimes tense, postcolonial reality. Also, British academia served as the hotbed of self-reflexive cultural studies approaches which were adapted, debated and modified in humanities and social sciences faculties all over the continent, not least in Eastern Europe. On the level of multicultural ideals, fantasies and dreams, Great-Britain occupies an eminent place in what we know as the West. Although Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska emphasise that the 'West' is a fluid and flexible concept, which "is at times synonymous with 'Europe', sometimes more precisely to 'European Union', sometimes 'Western Europe'" (22), Great-Britain is an integral part of all those fluid constellations they describe.

The boundaries of Eastern Europe are equally problematic, but all strategies and attempts of defining the region revolve around the inexorable heritage and history of a Soviet presence or interference. As Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery point out, the Soviet Union "operated at three distinct levels: (1) the Soviet Union itself, a large and expansionist unit incorporating peoples differentially within a single entity; (2) the "satellites" in Eastern Europe in orbit around "Moscow Centre" but not directly incorporated into Soviet territory; and (3) additional states enjoying various degrees of client status (Cuba, South Yemen), as well as

leftist parties aspiring to create such states" (16). In the context of this dissertation Eastern Europe as a geographical reality is approached as a geopolitical area consisting of ex-satellite states. It must be emphasised that the levels of Soviet presence and influence varied from country to country, so this definition is not without its own problems and the homogenisation of these countries must be consciously and reflexively avoided; at least their being highly influenced by but not geopolitically incorporated into the body of the Soviet Union provides a passable ground for discussing them within the same line of thought.

When it comes to approaching and conceptualising the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe, the most influential theoretical paradigm that is employed and adapted in the dissertation is the intersection of postcolonial and postsocialist studies. Although the cooperation between postcolonial and postsocialist thinking began with a simple question – "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" (David Chioni More) – the answer to that question proven more complex and also a lot more problematic than a simple yes or no.

Eastern and Western Europe's cultural imaginary, value systems and hierarchies, self-perceptions and constructions are highly affected by the *O/other*. On the one hand, they constantly define, redefine and renegotiate themselves, their cultural and spatial boundaries in the light of each other. Larry Wolff in his *Inventing Eastern Europe* offers a detailed analysis about the western cultural construction of Eastern Europe, and how it became "another other" in the British cultural imagination. Nataša Kovačević also emphasises that there is

> a long history of Western attempts to identify Western Europe as enlightened, developed, and civilized in distinction to Eastern Europe and, as a result, to intellectually master Eastern Europe through description and classification, fixing it into stereotypes of lamentable cultural, political, and economic backwardness ..., or, alternately, praiseworthy conservation of its "noble savages" (here, pallid Western city-dwellers, enervated by industrial fumes or corporate discipline, are contrasted with big, healthy, lazy, and gregarious Eastern Europeans."(2)

The Eastern European cultural context is neither exempt from the effects of these complex infatuations, as its position can be described as a multi-layered in-betweenness, which Kovačević describes as "a particularly confusing and schizophrenic position" (3). Eastern Europe and Eastern Europeans have needed to define themselves in relation to various others: "Eastern Europeans have been defined and define themselves as "European," especially in distinction to their more "Oriental" neighbors. […], Eastern Europeans, while not "other" as much as Asians or Africans, are also "not quite" European; rather, they are semi-European, semi-developed, with semi-functioning states and semi-civilized manners." (Kovačević 3) The constant "shadow" of the ever-future West and the ghost of the Soviet Union – as Bogdan

Ştefănescu observes – positions Eastern Europe in the middle of a triple othering (the West, the Soviet Union and the Orient ("Reluctant" 22). The constant self-(re)construction of Eastern Europe(ans) in the light of the three different pairings results in an inferiority complex and "feelings of shame at a marginal and uncertain identity and of dissatisfaction with their collective identity" ("Filling" 117). Furthermore, perceiving themselves in a constant state of marginality, secondary status and otherness, Eastern European identities internalise these perceptions and a process of self-colonisation (the term first coined by Alexander Kiossev) emanates.

Eastern Europe's long decades behind the iron curtain, and later the regime changes – its "coming out" from behind the iron curtain – did not in fact erase its perceived subaltern status (see Starck 2). Instead, the rapid and artificial unification provided "the reification of Eastern Europe as a civilizing project (*task*) by the European Union (EU) and North America; and, second, the reification of its communist legacies as "unregenerate Oriental instincts" that must be weeded out in this process. (Kovačević 1, emphasis in the original). Although the regime changes could have brought equalisation, opening up and the eradication of cultural borders, Madina Tlostanova points out that

> we woke up to a new reality of multiple dependencies and increased mental, if not economic and social, un-freedom, invisibility to the wider world and the continued forms of silencing and trivialization by the dominant discourses of neoliberal modernity, the growing dispensability of our lives, the intricate subordination of the spheres of being, thinking, and perception which continue after political decolonization and flourish after formal de-sovietization. (*Postcolonialism* 2-3)

Hence, the regime changes and the demolition of the Iron Curtain did not bring the West closer, but re-constructed it as unreachable, only this time not on geopolitical grounds (crossing the actual borders became possible), but as the "only legitimate modernity" to which Eastern Europe has to keep "catching up and forever emerging" (7).[1]

Another factor that must be taken into consideration in connection with the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe is the heritage of the West as an imagined dreamland, in which "the West is consciously construed as the significant "Other," a role model and desired destination" (Stojanova 19). Imagining, idealising the West as a dreamland is part of Eastern

[1]As Magdalena J. Zabrowska et al. point out, "Eastern Europe is represented, and is still invited to think of itself, as premodern, a drag on the continent's progress" (12) and even "after the Fall, the West saw and still sees the peoples of East as immature, childish." (13)

Europe's cultural heritage, the elements of which liberalism, progress, freedom, prosperity and multiculturality (Kulpa and Mizielińska 22).

Although the parallel reading of postsocialist and postcolonial conditions is not unproblematic because of the historical differences, many emphasise that "*all* of Europe is postcolonial, *but* in different ways" (Pucherová and Gáfrik 14, emphasis in the original). Such a realization seems as the initial step towards a more inclusive approach towards the examination of European culture, towards the recognition of Europe "as a multivalent, cumulatively created, hybrid postcolonial entity that nevertheless shares a common heritage and values" (22): a Europe no longer perceived along centuries-old binary divisions. The co-dependence and mutual, reciprocal connection, and very often blurred division between constructions of East and West is also stressed by Dariusz Skórczewski, who underlines "that easy demarcation between 'West' and 'East', the 'modern' and the 'backward' should be reconsidered and, perhaps, abandoned, and the two parts, instead of being juxtaposed, should be treated as belonging to one human and humanistic reality" (374).

Madina Tlostanova calls for an understanding that for the eradication of binary systems it is not "just" the co-dependence and mutual construction of East and West that should be taken into consideration, but also that the two juxtaposed constructions – and also the thought systems surrounding them – stem from one common source: "[b]oth postcolonial and postsocialist discourses are products of modernity/coloniality, emphasizing different elements and notions, yet sharing the basic rhetoric of modernity acting as a tool in justifying the continuing colonization of time and space, of lives and futures" ("Postcolonial" 30). Therefore, she advocates for a more radical way of approaching the deconstruction of the East-West binary, which excavates and examines this shared root: the decolonial option. According to her, this approach does not attempt "to 'study colonialism', but to decolonize knowledge, subjectivity, gender, sensuality from the position of exteriority" (*Postcolonialism* 18)

Although the "decolonial option" is Tlostanova's term which is little used by others, its approach towards the East-West division has permeated the field, which is exemplified by Magdalena Zabrowska, Sibelan Forrester and Elena Gapova's edited volume, *Over the Wall/After the Fall – Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze*, which was published in 2004, only three years after David Chioni Moore's thought-provoking essay, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique". Similarly to them I call for a "dialogic encounter" (Zabrowska et al 25) among East, West, postcolonial and postsocialist theory, the decolonial option, where queer also chips in as the

element which "exemplifies a more mediated relation to categories of identification" (Jagose 77), to create "a space for enquiry that deconstructs the East-West divide while exploring its origins" (Zabrowska et al 25).

The word, "queer," itself is a junction of various meanings. As Annamarie Jagose explains in her *Queer Theory: An Introduction* queer used to be (and in homophobic discourse it still resurfaces as) a derogatory term for "homosexual," a synonym of "faggot." However, after being reclaimed by LGBTQ activism (lesbian, gay, transgender, trans, queer), queer "has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications" (1). Furthermore, during the "queer turn" in academia during the 1990s, queer acquired a theoretical meaning as well, being "a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies" (1). Although the various meanings of queer might evoke connotations of uncertainty or still being figured out, Jagose also emphasises that "[i]t is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics" (1). In the context of this dissertation queer – especially as an adjective – is used in the sense of being an umbrella term for various marginalised and othered sexualities[2], but at the same time its indeterminacy, elasticity, its resistance to being properly defined – or normalised – is a key connotation for the purposes of this text.

Queer cinema is just as elusive to proper and conclusive definitions as queer. Many scholars include films in histories of queer cinema that actually contain no explicit representations of queer characters, issues, spaces or practices, as early examples of queer "touches" on the dominance of heterosexual cinematic attitudes (see for instance Richard Dyer *The Culture of Queers*, Robin Griffiths ed. *British Queer Cinema*, B. Ruby Rich *New Queer Cinema – The Director's Cut*, Alexander Doty *Flaming Classics. Queering the Film Canon*). On the other end of the scale, we find the "hardcore," activist queer visual arts that are consciously and fiercely challenging, deconstructing and queering the hegemony of heterosexuality and cinema itself in their every aspect (see for instance B. Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* on the democratizing and queering effect of the camcorder)[3].

[2] Although I use queer as an umbrella term for different kinds of marginalised sexualities, there is a predominance of gay male narratives in the analyses of this dissertation, which is not a result of my biases, but a reflection on the proportions within queer-themed cinema.

[3] As explained by Rich, apart from the camcorder, what had the biggest impact on New Queer Cinema was the AIDS epidemic (xvi). In this dissertation the HIV/AIDS crisis is highly underrepresented, due to the fact that the

The goal of this dissertation is to draw up an academic, discursive, analytical space in which it becomes possible to talk about similarities and differences between Eastern and Western Europe's specific, localised cultural phenomena while remaining conscious of and avoiding the trap of reinscribing inherited hierarchical structures, value judgments, fantasies and stereotypes that are abundant in the still persistent East-West binary within Europe. The multi-layered space is drawn up through a parallel reading of British and Eastern European cinematic representations of queerness, because – apart from me being queer – "queer is unaligned with any specific identity category" (Jagose 2); and therefore, I believe, queer establishes an intersection, where the various intertwined threads of normative and value systems, traditions, internalisations, marginalisations and otherings become exposed, questioned – queered – and therefore open up for analysis.

Since my aim is to disentangle the socio-cultural, geopolitical, ideological attitudes, power structures, stereotypes and practices that align in cultural and sexual othering, it is a third area of queer cinema that forms the core of my corpus: contemporary queer-themed feature films, which openly represent queer issues, characters, spaces, and (sexual) practices. It is important to note that these are all films that take the topic of queerness seriously: even if sometimes there are homophobic overtones in them, queerness is integral to the stories, a driving force of the films, and not simply a comic plotline or an opportunity to crack a homophobic joke. They are mainstream films in the sense that they not necessarily attempt (consciously) to queer, transgress or subvert cinematic traditions, yet they do queer the aspects of their socio-cultural contexts. Some films of the corpus are arthouse films, while others are genre films, but a common thread is that they are sensitive to and aware of their wider socio-cultural contexts and attempt to investigate persistent societal problems.[4]

In the following chapters I aim to join the discussion about the deconstruction of the East-West binary within Europe and the value hierarchies attached to it, by formulating a triangular viewpoint through examining the representation of queerness in British and Eastern European cinema. I read the representations of queerness as an intersection of power relations, discursive knowledges and social dynamics that marginalize cultural and sexual others in the name of a centre or a norm. I argue that the similar patterns in how the different cinemas

area of queer cinema chosen as the corpus of this text also shies away from direct and open representations – very often even from implications of HIV/AIDS.

[4] Contrasting the cinemas of Eastern Europe and Great-Britain is not unproblematic itself, as cinemas of Eastern Europe are small cinemas even when a country's population, like in the case of Romania or Poland, is significant. As a result, arthouse films have different roles in Britain and Eastern Europe. Arthouse cinema in Eastern Europe – since it would be financially unmaintainable at home – mostly aims at appearing at Western festivals and arthouse movie theatres and thus validating, legitimising its existence (and funds) at home.

approach the issue of representing queerness indicate that the seemingly impassable border imagined along the iron curtain is the thinnest where it would seem to be to be the strongest: in the field of attitudes, mentalities towards otherness. The British cinematic representations, if the fantasies that uphold the East-West binary were unquestionable, would be able to serve as a model for an open, liberal and natural representation of queerness. However, they not only approach queerness through similar issues as the Eastern European examples, they cannot provide more comforting and satisfying answers to these questions.

Following Tlostanova's argument about decolonial thinking, instead of a strictly binary, comparative reading – which might reproduce the very binaries I aim to leave behind – my attitude towards reading British and Eastern European cinematic representations of queerness can be better described as imp*a*rative. I consciously avoid using the word "comparative," since I agree with Tlostanova that

> [w]hat is needed for real dialogue is a true intersectionality: not comparative, but, in R. Panikkar's formulation (1988), rather an "imperative" – from the Latin *imparare* (to learn in the atmosphere of plurality) – approach. Instead of comparing everything and everyone with the Western ideal used as a model for the whole humanity, we can turn to an imperative mutual learning process based on a pluritopic hermeneutics" ("Postsocialist" 131, emphasis in the original)

Instead of the correct spelling of "imp*e*rative," I use "imp*a*rative" as it reflects more the Latin stem, which is the core of my attitude in the following chapters. The queer representations of the "Western ideal" – in this case represented by Great-Britain – are not treated as perfect models to which the Eastern European films appeal, rather, they are strategies that can be read parallel to Eastern European depictions of queerness without (re)building a hierarchy between them. Through implementing an exploration being conscious about plurality, I hope to open up entangled threads of (neo-/post-)imperialism, (neo-/post-)colonialism, (post-)socialism, and the binary oppositions between the East and West of Europe for a truly intersectional reading, since "it is often at the intersections, borderlands and in-between spaces of both geo-political domains and disciplinary bodies of knowledge that we not only encounter the productive force of affective technologies of power but also critically imagine how they could be otherwise." (Pedwell 2)

An admitted danger of my approach is falling back into recreating binaries as my selection of films comes from opposing sides of the former iron curtain. However,

> *[b]eside* permits spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiciton or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on fantasy of

> metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings. *Beside* compromises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations." (Sedgwick *Touching* 8, emphasis in the original)

By thinking and moving *beside* the iron curtain, its (past) existence and history is not forgotten, and it becomes possible to scrutinise the struggles, hierarchies, constructions, fantasies and myths without the burdening heritage of a Western dreamland and Eastern "nightmareland." By thinking imp*a*ratively, beside the Iron Curtain, juxtaposing themes and representations of various oppositions regarding queerness in the selected films – closeted/out, fucking/making love, alienation/community, rural/urban, native/foreign –, does not inevitably turn into attaching moral/ethical/value judgements on the basis of *where* they were made, yet, local specificities do not have to end up in the closet either.

The structure of the dissertation is similar to the linear interpretations of coming out, which suppose a gradual opening of space and visibility during the coming out process: the four thematic chapters of the dissertation assay the representations of queerness from a gradually broadening perspective. The first chapter focuses on the individual's coming out process, the second investigates the affective and sexual aspects of interpersonal relationships, the third part analyses public acts of reclaiming space; while the fourth chapter inspects the entanglements of different marginalising strategies when they impinge upon the same individual, couple and community.

The introductory chapter, "Two Strapping Lads: Queer, Postcolonial and Postsocialist Theory in the Light of Francis Lee's *God's Own Country*," is, in fact, more of a "statement of problem" than a traditional introduction. Through a close-reading of central issues of the film – like the process of coming out, sexual spaces and experiences, reclaiming a seemingly heteronormative space, and dealing with ethnic and sexual otherness – I highlight and problematise the concepts and issues that will compose the main junctions in the forthcoming chapters.

The first thematic chapter, "In and/or Out: Spatial Metaphors of the Closet and Coming Out" focuses on the representation of the closet and coming out in relevant British and Eastern European films: *Nighthawks* (1978, dir. Ron Peck), *Coming Out* (1989, dir. Heiner Carow), *Beautiful Thing* (1996, dir. Hettie MacDonald), *Get Real* (1998, dir. Simon Shore), *Kisses and Scratches* (1995, dir. György Szomjas), *Weekend* (2011, dir. Andrew Heigh), *The Pass* (2016, dir. Ben A. Williams), *The Innermost Room* (2006, dir. Csaba Szekeres), *Panic* (2008, dir. Attila

Till), and *Floating Skyscrapers* (2013, dir. Tomasz Wasilewski). I approach the concepts through psychological models of homosexual identity development (i.e. coming out), which assume coming out to be a linear, goal-oriented progress, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notions about the closet as a continuous structure that governs queer life. I connect both the closet and coming out as being in close connection with space and visibility, and therefore analysed the representational strategies of my corpus through their spatial metaphors for depicting the closet and their characters' struggle with coming out.

The second chapter, "From Fucking to Making Love: Affective Spaces and Practices of Queer Sexuality" elaborates on the matrix of space, affect and sexual practice. I argue that the films – *Nighthawks* (1978, dir. Ron Peck), *Coming Out* (1989, dir. Heiner Carow), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991, dir. Isaac Julien), *Kisses and Scratches* (1995, dir. György Szomjas), *Beautiful Thing* (1996, dir. Hattie Macdonald), *Mandragora* (1997, dir. Wiktor Grodecki), *Get Real* (1998, dir. Simon Shore), *This I Wish and Nothing More* (2000, dir. Kornél Mundruczó), *Endgame* (2001, dir. Gary Wicks), *Men in the Nude* (2006, dir. Károly Esztergályos), *Chameleon* (2008, dir. Krisztina Goda), *Greek Pete* (2009, dir. Andrew Haigh), *Weekend* (2011, dir. Andrew Haigh), *Floating Skyscrapers* (2013, dir. Tomasz Wasilewski), *Land of Storms* (2014, dir. Ádám Császi). – represent a complex interplay between affectivity, space production and sexual practice. Although my choices of words in this chapter might seem too vulgar at times for a doctoral dissertation and too elusive, euphemistic at others, inspired by Bailey's distinction of the English sexual vocabulary into spoken vernacular, medical-professional and agreed-on, often euphemistic phrases, I decided to use vernacular – at times vulgar – words and agreed-on euphemisms, as these are the most suggestive in terms of the affective qualities of the actions they describe. When it is necessary for the close reading of affective processes in certain scenarios, I consciously avoid using medical-professional terms, since they are constructed as being objective, distant and lacking any affective connotations.[5]

The third chapter opens up space to the territory of publicity and discusses the effects of queer presence in rural areas. In "Obsolete Fathers and Queer Sons: Rural Spaces, masculine Crises and Queer Presence" I point out that both the British and Eastern European films analysed here – *The Full Monty* (1997, dir. Peter Cattaneo), *Billy Elliot* (2000, dir. Stephen Daldry), *Go West* (2005, dir. Ahmed Imamović), *Beyond the Hills* (2012, dir. Cristian Mungiu), *In the Name of* (2013, dir. Małgorzata Szumowska), *Land of Storms* (2014, dir. Ádám Császi), *Pride* (2014, dir. Matthew Warchus) – depict how the rural presence of queerness highlights a

[5] On the treble categorisation of sexual vocabulary see Hess and Coffelt 604.

crisis of existing, class-related masculine structures. I argue that although queer presence provides a more adaptable concept of masculinity, queering rural, working-class men is unsuccessful in both areas.

The fourth chapter – "Minorities in Love: Intersections of Ethnic and Sexual Otherness" –revolves around the last stage, synthesis. in Cass's coming out model, and scrutinises the interplay between sexual and racial/ethnic othering by reading two British and two Eastern European films – *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985, dir. Stephen Frears), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991, dir. Isaac Julien), *A Village Romance* (2007, dir. Kriszta Bódis), *Soldiers – Story From Ferentari* (2017, dir. Ivana Mladenović) – featuring interethnic queer couples, whose personal and interpersonal positions reflect on an entangled logic of various marginalising strategies. After placing the films in their respective socio-cultural contexts – the Black movements of 1970s and 1980s Britain and the situation of Romani people in Eastern Europe – the chapter follows a broadening perspective in accordance with the structure of the dissertation. The two Eastern European films chosen for analysis in this chapter are different from the rest of my corpus as *A Village Romance* is in fact a documentary, while *Soldiers* is a docu-fiction with autobiographical elements. Although that might cause a contradiction with the definition of the corpus in the rest of the dissertation, it is also already suggestive of the scarcity in the intersectional representations in queer-themed cinema.

Similarly to the beginning of the dissertation, it also has a double conclusion. In the first, more traditional ending, "Towards a Conclusion: Proud and Out? Learning in the Atmosphere of Plurality," I summarise the main goals and results of the whole dissertation, and complement the text with an additional analysis of queer Pride representations and how they align with and emphasise the notion of an "imparative" attitude, as Pride marches reach their desired goals after recognising, learning and accepting plurality. The second ending, "Afterword," actualises the points of this dissertation by an overview of queer-related events and changes of regulations in Hungary, which, unfortunately, highlight the pressing importance of learning in the atmosphere of plurality.

An Introductory Case Study

Two Strapping Lads

Queer, Postcolonial and Postsocialist Theory
in the Light of Francis Lee's *God's Own Country*

1. Situating *God's Own Country*

Francis Lee's 2017 *God's Own Country* marked the arrival of a truly utopian vision of multiculturality, equality and sexual freedom on cinema screens. The romance of a British farmer boy, Johnny, and Eastern European (more specifically Romanian) migrant worker, Gheorghe, culminated in a queer happy ending that appealed not only to the fantasies of the Western viewer about the romanticised, orientalised Eastern European other, but also to the imaginations of the Eastern European (queer) migrant about the West as a liberal utopia where personal happiness, fulfilment and acceptance are possible unlike in their "dead"[6] post-communist, heteronormative motherlands. The narrative that resembles the genre of romantic drama provides the viewer with sweetly weepy moments and a happily ever after, however *God's Own Country* does not fail to reflect on crucial issues of othering, silencing, marginalisation, oppression, repression and heteronormativity. Happiness for the "strapping lads" (Lee 58:45) would be granted after having fought their battle against racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual and spatial stereotypes, survived the hardships of coming out and achieved the affective re-interpretation and re-claiming of social institutions such as the family and space.

The opening of the film is not exactly a promise of change, happiness or life. Prior to Gheorghe's arrival we see a self-loathing, (self-)abjecting closeted gay man who drinks every night till he is blind drunk just to wake up the next morning vomiting. Johnny occasionally has impersonal, hasty, rough sex in a cattle trailer as a quick rush of adrenalin before going back to repression and a dull life under the watchful eyes of his half-paralysed father, who is unable to carry out even the simplest tasks around the farm, whose meal must be cut for him by his mother, and who takes out all his frustrations on his son. Johnny is the only son of a disconnected, discommunicative family living in a claustrophobic and toxic family house set in the rural North on a failing farm where cows deliver stillborn calves, sheep need antiseptic for various diseases, and human and animal excrement mingle on the floor as Johnny often relieves himself in the stable. Although the farm is located in the famously scenic Yorkshire countryside,

[6] "My country is dead" (Lee 01:12:02) – Gheorghe remarks at one point in the film.

even this comes through as First World War landscape with mud, dirt, crumbling fences and barbed wire everywhere.

As opposed to the initial despair, lifelessness and isolated stagnation, the film depicts Gheorghe, the queer, Romanian immigrant as the life-bringer, active agency. It is through his presence and activity that the fixed arrangements of this socio-cultural environment begin to open up, become legible and changeable. He brings difference and change to a stagnating, failing system. With his lightly darker complexion and Romanian accent, he is an outsider. According to Sarah Ahmed, "when bodies arrive that seem »out of place, « it involves *disorientation* [...]. The proximity of such bodies makes familiar spaces seem strange." (*Queer* 135, emphasis in the original) In this case, the habitual mechanisms that create the disheartening wretchedness of this environment are revealed as constructed, arbitrary, – and therefore – changeable. The outsider, the queer Romanian migrant proves to be the long-awaited, life-altering force: the embodiment of difference and otherness, what is more, the bearer of "a plethora of forms of alterity, each of which interacts with identity in its own manner" (Peeren and Horskotte 10).

As Esther Peeren and Silke Horskotte put it, "alterity delivers a particular type of shock to the system" (10), which serves both as a wakening from the familiar and the beginning of transformation. The decision to hire a stranger to help out in the farm itself signifies that the Saxby family is ready to change. They realize that they fail "to get on with" the tasks and "to manage" the farm (both phrases recur in the film as the acknowledgement of their problems). The presence of an outsider emphasises that the farm, along with socio-cultural institutions such as identity, family and home, needs to be transformed in order to survive. The transformation results from meeting alterity, as "the encounter with 'otherness' has [...] effects on the 'Other'" (Skórczewski 357). Not only does the socio-cultural space embedding the characters change, but so do members of the Saxby family, since "alterity – otherness – [is] an inalienable aspect of identity construction and assertion" (Peeren and Horskotte 9). However, an encounter with otherness "is likely never void of ambiguity and violence" (Skórczewski 357), therefore Johnny, Martin, Deirdre and Gheorghe need to encounter both themselves and their Yorkshire environment, which – through the prism of Gheorghe's queer, immigrant and postsocialist/postcolonial position reveals how "sex, race, desire, ability, gender and class are the very structures through which embodiment and power (biopolitics) emerge" (McCormack 186). Gheorghe's multiple otherness points out the entanglements of a hetero-patriarchal, sexist, racist, disciplinary system based on binary oppositions implying value hierarchies that needs to be tackled and dismantled for a happy ending. Furthermore, his position allows for the

queerly postsocialist and postcolonial reading of these intersections, as "[t]he central tenet of queer theory is a resistance to the normativity which demands the binary proposition, hetero/homo" (Hawley 3).

It is tempting – especially as an Eastern European scholar – to read Gheorghe's character as a "true" embodiment of the queer Eastern European migrant, whose presence is the key to bringing a heavenly balance to the "stuck-in-patriarchy" English countryside by creating a blissful queer, postcolonial, postsocialist unity between East and West. This type of reading becomes even more tempting when one learns that the director insisted on having a Romanian actor for the role of Gheorghe (Alec Secareanu), whose character is based on a Romanian migrant worker whom Francis Lee met in the UK. Gheorghe's position –transgressing various types of normativity (being a national, spatial, sexual other) – does provide an advantageous angle for the queer, postsocialist and postcolonial reading of intersections between space, identity and power positions. He functions as "[t]he central tenet of queer theory, [...] a resistance to the normativity which demands the binary proposition, hetero/homo" (Hawley 3).

However, while reading the film from this queer-postcolonial-postsocialist perspective, we must keep in mind that Gheorghe is a delicately and deliberately chosen and constructed character who is used by a Western director to talk about specific Western (queer) conditions. The three axes of his otherness – gay, migrant, Eastern European – provide a perspective of difference, but this otherness is constructed from a Western (English) viewpoint. After all, he is portrayed as a queer outsider coming from Western Europe's internal Other (Eastern Europe) who brings life and light to the English countryside, nevertheless, he still remains the product of Western (queer) fantasy.

By choosing a gay man as a central character, and placing him in a secluded space – the traditional Yorkshire countryside –, the film creates a laboratory environment to study how "the presence of queer bodies in particular locations forces people to realise [...] that the space around them [...] have been *produced* as (ambiently) heterosexual, heterosexist and heteronormative" (Bell and Valentine 16, emphasis in the original). In other words, the seemingly self-evident and naturalised, heteronormative structures of rural, countryside space are outed as marked, constructed and open for analysis and re-interpretation. Gheorghe's (and Johnny's) queerness confronts heterosexuality with "its own contingency, and open-endedness, its own tenuous hold over the multiplicity of sexual impulses and possibilities characterizing all human sexuality. Its own un-naturalness, its compromise and reactive status." (Grosz, *Space* 226) Although queer might seem to be only interested in sexual matters, Eve Kosofsky

Sedgwick asserts that queer is spreading "along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses" (*Tendencies* 9, emphasis in the original), therefore a queer perspective paves the road for an intersectional reading of Gheorghe's multiple othernesses.

Another factor in Gheorghe's alterity is his migratory status, which bears an equally queering, transformative force since as, Martin Manalansan notes, "transnational movements enable queer practices, identities, and subjectivities" (530). As it is demonstrated in the early sequences of the film, Johnny alone – no matter how queer he is – might try to resist the intersecting lines of power relations surrounding him, but he cannot realise, let alone change the entangled threads. However, "[t]he instability of boundaries, whether they be the bodily boundaries of individuals or the collective boundaries of nation-states, causes anxiety and a threat to order" (Longhurst 123). Therefore, Gheorghe's arrival as a queer *and* migrant worker pushes the moss-grown surroundings into a critical imbalance, which will eventually turn it upside down. His ethnic otherness amplifies the effects of queering the naturalised heteronormative system by allowing for a deeper cut into its complex and intertwined threads of national and cultural pride, colonisation and racism since "when a practitioner of "homosexual acts," a body that carries any of many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces – nation, region, metropole, neighborhood, or even culture, gender, religion, disease – intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place" (Sánchez-Eppler and Patton 3). Gheorghe's presence provides a sharper edge for the analytical scalpel of both the film and its reader, as "the migrant body is the site where racialized, ethnicized, and gendered disciplinary measures employed by various states and their agents come together and is also the venue for promoting as well as repressing sexualized images, desires, and stereotypes" (Manalansan 537, referring to Luibhéid).

The fact that he arrives as a temporary immigrant worker is strengthened by his first, fragmented interactions with Johnny. When he arrives at the station to pick up Gheorghe, he enquires after his name, but mispronounces it, emphasising the cultural difference between them, and implying a hierarchy as well, since he distorts Gheorghe's name into an Anglicised version (Georgie). Later, pointing at Gheorghe's slightly darker complexion, Johnny asks him? "You half-Paki or summat?" (Lee 13:20), hinting at the British colonial past. When Gheorghe states that he is from Romania, the English farmer boy immediately assumes that Gheorghe is a "gypsy," and even though he strictly refuses the pejorative ethnic categorisation, Johnny continues to call him so for a significant time. The insinuation of colonial and Cold War

hierarchies invites the application of the intersection of postcolonial and postsocialist theories, which in the past two decades developed into an active and lively scholarly field, although accompanied by heated arguments and often strict refusal from those who view the two fields as irreconcilably separate. Yet, as Madina Tlostanova argues, "[w]hat can still allow us to regard the postcolonial and the postsocialist together is not a historical concept of colonialism but rather the decolonial concept of *global coloniality* – an integral underside of modernity that emerged as a conceptual and ideological matrix of the Atlantic world" (Tlostanova "Postcolonial" 30 emphasis in the original)

Gheorghe's marked postsocialist otherness, his "problematic human status" and "poorly representable semi-alterity" (Tlostanova 29)[7] renders legible how "the East remains in many ways Western Europe's 'other', [...] Western Europe is Europe, while Eastern Europe finds itself in uncertain ground that is not quite European." (Gott and Herzog 2) or as Larry Wolff puts it, Eastern Europe and its population has to face "a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, [being] Europe but not Europe" (7). The internalised tactics of a colonising gaze are depicted through Johnny's attitudes towards Gheorghe by instinctual racism, and they also resurface in the visual techniques of the film through the romanticising, eroticising and orientalising representation of Gheorghe. Not only is he basically the only attractive man in the whole film, but, as a healthy body, he seems to revitalise and restructure the cultural and spatial context around him: the Eastern European queer migrant brings life to a petrified heterosexual conservatory both on a macro-level – by re-interpreting space, tradition, values, and family – and on an individual level – by aiding the affective, sexual, emotional aspects of Johnny's coming out process.

In order to analyse Gheorghe's multiple queer interactions with places, spaces and bodies I build a postsocialist, postcolonial and queer line of argumentation. In what follows, I point out those intersections of postsocialist, postcolonial and queer conditions, combined with issues of space, identity, body and affect – both in theory and on the screen – upon which the chapters of this dissertation are built. I analyse the intersections of space, identity and power structures surrounding the spatio-cultural context of the film. First, I examine the representation, perception and experience of Yorkshire at its "pre-queer" state, i.e., prior to Gheorghe's arrival. Then, I continue with how his presence acts as a catalyst for change: I

[7] His semi-alterity is characteristic of his representation: Gheorghe's dark curly hair, and darker complexion makes him a bit different from the pale Yorkshire men around him, however, he does not look radically different from them. Furthermore, his accent is audible, but Johnny's grandmother remarks that his English is really good, and it turns out that his mother works as an English teacher in Romania.

observe how he recreates various levels of the spatio-cultural context through his otherness, and how the evolving relationship between the English farmer boy and the Romanian migrant worker subverts and reclaims queer (English) space. Finally, I place the narrative into a wider spatio-cultural context by pointing out how it relates to the subversion of the binary opposition of East and West. However, I also point out how through using Gheorghe as a reservoir of alterity, identity development, sexuality and affective experience the film utilises his character as a tool to fantasise about a queer "happily-ever-after" in the unity of East and West; yet, it remains just that: a Western fantasy.

2. Pre-Gheorghe vs. post-Gheorghe

God's Own Country opens with a dark image of a solitary house seemingly in the middle of nowhere. This geographic marginality might be "a mark of being a social periphery" (Shields 3), and might signify "being at the 'edge of civilisation'" (5): the periphery, the margin, the edge is not outside culture, but is intimately embedded in it. Therefore the location of *God's Own Country* is not performed in a cultural vacuum, but is deeply inserted in the cultural discourses, myths, fantasies about Northern England, more specifically about Yorkshire, where Gheorghe and Johnny's love story takes place.[8] As Rob Shields points out, "[t]he myth of the British North is an important element of a social spatialisation and cultural discourses which locate the British industrial working class both spatially and hierarchically *vis-a-vis* the spaces and positions of other classes and groups: in particular, to London, the centre of authority and finance, and to the pastoral South of the gentry" (245). As such, the North – in a binary-like opposition to the South – is associated with coarse lives, the lower strata of social hierarchy, marginalised, inferior groups. James Knowles adds that "the North is imagined as homogenously industrialised and working-class (135), a generalisation subverted by the film, since it depicts a different aspect of Northern hard-working life: the life of the farmer. Still, by endowing its location with signifiers of marginality, peripheral existence, backwardness, *God's Own Country* is affected by the myth of the North described by Shields. British queer cultural imaginaries align with such fantasy of the North, "[t]he 'south' represents not only 'out' sexuality but a hegemonic geography of centre and margin, figuring the north as marginal, uncivilised and unliberated, part of a Cartesian spatial politics of categories and hierarchies" (Knowles 135), which partly (and queerly) resurfaces in the film as portraying the North of England as a place of (failing) patriarchal, heteronormative, disciplinary power structures.

[8] Already the title designates Yorkshire as the film's location since calling Yorkshire "God's Own Country" is part of the local discourse.

The representation of natural scenery, the Yorkshire countryside, is in line with the marginal qualities surrounding the North in cultural fantasies. It is radically different from the thread in the cultural myths about the North of England is connected to its harsh natural beauty, there is no sign of romanticisation or idealisation of the space here *God's Own Country* follows the tradition of an unromantic representation of the Yorkshire countryside that is present in British film and television.[9] The environment is depicted as an unwelcoming, inhumane site of struggle, mud, dampness, and low temperatures that engulf and trap the human body (Fig. 1). In addition, the barbed wire is a clear sign of the separation, isolation and dissolving of the unwanted, "abnormal," other body – the queer farmer. Although in certain cases a particular queering of the countryside seems possible (see for instance Johnston and Longhurst "Rural Erotics"), it proves to be impossible for Johnny alone. As "the spaces we inhabit provide an active and constitutive context that shapes our actions, interactions and identities" (Brown et al 4), he internalises the hetero-patriarchal, repressive environment and turns its disciplinary logic against his "othered" queer self. This remote place is "[f]ar from representing a safe haven where otherness can be evaded, [it] becomes the site of the confrontation and negotiation with the other, the stake of the identity / alterity intersection" (Peeren and Horskotte 11). However, as "insider-other" Johnny is stuck in this "shitehole" (Lee 13:50) to use his own words, and only the alterity of Gheorghe's viewpoint will be able to change his (and the film's) perspective in the perception of the natural scenery of Yorkshire.

The family farm of the Saxbies bears a likeness to its surroundings, and is depicted as a smaller, more concentrated version of *God's Own Country*'s Yorkshire. The failed promise of new life is emphasised by one of the early scenes when – in Johnny's absence, the half-paralysed, dysfunctional father, Martin Saxby, who is unable to perform even basic tasks, has to assist a cow delivering a calf which soon dies. Although Johnny is in a good physical condition (despite his constant hangover and his repression of same sex orientation) he is incapable (and unwilling) to tend to his responsibilities. Even when he tries to do good, he receives only negative feedback. As a result, fences are down, animals are very often neglected and suffer from unhealing, untreated wounds; the stable floor is infected with dirt and excrement. The film uses several close ups, allowing viewers to muse on the miserable state of the farm, and evoking a sense of abjection, which is "the affect or feeling of unease, repugnance, and abhorrence that the subject has in encountering certain matter, images, and fantasies – the disgusting – to which it can only respond with aversion, nausea, and distraction" (Johnston and

[9] See for instance Northern crime series (*DCI Robinson*, *Vera*, *Happy Valley*, or drama series like *Last Tango in Halifax*, *Red Riding*.

Longhurst 27). Just as the suffocating mud of the fields, the farm itself is perceived by Johnny as an obstruction of his chance to leave behind this repulsive environment. When an old friend invites him to Bradford for a night out, he replies: "to you [it's just a night out]. I'll tell me cows they can go without their teas shall I cos I'm off gallivanting around Bradford?" (Lee 18:25). He also alludes to "joining the real world" in this conversation, implying that accepting the farm's (and Yorkshire's) suffocating atmosphere is part of growing up, however, it is actually (self-)repression.

Fig. 1. Representing the Yorkshire countryside as a site of struggle (Lee 02:58)

The choking, retracting atmosphere of the environment and the abjected aspects of the farm are thickly inscribed on, and condensed in its central building, the farm house. The film opens with an image of this solitary house at dawn. Colours are dimmed, the surroundings are dark and there is hardly any light around. The house is marked as a marginal space, a space on the cultural, social, geographical periphery. The first sounds of the film even worsen this peripheral, marginal, and othered quality of the house, since what we can hear first – even before we could see him – is Johnny vomiting. The disgusting noise is still audible when we catch sight of the house, therefore, it is the space of this marginal building that is inscribed with abjection. Shots of the building's interior are claustrophobic: walls rigidly separate the family members, who usually communicate with each other standing in different rooms, through doors, exemplified by Johnny's first interaction with his grandmother. It is quite an exaggeration to call this an interaction, since it is the grandmother who does the talking, Johnny hardly says a word. This depiction correlates with how David Bell and Gill Valentine characterise the heterosexual family home "as a place of walls, of separation, but also of surveillance and discipline" (1). Although in the absence of love-relationships (none of the family members has

a partner) it might be assumed that sexuality has little to do with this home of a disintegrated family, as Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst point out, "there are no spaces that sit outside of sexual politics" and "[h]omes are sites of a range of differently configured sexual relations" (3), therefore the regulating, hetero-patriarchal, repressive qualities of the countryside and the farm are reflected in the representation of the home, which becomes a container of Johnny's (partly self-inflected) closeted frustrations.

From a queer perspective all three central places – the home, the farm and Yorkshire – can be read as aspects of Johnny's closet, which "is a term used to describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men" (Brown 1). Although for Sedgwick the closet is more of an abstract idea, "the defining structure for gay oppression" (*Epistemology* 71), Brown emphasises its material, spatial aspects: "the closet is a *spatial* metaphor: a way of talking about power that makes sense because of a geographic epistemology that is largely taken for granted" (Brown 1, emphasis in the original). *God's Own Country* touches on both the abstract and spatial aspects of the closet. Those who are portrayed (or assumed to be perceived as) heterosexual never perform or utter anything that is connected to sexuality, let alone queerness. On the other hand, with central places embodying different aspects of the closet, the film more openly portrays its spatiality: as Johnny struggles while building fences, Yorkshire is transformed into the cage, while the family home becomes a cell that holds him in the grasp of "real life" – heterosexual pretence.

His closeted state results in frustration, anxiety and anger, which radiate in all directions: he hates Yorkshire, the farm, his family, at the early stage of the acquaintance he despises Gheorghe, but most importantly, himself. The film depicts his struggles with self-closeting emphasised by his self-hatred and self-neglect. He very often drinks until he is unconscious (which could also be an attempt to forget and repress), after his drunk nights he wakes up in a terrible state – at one point at the foot of a pile of stones, covered in a plastic sheet, surrounded by chickens. Johnny even refuses to make his own job easier, for instance, he mends the stone fence without wearing gloves (and ends up hurting himself) and he also rejects adequate protection against the weather. Consequently, the representation of Yorkshire, the farm and the family can be read in two – synergetic rather than exclusive –ways. On the one hand, they can be interpreted as the embodiments of a failing, conservative, heterosexist, heteronormative system, which forces Johnny into the closet, whose repression results from space itself. On the other hand, his frustrations and repressions taint the image and perception of the space. *God's Own Country* reflects on the inevitable necessity of changing this socio-cultural institution, yet,

the space itself is not inherently corrupted, since Gheorghe's arrival queers, re-interprets it and brings it back to life.

Although Gheorghe himself is a static character, a ready-made figure of (partly reversed) cultural myths lacking any character-development, he embodies an active agency which is in direct connection with how he, as a queer migrant "take[s] or find[s] location and transform it" (Sánchez-Eppler and Patton 6). When he first appears on the screen, he is waiting at the train station, which indicates both stillness and mobility. His early representation foreshadows multiple elements, the queering of which is intimately related to his arrival and presence. Before his arrival the colour red is missing from images, however, already on their ride home red lights are reflected on both their faces, introducing emotion and eroticism onto the screen (and into Johnny's relationship with queerness and sexuality). The warmness of the colour scheme continues in scenes set in the family home, indicating how Gheorghe's queer presence will restructure the space of this hetero-patriarchal social institution. In connection with the farm, he is defined as a character of novelty, capable of renewing life as his first act here is delivering a lamb safely (as opposed to the earlier dead calf), indicating his transformative impact. One of his first acts is pinning a photo on the wall of his accommodation, which – with its crumpled edges and personal relevance – signifies his ability to introduce himself and his own perspective to a given space, which is confirmed by his transformative power on how Yorkshire is perceived.

As "the geography closest in" (Rich, quoted in Johnston and Longhurst 21) is one's body, I first analyse how Gheorghe's queer presence restructures various spaces in the film with examining how he transforms Johnny's relationship with his own queer identity. It would be tempting to state that with Gheorghe's help the English character is able to complete his coming out process, and allows him to acquire a well-structured and stable queer identity, Sedgwick warns that coming out is basically an endless process, since "every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts ad requisitions of secrecy and disclosure" (*Epistemology* 68). Therefore, I would refrain from stating that Johnny's coming out is accomplished in the course of the film, nevertheless there are serious (and positive) changes in his perception and performance of his sexuality.[10]

[10] In a psychological model of coming out such as Richard Dyer's or Vivienne Cass' these changes would indicate the personal and interpersonal stages of coming out. Johnny's changing relationship with his family is also part of

At the beginning of the film, Johnny is represented as a closeted, struggling gay man, who despises himself, and controls his desires by occasional sexual affairs. At first, he approaches (or rather distances himself from) Gheorghe showing the same attitude. Their first sexual intercourse also bears the signs of repression and self-hatred on Johnny's part: it starts and looks like a fight in the mud, however, as opposed to a "quick relief" with anyone – as Johnny approached the question of his sexuality earlier – here, sexual tension builds up slowly, and desire for the *other* is emphatic. Their second sexual encounter can be considered as a huge step in Johnny's coming out process: they have sex in their shared cottage, in the straw; a space that is more protective and protected.[11]

Although it might seem a paradox in the film that Johnny's coming out process is paralleled with a move towards increasingly hospitable environments (the spaces where they have sex are more and more closed: outside, half-ruined cottage, caravan, room), as Nancy Duncan notes, "[s]pace is […] subject to various territorializing and deterritorializing processes [...] In some cases this may have socially progressive results in terms of providing a safe base (site of resistance) from which previously disempowered groups may become empowered" (Duncan 129). Therefore, this inward direction should not be read as retreat, but as a reflection on Johnny's opening up to his so far repressed queer desires and to emotional connections. Furthermore, this inward movement also symbolises moving closer to the centre of the patriarchal, heteronormative regime. The deeper they penetrate, the more effective queering can be. Their spatial practices "work to undermine the (always already unstable) coherence of this [public/private] binary and related binaries" (Duncan 127). As Manalansan claims, "migrant queers are creating non-normative family formations and hybrid cultural arrangements" (538), which characterises the effects of Gheorghe's queering presence on the home-space and the disarranged, isolated hetero-patriarchal family.

The spatial arrangements of Johnny and Gheorghe's bodies within the family home also signify their transformative, joint presence. Earlier, we could hardly see the family members together, even when they share a meal, they sit strictly at different sides of the table. In contrast, Gheorghe and Johnny are always pictured in the same room, whether they are watching TV in the living room and exchanging playful glances, having dinner, taking a bath together, or sitting in Johnny's bed after sex and engaging in intimate conversation. This is a lot closer to what an "ideal" family would look like, but, as depicted in the film, repression, alienation and

his interpersonal phase, whereas his transforming view of the Yorkshire countryside can be associated with the public steps of the coming out process – see later.

[11] On the affective qualities of their sexual relations and their representation see Chapter 2.

frustrations suffocate and kill these positive vibes. Their restoration however, becomes possible by queering the family. Seemingly irresolvable tensions, fixed hierarchies, and normative relations prove to be changeable, since "this heterosexing of space is a performative act naturalised through repetition – and destabilised by the mere presence of invisiblised sexualities" (Bell and Valentine 16-7).

It is especially telling how Johnny's queer growth effects his relationship with his father, which is portrayed as troubled throughout the film, but parallel to his self-accepting development, and the queering of the family institution, the father-son connection also improves. Previous to Gheorghe's arrival the family is characterised by alienation, failures of connectivity and communication, which poisons the relationship of Johnny and his father. The father is a paralysed, wretched man, who shows no signs of empathy or understanding towards his son; and Johnny is no better. He is also paralysed and frustrated under the weight of his unwanted responsibilities and his repressed queerness, he is unable to care about his father or the farm. They are unable to communicate with each other, all attempts end in a quarrel.

During the course of the film the father (hardly) survives a second stroke which leaves him in an even worse condition and a more severe dependence on his mother and son. As a result of Gheorghe's guidance (and the shock caused by his departure) Johnny grows into not only a responsible adult doing his best in managing the farm, but also a responsible son. The transformation begins with a light touch on the father's hand, when he is lying in a state of coma in hospital. As Sedgwick points out, "to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people" (*Touching* 14), therefore this gentle gesture signifies Johnny's opening up towards his father. The physical contact between them is more and more emphatic as their relationship grows, so much so, that Johnny bathes the helpless father at home, because through his developing empathy he understands how humiliating it feels for an adult man to be washed by his mother. This is the first time when the father returns the touch: he grabs Johnny's hand and thanks him. (Fig. 2.) Gradually he starts recognising the character development of his son, and gives him positive feedback – which would have been unimaginable in the past. Most significantly when Johnny decides to go after Gheorghe in order to bring him back to the farm – and make him his family – the father in his distorted speech asks him: "Make you happy?" (Lee 01:29:11)

Gheorghe's presence and the changes that occur in the family do not leave its wider socio-cultural context, the farm, unaffected. Gheorghe is an effective work force, who understands the underlying factors and reasons of the farm's dysfunctionality. He emphasizes

that he experienced the same insufficiencies in his homeland, at his own family farm and is determined to save the Yorkshire farm. Ever since his arrival, he advises the family on how to make new techniques work and he treats the animals with respect and care. This attitude intensifies after deciding that Johnny and himself would run the farm together in the future. The last conversation between son and father is the culmination of this change. This time calmly, and with empathy towards the handicapped elder, Johnny says: “I’m sorry. I can’t do what you want me to. I can make this work, but the way that I want to do it, not you.” (Lee 1:28:15).

Fig. 2. Improving father-son relationship. (Lee 01:25:57)

In the process of Johnny’s developing self-affirming sexual identity, his self-acceptance, the queering of the family and the farm, the visually most stunning transformation occurs in the depiction – and perception – of Yorkshire. At first, images resemble representations of battlefields rather than natural scenery, which reflect on Johnny’s experience of his continuous battle against himself and his circumstances. However, as Gheorghe and Johnny reclaim more intimate spaces, the natural environment also fills with life. The morning, following their first sexual encounter – which they spend casually lying in the straw, opening up towards each other through talking – starts with images of nature full of life: green grass, running stream, bugs, sunshine (Fig. 3). These are images of a living, embracing, caring and protective nature, which allows for their personal connection. When they move back to the farmhouse, the coming spring is even more emphatic with shots of flowers, sunrise and sunset as seen from the garden. Since diegetic time is relatively short (a couple of days), this rapid change indicates that the transformation of nature is a symbol of Johnny’s changing self-perception.

Fig. 3. Blooming nature (Lee 01:06:46)

Although it might seem that two young queer men's struggles are unique and without precedent, the ending of the film suggests that they are part of a hidden and silenced history, which also alludes to traditions of a queer countryside[12]. After their story concludes, the film involves a montage of archival photographs depicting highly homo-social (if not homoerotic) photographs of rural life. It seems that the countryside has always already been queer, but this alternative history is repressed by the dominant, hetero-patriarchal narrative both in history and on the screen. As Robin Griffiths indicates: "[t]he history of *queerness* in British *sin*ema consequently represents a history of erasure and marginality, a struggle over meaning and interpretation" ("Introduction" 3, emphasis in the original).

3. Whose fantasy?

It appears that *God's Own Country* subverts or even deconstructs these inherited value hierarchies attached to the East/West binary. Gheorghe is a stable, self-conscious character, the representative of growth, movement and the transgression of both literal and more abstract borders. He is the life-bringer, even a saviour-figure, a transformative, future-oriented, queer person. As opposed to him, the English farm is on the verge of ruin, stuck in the past, characterised by claustrophobia and hetero-patriarchal power structures. By providing a happy ending for this Eastern-Western couple, *God's Own Country* fantasises about a utopia of

[12] Although the traditions of a queer(ed) countryside rather involve the South of England, they are definitely present in British literature and cinema, for instance the pastoral tradition and the Hellenisation of the southern English landscape, the camp style of Ronald Firbank (see for instance Brigid Brophy's *Prancing Novelist: in praise of Ronald Firbank*), or such heritage films as *A Room with a View* or *Maurice* (for a detailed analysis of the relationship between queerness and heritage cinema see for instance "'Come and have a bathe!': Landscaping queer utopia" by Michael Williams).

multiculturalism, equality and sexual freedom, the eradication of borders between opposites, and a blissful "ever-after" for a unified, queered Europe. However, it still uses stereotypes and binary opposites to create both the "rural Englishman" and the "Eastern European migrant." Here the Eastern European worker gains positive attributes (which is heart-warming of course as an Eastern European viewer), but the mindset, the rhetoric, and the othered, stereotypical representation of the Eastern European person does not change. Gheorghe himself refuses being put in the position of the "good guy," he refrains from being the embodiment of positive stereotypes. When Johnny asks him to go back with him and save the farm together, he replies: "I'm not the answer" (Lee 01:35:50). A reversal of stereotypes about the "good" West and the "bad" East is not enough for doing away with the binary partition of mindsets, discourses, myths and Europe.

Chapter 1

In and/or Out

Spatial Metaphors of the Closet and Coming Out

I can make this work, but the way I want to do it, not you.
I've got to go get him. I *want* to go and get him. [...]
But I'm coming back and I want it to be different.

Make you happy?

Yeah, I think it could.

(Lee 1:28:20)

1. Introduction

God's Own Country is a multi-layered narrative that touches upon the complexities and hardships of life in rural England: the decaying farm, the similarly dysfunctional patriarchal structure (embodied by the crippled father figure), the struggles of the heteronormative family unit (incomplete due to the mother's lack) all point towards the vital inevitability of change. Transformation is what the film's protagonist, Johnny, also needs, as he is struggling with his queer desires and his identity as a young queer farmer: his coming out process is one of the film's central topics, and its leading force.

At the beginning of the film Johnny is a clearly and strongly closeted young man, who struggles with self-acceptance and tries to drown his queer desires into alcohol. The walls of the farm house, the stable and the cow truck seem to be closing in on him, and even the otherwise famously beautiful Yorkshire scenery is perceived as a hostile environment; constructing and forcing him into the closet. During the course of the film (with the help of Gheorghe) he goes through a process of learning to accept himself and his desires, which leads to the conversation quoted as the motto of this chapter: a verbal act of coming out in front of his father.

Apart from signifying his successful (and exaggeratedly quick)[13] coming out process, his words also display a strong connection between the closet, coming out and space. When he declares that he can "make *this* work" or that he "want[s] *it* to be different" (Lee 1:28:20, my emphasis), he is not simply talking about his life, but mainly about the farm: the very space and the social structures it is embedded in, which used to mean the most choking closet for him. For Johnny, the stakes of coming out are not encompassed by a simple – yet the most difficult – speech act, rather, his coming out means the restructuring of space: he intends to transform the farm – his closet – into a liveable, maintainable, queer space.

The strangulation of the closet and the struggle with self-acceptance experienced by Johnny in *God's Own Country* are central themes throughout the literature about homosexuality, and are grounding concepts in the examination of homosexual identity development. After homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 (see Drescher) and hence depathologised, a growing number of psychological studies in the Western academia has been conducted about same-sex desire, which constructed developmental models that "describe a process of identity formation and integration as individuals strive for congruence among their sexual orientation (i.e., sexual attractions, thoughts, and fantasies), sexual behavior, and sexual identity" (Rosario et al 46-7). These models examine identity formation along the lines of the coming out process, defined by Susan McCarn and Ruth Fassinger as "a specific struggle with identity awareness, acceptance, and affirmation" fostered by "a context of pervasive environmental and internalized homophobia and expectation to be heterosexual" (508).[14]

One of the most influential of such models comes from Vivienne Cass (1979), which has since been adapted, elaborated, extended, and also widely criticised by other researches, such as Coleman (1982), Troiden (1989), Minton and MacDonald (1984), Faderman (1984), Sophie (1985-1986), Chapman and Brannock (1987), and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) as well. Cass grounds her model in congruency theory "based on the assumption that stability and change in human behaviour are dependent on the congruency or incongruency that exist within an individual's interpersonal environment," adding that development in the identity appears with the individual's "attempts to resolve the inconsistency between perception of self and others" (220). Cass, indicating an "essentialist view of gay identity [that] generally regards

[13] The course of the film is measurable in a maximum of a couple of weeks, while in reality the psychological process and struggles with coming out can take up years in a queer person's life.
[14] Michel Foucault also writes extensively about how homosexuality became an identity, and the homosexual an individual in *History of Sexuality*.

coming-out as a stage-based progression that links same-sex romantic or sexual feelings with gayness" (Hamer 77), differentiates six stages – identity confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride and synthesis – which stretch from the discovery of same-sex desires to developing confidence to openly displaying homosexual identity and integrating it as one aspect of one's identity: "instead of being seen as *the* identity, it is now given the status of being merely one aspect of self" (Cass 235).

Although Cass's model has been criticised for its quite rigid treatment of the individual stages and for being over-generalised (in handling gay, bisexual and lesbian identity formation under the same terms), other models show similar characteristics in conceiving coming out as a linear process. As McCarn and Fassinger summarise it:

> All of these models describe a lengthy process of coming to terms with homoerotic desire and changes in self-concept required to act upon, accept, and internalize that desire. Each begins with a phase in which the nature of attraction is unclear to the individual, a turning point that involves recognizing a difference, and progressive movement toward self-affirmation and disclosure to others. All describe a linear path in three to six stages, along which lesbian/gay identity moves from the recesses of the self-concept to the very center and finally emerges as one acknowledged part of the self. (513)

As opposed to the psychological models, in her 1990 seminal book, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick describes coming out as a never-ending, continuous project (68). Furthermore, in her understanding, coming out cannot be interrogated without the concept of the closet, which she believes to be "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (71). Although Michael Brown defines the closet as "a term used to describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men" (1), Sedgwick argues that the closet also affords a certain sense of privacy and safety in an otherwise heteronormative and homophobic environment (*Epistemology* 71). In other words, the closet stands at the crossroads of various defining structures of power and highlights their colliding and elusive nature. As Nicholas de Villiers puts it:

> [t]he closet condenses a number of highly charged cultural dualisms, and certain queer thinkers have already suggested their potential deconstruction. Schematically, the closet suggests—and in some cases takes for granted—the following oppositions: silence/speech, invisible/visible, in/ out, private/public, secret/open, disavowal/avowal, negation/affirmation, shame/pride, shyness/exhibitionism, secrecy/disclosure, connotation/denotation, covert/overt, conceal/reveal, deny/admit, dishonesty/honesty, lie/ truth, surface/depth, obtuse/obvious, oblique/direct, obscure/illuminated, opaque/transparent. (21-2)

A common thread in the psychological and theoretical takes on the closet and coming out is their connection to space: both the closet and coming out can be interpreted in spatial terms, as a gradual spatial expansion towards increasing visibility and publicity; a linear journey according to the psychological models of homosexual identity development and repeated acts of stepping outside in Sedgwick's understanding. In agreement with Brown, I regard the closet and coming out as spatial metaphors: "a way of talking about power that makes sense because of a geographic epistemology that is largely taken for granted. It is a sign that – often surreptitiously –alludes to certain kinds of location, space, distance, accessibility and interaction (Brown 1). However, he also warns that the closet is not *simply* a metaphor, rather, a metaphorical description of queer realities, as it "can carry along with them a whole system or networks of beliefs that do powerful epistemological work" (15) and "signify both the psychological and social dimensions of alienation" (17). Therefore, he reminds us, we should explore "the closet as a spatial manifestation of homophobia and heteronormativity – and not just a metaphor for them" (19).

In this chapter I read British and Eastern European films that focus on their protagonists' coming out process, and therefore represent the different closets they have to face. In the analyses I build on the notions of psychological coming out models, but in my terminology, I rather follow Richard Dyer's take on coming out, who, as a theoretician of queer cinema, wrote extensively on the representations of non-heterosexual identity formation on the screen. He points out that

> CO [coming out] was generally understood to have three stages: coming out to oneself (recognising homosexual feelings in oneself, accepting them, being willing to act on them); coming out to other lesbian/gay people (going on the scene, joining groups, CR); coming out to other people (both in one's daily life, coming out to friends, family, employers, colleagues, and also in public, wearing badges, going on marches, kissing and holding hands in the street and so on). (Dyer 232)

Building on him, I will use the phrases "personal coming out" – referring to accepting same-sex desire in oneself –, "intraqueer coming out" – describing self-liberation within the queer community –, and "extraqueer coming out" – indicating acts of coming out to the heterosexual majority, or the public. However, influenced by Sedgwick's notions about the continuity of the closet and coming out, I do not view these as fixed stages or parts of a linear process, rather, as characterising aspects of certain acts of coming out.

In order to overview the changing attitudes towards queerness, I read British and Eastern European films from three different periods – the Thatcher era/state socialist regimes, the 1990s

and the 2000s – that tackle the struggles of coming out: *Nighthawks* (1978, dir. Ron Peck), *Coming Out* (1989, dir. Heiner Carow), *Beautiful Thing* (1996, dir. Hettie MacDonald), *Get Real* (1998, dir. Simon Shore), *Kisses and Scratches* (1995, dir. György Szomjas), *Weekend* (2011, dir. Andrew Heigh), *The Pass* (2016, dir. Ben A. Williams), *The Innermost Room* (2006, dir. Csaba Szekeres), *Panic* (2008, dir. Attila Till), and *Floating Skyscrapers* (2013, dir. Tomasz Wasilewski) all concentrate on the struggles of coming out, yet, their varying strategies reveal how they are embedded in different contexts. I read the films both as works of art and reflections on their socio-cultural tempo-localitites, to borrow Madina Tlostanova's term, since, as Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst point out, "space, place, and sex are inextricably linked. It matters that bodies occupy particular positions marked in *time* and *space*. It matters whether it is 1997 or 2007; it matters whether we are gay, have large breasts, are an English tourist, live in Australia, New Zealand, or somewhere else, are in a gay bar or a casino." (2, my emphasis) I analyse the films' visual strategies to represent the closet and coming out acts in cinematic space, while keeping in mind their spatial, temporal, cultural, sociological embeddedness that influenced the possibilities of representation. I argue that – although the legal, social and political circumstances of queer people differ – a similar trajectory can be found in how the films handle the closet and coming out in both cultural contexts. *Nighthawks* and *Coming Out* took up and interpreted coming out as a form of political resistance; in the 1990s we can detect pro-gay, educational and political attitudes in *Beautiful Thing*, *Get Real* and *Kisses and Scratches*; and in the 2000s the focus is placed on the individuals' own struggles with coming out and the still existing closet in both cultural contexts.

2. "Sir, is it true that you're bent?[15] – Queer high school teachers and coming out as political resistance

Although made eleven years apart and separated by the Iron Curtain Ron Peck's *Nighthawks* (1978) and Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989) show marked similarities. Both films are the first of their kind in their socio-cultural contexts as in being the first open representations of gayness and same-sex relations. As Charles Smith points out, "by its very existence *Nighthawks* is a significant film: in a UK context it is possibly the first attempt by gay men themselves to depict the emerging gay male commercial scene of the 1970s" (180); and "Carow's 1989 film *Coming Out* was the only DEFA [Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft] production to directly address gay life and culture" (Lessard 9). As the quote from Smith already indicates, *Nighthawks* was made by gay men, which is the case with *Coming Out* as well. Furthermore,

[15]Peck 1:37:41

both directors and films had close connections with the gay activism of their era, and the films themselves can be perceived of as part of their activism. *Nighthawks* "was conceived and marketed as an act of political activism, and produced using the infrastructure of the gay movement, but portrayed the seemingly apolitical world of the bar and club. This reflected Peck's twin influences: he was both a political activist and a frequent customer of gay clubs and pubs." (Smith 180). Similarly, *Coming Out* "shared much in common with the grassroots lesbian and gay movement. Both film and movement were part of a reformist moment in East German history. [...] while maintaining a socialist framework, East German artists, intellectuals, and civil rights activists sought to make state socialism more adaptive to populist or grassroots pressures." (Dennis 55). Furthermore, apart from the director's involvement in gay activism, "many of the supporting actors were openly gay men and (a few) lesbians playing themselves […] and Carow's openly gay assistant director, Dirk Kummer, played Matthias" (73-4). Another striking connection between the two films is their similar storyline: both *Nighthawks* and *Coming Out* choose a high-school teacher as their central characters, and place emphasis on their struggles about visibility at school, a space which is "hegemonically heterosexual and cisgendered, characterised as oppressive and tense spaces where heterosexuality is the ever-present, regulating influence in classrooms" (Lee 2). In this part of the chapter – after taking a glance at the films' cultural background – I analyse how *Nighthawks* and *Coming Out* construct the identities of their gay protagonists, how they talk about the (im)possibilities of coming out and the closet, and how they perceive of their main characters' extraqueer act of coming out – being open about or hiding their gayness – at school as an act of political resistance.

In order to contextualise the similarities – and also the differences – between *Nighthawks* and *Coming Out*, first we must take into consideration their local and temporal specificities. Although *Nighthawks* had been made a year before Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister in 1979, and ten years prior to the infamous Section 28, it can be seen as an uncanny prophesy for the Thatcher era's attitude towards queerness, and also as a reflection on the processes in the 1970s that lead to Thatcher's 1975 becoming the leader of the Conservative Party and her election four years later. After the "permissive society" (Durham 5) of the 1960s, the 1970s produced a turn towards more conservative thought, in terms of the family, abortion, sex-education, sexuality and homosexuality as well. So much so that "addressing the 1977 Conservative Party conference, Margaret Thatcher declared that 'we are the party of the family'" (13). As a result, although homosexual acts were decriminalised by the Sexual Offences Act 1967, visibility of and openness about queerness became increasingly politicised: "during the 1970s, representations of queer London in film became political talking points, and,

by the end of the decade, film was being used by gay and lesbian activists [...] to lay claim to broader visibility in the public sphere" (O'Rourke 117).

As opposed to *Nighthawks* that signalled a gradual shift into conservativism and a threat of decreasing visibility for queerness, *Coming Out* is the result of "East Germany's 'sexual evolution'" (Herzog quoted in Dennis 55), and "German (state) socialism's overwhelmingly ambivalent and often contradictory stance toward same-sex sexuality" (Dennis 55). As Frédérick Jörgens points out, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) seemed to be progressive about the treatment of homosexuality with a gradual decriminalisation: "the discriminatory §175 and §175a on homosexual acts were abolished through consecutive reforms in 1950, 1957, 1968 and 1988" (118-9). However, Kevin Moss calls attention to how as opposed to the gradual decriminalisation of homosexual acts throughout the Eastern Block during the 1960s and 70s, "homosexuality was certainly not accepted or encouraged by the state" ("Queer" 249); which resulted in contradictions in the relationship between state and queerness.[16] As Jürgen Lemke – writer of *Gay Voices from East Germany* (1991) – states in an interview: "to be gay in the GDR was to be very ambivalent; on the one hand, we wanted to be able to express ourselves like anyone else, and on the other, we were living in a communist regime (Peck and Lemke 151). That is why, David Brandon Dennis argues, it is possible to "read *Coming Out* as a reform-minded quest for a third way between social(ist) commitment and individual self-determination. Just like the demands of leading gay and lesbian activists, Carow's third way emerged in the fraught tensions between official and unofficial culture, between state and society, and between East and West" (56) – and, let me add, between personal and public.

Carow chose to portray the whole spectrum of coming out acts, from personal self-acceptance to intra- and extraqueer steps of self-disclosure, leading up to the politicised climax of the film, the question of publicly coming out at school. The first sequence of the film already indicates how *Coming Out* will portray the issue announced in its title from the very beginning – struggling with accepting one's own gay desires, let alone acting on them or displaying them publicly. In this disturbingly detailed sequence, a young man, Mathias is taken to hospital as a result of attempted suicide. After saving his life by getting his stomach pumped, he is shown crying in a hospital bed on the corridor. When the nurse asks him "what made you do that?" he

[16] The relationship between the state and queerness was ambiguous throughout Eastern Europe. Hungary and Czechoslovakia decriminalised homosexuality in 1962, Yugoslavia in 1977, but still continued to harass queer people, in Poland in fact there was never a regulation in place about the criminalisation of homosexuality, but the state still persecuted queer people, while in Romania the criminalisation of homosexuality was a major form of control throughout Ceausescu's regime.

reluctantly answers: “It’s because [...] I’m queer. A homosexual.” (Carow 04:30). Apart from delineating the main course of the film – coming out – this scene also suggests that *Coming Out* does not necessarily view coming out as a stage-based, linear process. Clearly, Mathias has not accepted his gay orientation as indicated by his suicide attempt, yet, comes out to the nurse – reluctantly, and as an angry response to her pressing questions. The nurse’s answer – “Mathias, don’t cry, that’s nothing to cry about” (04:33) – is also indicative of the film’s attitude towards gayness and coming out: it is, after all, a film made by gay activists.

After the disturbing sequence of attempted suicide and stomach pumping, we can see the main character, Philipp Klarman, cycling along the same roads as the ambulance that rushed Mathias to the hospital, which sutures the two characters together and foreshadows that Philipp will have to face the issues that almost drove Mathias to an early self-dug grave. At the beginning of the film, we can see him as an exemplary East German citizen, who has just taken up a position as a literature teacher in a high school, and on his very first day bumps into a female colleague – who turns out to be an old acquaintance from the university – with whom he develops a blooming relationship. Especially in this introductory sequence, he is portrayed as on ordinary East German, cycling beside Trabants and Wartburgs surrounded by the ordinary greyness of East Berlin.

What disrupts this deeply closeted state and heterosexual appearance is an unexpected visitor from Philipp’s past: “a visit from his girlfriend’s gay friend with whom he previously had a relationship in their youth, [...] question[s] the (apparent?) heterosexuality he had adopted” (Wharton 101). Throughout Jacob’s visit Philipp is visibly awkward and upset, he even excuses himself and hides in the bathroom. In this symbolically closed and intimate space he splashes his face and head with water in an attempt to force his re-appearing gay desires back into repression, his personal closet. Later on, he visits Jacob who is an out gay man living with his partner, when he comments on Philipp’s closetedness: “You haven’t changed at all. Pity. You’re still just as ashamed.” (Carow 41:32) This indicates that their relationship in their youth was highly affected by Philipp’s inability to disclose his gay desires even to himself. This time, he is so upset by the visit that he runs away, as if trying to flee from his same-sex desires.

It is in this state of mind that “he walks past a bar, seen to be brightly lit from within. A group of boisterous gay customers comes out and sweeps Philipp inside.” (Wharton 110) Although he insists that he only came in to buy a pack of cigarettes, the gay community welcomes him with understanding and encouragement: “[d]on’t be scared. Everyone is at first. Be brave.” (Carow 31:58) The space and the community are depicted as welcoming and

supportive. He is offered a seat, involved into chitchat, and an elderly gay customer – Walter – gives him cigarettes, as in indicating that even his shy, reluctant excuse is taken seriously. As Dennis points out, there is a stark contrast between Philipp's everyday Berliner reality and the space of the gay bar:

> At first glance *Coming Out* portrays East Berlin's gay subculture as a warm, inviting space lit by bright colors and flashy characters, contrasting starkly with Philipp's closeted *Alltag*. On his first visit to a gay bar, he encounters flamboyant drag kings and queens, happily dancing couples, and plenty of men who show interest in him. [...] The bright colors inside the gay bar contrast starkly with the grey or muted tones that shade other areas of Philipp's daily life. (74)

Philipp is enchanted by the liberation and happiness in the bar as he is watching the talking, dancing, laughing and kissing couples. The camera alternates between showing his smiling, enthusiastic face and depicting what he sees in eroticising images, close-ups of the colourfully – sometimes scantily – dressed male bodies; which strategically puts the viewer into his, queer, position (Fig. 4-5.). In this elevated state of mind, he exchanges glances with Mathias – whom we saw after his suicide attempt in the first scene – and attraction between the two is undisputable from the first glimpse.

Fig. 4-5. Queer spectatorship and positioning. (Carow 31:00 and 34:47)

After Philipp's first visit at the bar ends in a drunken stupor it is by chance that they meet again: ironically, Philipp is queuing for concert tickets for his girlfriend, Tania's birthday when he is spotted by Mathias and is reminded of their earlier encounter. Although they cannot openly display affection as they are in public, they engage in an emotional discussion during the surprisingly long wait. Mathias – as a survivor of suicidal tendencies due to the lack of self-acceptance – is understanding about what Philipp is going through: "it's like that when you find out what you are. You hang out in bars and drink just to drown all your problems." (Carow 54:18) Furthermore, he invites Philipp to his birthday party, to be held at the same bar where they met.

The night of the birthday party is a turning point for Philipp. He tries to resist and cram himself back into the heterosexual closet, he invites her girlfriend to the cinema, after she declines the offer, he reads to her in bed until she falls asleep. Throughout their long evening, Philipp is visibly struggling, trying to maintain a facade of business as usual, while fighting a battle with his gay desires: after Tania falls asleep, we can see him sitting at the kitchen table, smoking, his head in his hand. In the end, he makes a decision and leaves a letter for Tania: "Please don't be sad. I need to be alone for a while. Don't worry about me or try to contact me." (Carow 58:49) In other words, his gay desires prove to be stronger than the grasp of his self-induced heterosexual closet, and instead of leading a double life, he chooses to explore his queer sexuality. The birthday party in the gay bar is represented in just as a welcoming, embracing and inclusive manner as the bar itself earlier. This time, the gay community is completed with Mathias' parents, which indicates that it is possible to come out to one's family and maintain a loving relationship with them afterwards.[17]

After the birthday party Mathias and Philipp go to the latter's flat, which he kept even though he officially moved to Tania. The flat is in a high-rise block on one of the top floors, which indicates both its (and Philipp's) distance from the rest of the city and society and also provides a sense of being hidden and in safety. In a queer interpretation of the panopticon, from here the two gay men can see that no one else sees them from anywhere in the rest of East Berlin (Fig. 6). It is here that they make love to each other, which is displayed in a soft, eroticised manner. Although characteristically the sequence of their kissing and hugging is cut before any explicit sexuality or nudity, during the two lovers' post-coital embrace the camera slowly pans across their entangled naked bodies; signifying that their love-making was more than a one-night stand: it indicates a beginning of a relationship, and a transformation in Philipp's self-image and acceptance.

Although their emerging relationship could be a sign, a step towards Philipp's self-acceptance, the consequences of his closetedness and heterosexual facade reach him. The grasp of heteronormativity that tries to force him back in the closet is depicted in *Coming Out* through Tania's pregnancy. After Philipp left her to follow his authentic desires, it turns out that she is pregnant. Philipp takes responsibility for the woman and their child and abandons Mathias without a word. We can see how Mathias tries to find him in the flat where they spent a night

[17]This is in sharp contrast with Philipp's experience later in the film, whose mother reacts in a rejecting manner. She says "I'm unhappy because of you" (Carow 1:27:06) and runs away from Philipp.

together, however, Philipp's striking lack implicates Brown's definition of the closet as an erasure of queer people (Brown 1).

Fig. 6. Queer panopticon. (Carow 01:00:27)

However, the two opposing forces must meet: the double binds of queer desire and heterosexual commitment that tie up and are tearing Philipp apart collide at the very concert which – in the queue for the tickets – brought the two men closer to each other. Philipp is there with Tania, while Mathias goes alone and hopes to find Philipp there. It is in the interval when they meet: Philipp runs to Mathias, leaving Tania standing awkwardly with two glasses of champagne in her hands, in the middle of the beautiful hall of the opera house. When Philipp returns with Mathias, he introduces her as his wife, but the tension is not resolved: Mathias runs away in tears. Although Philipp tries to catch him, he loses both Tania and Mathias at the same night, indicating that the choking place between heterosexual repression and following his gay desires is unmaintainable and uninhabitable.

In order to face his demons – and find Mathias – Philipp throws himself into the queer scene of East Berlin: he visits cruising areas (once he even takes home a young man quite similar to Mathias for a night) and various gay bars. Although he finds the young man, he rejects him and leaves with Lutz, a student from Philipp's class. After the rejection Philipp goes back to the bar where they originally met and discharges his frustration and heartbreak by irritating guests, bothering the performance and as an ultimate act of self-hatred and final attempt to deny his gayness he knocks over the elderly gentleman who offered him cigarettes and took him home to the safety of his own flat at Philipp's first visit to the bar. Although the host wants to

throw Philip out, Walter understands what he is going through and sits down to talk to him. In this conversation, Philipp can finally face what seems to be his biggest fear and greatest obstacle in accepting himself as a gay man: "I'm afraid. I'm terrified. I'm a high-school teacher. Know what that means? A queer high school teacher." (Carow 1:38:38)

As opposed to Philipp, a closeted, struggling gay man, *Nighthawks* chooses a protagonist who is also a high-school teacher, but is in harmony with his own sexuality. However, the strict separation of his private life as a gay man and his public life as a geography teacher fills his life – and the film – with tension: "*Nighthawks* was 'structured on a state of mind that most homosexuals "adapt" to, a rigid separation of their sexual life from their everyday experience'. The film showed both Jim's nights out on the gay scene and his days working as a geography teacher at an inner London comprehensive." (Smith, Charles 183) Although the film supposes that Jim's struggles with coming out only affect his public life at school, the appearance of coming out as a frequent topic in clubs and with his occasional partners indicates that extraqueer, in Jim's case especially work-related closetedness is a central issue in the characters' lives.

Since Jim's personal self-acceptance is represented as completed in the film, the representation of his experience of gay bars differs from Philipp's for whom the gay bar means liberation and inclusion. Although the bar is depicted similarly to the images in *Coming Out*, as a lively, crowded and inclusive space, the milieu is quite different for two reasons: objectifying imagery and extensive repetition. During the scenes shot within the bar, the camera often takes Jim's perspective, similarly to what I described earlier in connection with Philipp's first visit to the East Berlin gay bar. However, the affective impression differs: here, instead of Philipp's enchantment by the liberated guests in the bar, the close ups of dancing male bodies produce an objectifying effect. These images depict how the gay clientele of the bar are eyeing up each other through what Peck calls "the cruising eye shot" (Peck quoted in Smith 184), which, although places the viewer in a queer position – taking the gay gaze – deprives the bar space of its emotionally integrating qualities (Fig. 7-8). On the other hand, the bar scenes of the film show a repetitive, cyclical pattern: Jim goes to a bar, picks up someone, spends the night with them, and says goodbye in the morning; even the exact same music is played during each scene.[18]

[18] Although the repetitive rhythm of these scenes is taken to an extreme in the film, the depiction of the sex scenes shows a certain gradual opening: more and more nudity is involved is the representations, which culminates in the involvement of an image of Jim's – though not erect – penis. This gesture can be interpreted as the film's own coming out process in terms of representing gay sex and male frontal nudity.


Fig. 7-8. The cruising eye shot. (Peck 00:05:47 and 00:06:01)

These two aspects, instead of perceiving of the London gay scene in a liberating manner, construct it as a place of entrapment and isolation. As Chris O'Rourke points out, "the mood […] is no longer of paranoia. But it is replaced by a sense of isolation, [...]. The problem of connecting with other gay men in the city, despite the proliferation of places to meet, is a recurrent theme in the film." (125) Furthermore, "the cyclical pattern of Jim's life on the commercial scene also adds to the impression that he is trapped on the pub-club-disco circuit (126). In other words, the gay bar in the British context is not depicted solely as a space of liberation, but as an ambiguous intraqueer closet. Although by going there and engaging in same-sex relations these men perform intraqueer acts of coming out, yet, they are trapped and contained here, separated from other public areas of the city, just as Jim's gay life is first strictly separated from his public identity as a teacher.

In-between the repetitive cycles of his bar visits *Nighthawks* depicts Jim's developing friendship with one of his colleagues; which, inevitably, results in his opening up about his sexuality towards her, and the blurring of the line between his gay and teacher identity. There is no climactic coming out scene between the two of them, during a conversation in a café Jim simply uses the pronoun "he" when talking about his partner. Judy at first seems embarrassed and deep in thought, but instead of pushy questions or funny comments she only asks Jim what his boyfriend's name is. It is at a later event when they engage in a serious conversation about gayness. In the half-public space of his car Jim talks to her about various aspects of gay life, from the problems of finding emotional attachment, through the liberating impact of his first gay sexual experience to how gay bars are actually "just like ordinary pubs or discotechs" (Peck 1:20:18). In this conversation he elaborates on his attitude towards coming out, which reflects Sedgwick's notions about it being a continuous, never-ending project: "it's always such a big deal to tell anyone. It shouldn't be. It should be the easiest thing in the world to tell someone, but it always becomes such a big issue. I suppose it's because, well, people never, never think you are. They just don't think that I might be gay." (1:26:45)

His opening up to Judy foreshadows the political climax of *Nighthawks*: "in the film's denouement and most conventionally politicised moment, Jim's life as a school teacher and his life as a gay man stop being separate" (Smith 187). During a class when he is substituting one of his colleagues, a boy asks him: "Sir, is it true that you're bent?" (Peck 1:37:41) In this scene, as opposed to the earlier sequences depicting his classroom work, the camera does not show him sitting at the front, but takes his position: as viewers we can see the students' reactions and feel their inspecting gaze as the camera takes Jim's position, when he answers: "Yes, it is true" (1:38:06) (Fig. 9.). The kids' reactions vary from ovation to teasing and they start asking questions which prove that silencing and erasing public discussion – visibility – of queerness results in ignorance. They want to know what he does in bed, whether he likes young boys (reflecting on the dangerous blurring of the line between gayness and paedophilia) and whether he carries a purse (implying the permeating effect of the stereotype about the effeminate gay man). Furthermore, they touch upon a contradiction is Jim's life: they ask whether his parents know about his homosexuality, and his negative answer contradicts his earlier claims that he is not ashamed of his sexual orientation.

Although the tension about coming out in front of the class is tangible throughout the scene, its political significance is revealed by Jim's discussion with the headmaster that follows the classroom scene. When questioned by the headmaster he argues that his purpose was education:

> The question arose and I discussed it. I answered their questions. They were asking me the usual, stupid questions that children of their age do ask because they don't know anything about the subject. They're not taught it anywhere, they certainly aren't taught it at this school. They were asking me questions like 'is it true that you fancy little boys, sir," [...] the usual prejudices. And they're going to leave this school with the same things. (Peck 1:42:26)

Even if the headmaster does not seem to be a homophobic person, and it is indicated that he already knew about his employee's sexual orientation, he still retorts Jim for "inviting people to make a fuss" about the school that already has a "liberal reputation" (1:43:01). His words are indicative of the conservative turn of the 1970s that was discussed earlier in this subchapter, which also generated heated debates about the school curriculum and especially sex education (and also intuitively foreshadows Thatcher's Section 28). In that political atmosphere, Jim's decision to discuss the issue of queerness with the students through his own personal involvement is a political act of coming out in public, and results in an ultimatum from the headmaster: "if you talk about homosexuality at class ever again, you'll get the sack" (1:43:46).


Fig. 9. Questioning the queer teacher. (Peck 01:37:42)

The striking similarities and essential differences in Heiner Carow's version of the scene in *Coming Out* reflect on the same systemic homophobia in the two cultural contexts but also demonstrate the structural differences between a turn to conservativism in 1970s England and a (declining) state socialist regime in the GDR. In *Coming Out*, the questioning does not come from below – from the students –, but from above, in the form of an inspectorial visit at one of Philipp's classes after his turbulent relationships with Mathias and Tania ended. It is clear that the authoritative visitors' goal is not the inspection of his teaching methods or professional qualification, they are there because word got out that he is gay. As the leader of the committee puts it when entering the classroom: "certain events which we must discuss later on force us to carry out an inspection of your work" (Carow 1:42:55). Jim in *Nighthawks* replied to honest questions with authenticity, Philipp chooses to react differently to the dishonest, yet clearly homophobic, authoritative investigation: he sits down on the top of his desk and stays silent throughout the whole length of the class (Fig. 10.).

Although his silence could be interpreted as a lack of public coming out, which would mean that the climactic scene of the film represents a failure, a victory of homophobic strategies in silencing and erasure, I do not believe that this is the case. Sedgwick reminds us that "there is no binary division to be made between what one says and does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. [...] There is not one but many silences,

and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses." (*Epistemology* 3) I argue that this is a silence of pride, a refusal to obey the oppressive rules, unwritten regulations and power plays of a systemically homophobic social structure. His silence is a form of public coming out: he publicly rejects the authorities' attempt to make him confess and with that he also refuses to be re-introduced into the closet, as it is "a modern form of confessional discourse" (de Villiers 5). He stays silent by choice, not because of silencing, and by that he also leaves behind the crippling fear which did keep him in the closet, the fear of being a queer high-school teacher. He comes out by not coming out to the authorities.

Fig. 10. Standing up against the homophobic inspection. (Carow (01:44:68)

3. "It's only love. What's everyone so scared of?"[19] – Coming out films, pro-gay politics and social realism in the 1990s

The last decade of the twentieth century seems to have been highly different in Great Britain and in Eastern Europe: the British continued with their democratically elected governments, while transformation and democratic restructuring swept through the countries of Eastern Europe after the regime changes. However, behind the spectacular differences on the surface, both regions had to endure radical and traumatic changes due to a neoliberal transformation, which, fundamentally, resulted in more similarities than differences.[20]

[19] Shore 1:41:42

[20] Both in Britain and in Eastern Europe the period saw worrying changes: the brutal dismantling of the heavy industries which brought gender and financial crisis (for a more detailed analysis see Chapter 3), the gap was radically growing between richer and poorer strata of society, the welfare state was attacked and people were stripped of their taken-for-granted safety.

From a queer perspective, the two areas also show similarities. In the UK, the Thatcher era, with its institutionalised homophobia, ended in 1990, and although she was followed by John Major, another Conservative, by the end of the decade the British had a Labour Government with Tony Blair as Prime Minister. As Robin Griffiths points out, the end of the Thatcher "regime" did not bring at first the end of previous attitudes, but the New Labour's cultural politics and the emerging concept of "cool Britannia" did: it helped create more queer visibility, and questioned hegemonic discourses traditionally associated with homosexuality both socially and politically ("Introduction" 16).

Social and cultural attitudes of Eastern European societies were not transformed immediately after the regime changes either. Although homosexuality was decriminalised in most Eastern European countries surprisingly early during the communist period, inherited, official, homophobic attitudes did not vanish after the transformations. Furthermore, societies after the regime changes were mostly concerned with only political restructuring: "empirical evidence from the early 1990s suggests that in the former state socialist region, including Hungary, democracy was interpreted mainly in political-institutional dimensions, stressing the importance of political freedom, equality of rights and the freshly re-introduced multi-party system much more than that of moral and sexual freedoms" (Takács, "Queering" 199). So, in theory, the regime changes ended the ideological and authoritative pressure that aimed to observe, control, and undermine the existence of those individuals and groups that were or could be categorised as enemies of the state. Therefore, after the regime changes queer people in Eastern Europe should have gained more visibility without the previous strong grip of censorship, written and unwritten rules of oppression. On a socio-cultural level, we can talk about an opening and increasing visibility: in the 1990s more and more gay activist groups were formed, gay bars opened and Eastern European Pride Marches were organised. However, in cinema, there was a scarcity of Eastern European queer-themed films.[21] Still, if we look at the cinematic representations of coming out stories that do exist, a similar transformation can be detected in both cultural contexts in relation to the earlier films[22]: instead of quasi activist films

[21]Polish director Wiktor Grodecki made a triptych about underage male prostitution in the Czech Republic (two documentaries and a feature film), with strongly homophobic overtones: his films feature young boys who identify mostly as heterosexual, selling their body to wealthy, Western gay men who appear in the films as exploitative perverts.

[22] Michael Bronski also points out a transformation in the concept and cultural-political embeddedness of coming out: "In addition to these hypotheses, the cultural meaning of 'coming out' had changed as well. In the early years of the Gay Liberation Movement, coming out was a vital and specifically political act. Taking cues from second-wave feminism and the intensely articulated language of black-identity politics, the gay movement embraced the idea of the personal as political. By the early to mid- 1980s, coming out was still political, but it was quickly becoming an alternative and increasingly acceptable middle-class rite of passage. Homophobia had not disappeared, but as the Gay Liberation Movement (which promoted wide-scale social change) became the more

by gay directors – involved in gay activism – *Get Real*, *Beautiful Thing* and *Kisses and Scratches* are works of straight directors, mostly straight actors[23] (see Fouz-Hernández 145-6), which display pro-gay, educational attitudes in their strategies of representing coming out in close relation to space and choosing to display the whole spectrum of coming out through spatial metaphors.

Both *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real* belong the genre of coming out film, which is, "by its own nature concerned with positive representations of gay people" (Fouz-Hernández 146), and "offer a simple – continuous – affirmative vision" and "provide a philosophical, emotional, even metaphysical grounding for those who have set off on this new road" (Bronski 20).[24] As a result, he argues, "the coming out film and narrative has been, to a large degree, inseparable from the idea of progay propaganda" (23). Furthermore, and also as a consequence of their genre, they "are concerned almost by definition with binarisms such as light and darkness, public and private spaces" (Fouz-Hernández 153), and structure their coming out stories on the basis of a gradual spatial expansion: *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real* use spaces like the bed, the bedroom, the garden, the forest, the gay bar and the school to display certain stages in their characters' coming out process.

Although *Beautiful Thing* is primarily a coming-out story, it is also characterised by a strong sense of social realism, and describes "the economic and racial problems of the boys and their neighbors" (Bronski 24). Ste and Jamie's narrative of their "same-sex romantic and sexual attachment" is placed in "a low-income council housing 'tower block' estate (filmed in Thamesmead, south-east London)" (Pullen 152). Though the panel block is depicted by the opening images of the film as a lively place (reinforced by the upbeat music), it is also characterised by smoking teens, a hardly functioning elevator, tension among the neighbours, lacking or abusive father figures and missing motherly love. Still, in quite a didactic manner, we can see Jamie framed by the high-rise tower block and a huge rainbow in the sky above.

The two young protagonists, Jamie and Ste are neighbours, and both live in incomplete families. Ste lives with his controlling father and aggressive brother, suffers from domestic abuse, and finds refuge with Jamie and his mother. Jamie is raised by his single mother, who is

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acceptable (and civil-rights-based) gay-rights movement, 'coming out' became less aggressively and determinedly political." (21)

[23] Although being directed by straight artists, *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real* are based on dramas written by openly gay playwrights.

[24] These works lack the Sedgwickean insight of coming out as a continuous project, and their gradual opening up of space reflect how their representations are in correlation with psychological, goal-oriented models of coming out.

a hard-working, strict, occasionally quite coarse, but essentially loving woman. The two boys have experienced their sexuality differently – and therefore the coming out situations they go through during the narrative also differ. For Ste, it is a completely new experience, while Jamie is accepting of his sexual orientation, though he is closeted in front of his mother and at school. As Fouz-Hernández points out, Jamie is the gay model figure in the film, a goal for Ste to reach in his coming out process: "when Ste asks him if he is gay, his answer is that he is 'very happy', especially when they are together. [...] Jamie here sets an example of how to be queer and proud." (157)

The developing relationship between the boys is in a way a result of their family backgrounds: on her way home from work Jamie's mother finds Ste on the steps crying, and invites him to spend the night at their place. However, as the tiny apartment does not have a guest room, he must spend the night in Jamie's bed. This bed and bedroom are the first significant spaces in their relationship, and they bear the contradictory characteristics of a closet: a closed, personal space hidden from the eyes of the society (although the boys mention the paper-thin walls of the flats and how that forces them to stay silent); and literally a space of refuge, a sanctuary for Ste, which protects him from his abusive father. It is in this contradictory space that the boys get closer to each other, step by step. At their first night together, Ste is visibly uncomfortable from the closeness of Jamie's body, he folds his arms in front of himself, wants to sleep early, and sticks to a sleeping position where they face each other's feet instead of their faces being next to each other. It is also in this closed space that they see each other's bodies for the first time. When Ste takes off his shirt, Jamie (and the viewer) can see the bruises on his back. He offers to rub lotion on them, and the caring act is depicted by quite erotic (eroticising) close ups. After that he wants Ste to turn around so they could face each other – but he refuses, quite clearly, hiding his erection. For a while he fights his desires, but in the end, he embraces Jamie and their mutual attraction results in a kiss. It is clear that – even if he acts on his desire – Ste is still fighting with his queerness[25], yet, in the protective environment of the bedroom – their closet – eventually they have sex.

The next step in their development – coming out process – is a visit to a local gay bar. Although Jamie is represented as having already gone through personal coming out or self-acceptance, intra- and extra-queer acts of coming out are a challenge for both boys. They find

[25] Ste's fight with self-acceptance is a recurrent theme in the film: for a while he does not seek Jamie's company and starts hanging out with their heterosexual – homophobic – classmates, who bully Jamie with offensive signs written in his notebook. Eventually, after he is confronted about this by Jamie, he talks about his fear from being gay, from his father, and as a result of the open communication, they can make up and continue their relationship.

the advertisement that leads them to The Gloucester in *Gay Times*, however, Jamie does not dare to openly buy the magazine, so he rather steals it. The bar itself is represented quite similarly to the pub where Jamie's mother works – indicating that gays are "normal" people – only the clientele is a lot nicer than the loud, drunk guests in the straight pub. The bar is depicted as a lively, crowded, welcoming space, where Jamie and Ste both can enjoy themselves and the company of other queer people.

A crucial step in Jamie's coming out process is his opening up towards his mother. Although it does not happen spontaneously, in Jamie's rhythm, as the mother finds out about the school bullies, follows them to The Gloucester, and upon coming home, she starts questioning Jamie. Symbolically, he runs to his room, his protective closet, but the mother follows him. Even if this is a forced coming out, and at first Jamie denies everything, in the end he decides to share his feelings with his mother, who proves to be understanding and caring, and the two can reconcile their relationship. Right after that, the mother's boyfriend rushes into the room, and Jamie comes out to him as well, however, in a highly different manner: he recalls all the derogatory words and phrases that a homophobic society uses to aggrieve queer people, and by that symbolic gesture, he reclaims all of them.

The culmination of the film and their coming out process is an act of extraqueer, public coming out, when they openly display their affection to the whole neighbourhood. After Jamie's coming out to his mother, they invite her, and Leah, the girl next door who has been a secret ally throughout their developing relationship, to join them for a party at The Gloucester. While waiting in front of the high-rise building, they start dancing slowly, affectively, in a tight embrace, while more and more people gather around them to watch their dance. As Charlotte Brunsdon puts it: "the young lovers slow dance in the middle of a curious – potentially hostile, reluctantly admiring – mixed crowd as the setting afternoon sun renders the otherwise Brutalist Thamesmead beautiful to the crooning of "Dream a Little Dream of Me." (46) To show their support, Leah and Jamie's mother joins them and start dancing together, and the queer boys and their allies successfully fulfil the promise of the opening rainbow: the neighbourhood is queer(ed) (Fig.10.).

As opposed to the intersectional sensitivity of *Beautiful Thing* regarding sexuality, class, financial background, "*Get Real* has a particularly white, English public school middle-class feel [...]. Shore's film is set on the upper-middle-class suburb of Basingstoke, an American-looking town archetypal of lower-middle-class Britain." (Fouz-Hernández 150) Yet, the narrative of Steve and John's love has similar dynamics and spatial structures as Jamie and

Ste's relationship in *Beautiful Thing*. Steve is introduced as a conscious, proud, young gay man, whose personal coming-out is completed, and he is even out to his best friend, Linda, with whom he can talk about his experiences openly, without judgement. However, he desperately craves the acceptance of his parents, from whom he completely hides his sexuality; furthermore, he feels suffocated by the heteronormative, homophobic milieu at school and desires total, public visibility. As opposed to him, John is completely closeted and engulfed in the heterosexual norms of the school and his peers: he has a beautiful girlfriend who is older than him and works as a model, he is the top athlete at school, admired by girls and respected by boys. Although it turns out that he had a gay experience some years earlier, he represses his desires and follows the heterosexual model prescribed by society. Their relationship is connected to different spaces that serve as the closet, which – similarly to the closet spaces in *Beautiful Thing* – are characterised by the contradiction of being safe spaces and spaces of social oppression.

Fig. 10. Queering the neighbourhood. (MacDonald 01:23:45)

The first closet space represented in the film is the public toilet, which possesses a number of distinctive spatial qualities: "[it is a] multiple, contested, ambiguous space of heightened affect and sensory charge" (Barcan 28). Steve, lacking any other space where he could meet gay men, is a regular visitor. This run-down, dirty space – and public toilets in general – are connected to "anonymous sex without further commitment" (Nedbálková 69) where homosexuality is reduced "to the performance of sexual encounters" (72), still, they do "represent a kind of subcultural scene within the gay community" (71). Although Steve yearns

for connection, and sometimes imagines himself in a relationship with other visitors[26], the public toilet primarily functions in his life as a place to find sexual partners. This is emphasised by his monologue (preceding the toilet scene) on how he gained knowledge about sexuality. He recalls the misconceptions they learned from accidentally finding a porn video at the age of ten, the prudish sexual education of secondary school which is reduced to showing them a film about mating hedgehogs, and he finally comes to the conclusion: "just find someone to do it with, find somewhere to do it, and do it" (Shore 02:18). Although Steve and John superficially know each other from school, it is here that they actually meet for the first time. At first, they do not even know who they are talking to, as communication is managed through the wall that separates the cubicles using small sheets of paper and a hole in the wall.[27] They agree to meet in front of the toilet, where they recognise each other. John is visibly anxious, and tries to downplay the situation by stating that he does not even know what he is doing there, and assumes that Steve is also only experimenting; however, Steve states that he is gay.

In order to resolve the frustrating situation Steve invites John to have a cup of tea at his home – and he hesitantly accepts the invitation –; which leads the boys to the second central closet space of the film: Steve's room. When they arrive, John is uneasy, jumpy and uncomfortable, he has no idea – or experience – about how to handle the situation, and in the end, he sits down on the corner of Steve's bed. His curiosity proves to be stronger than his anxiety and repression, and starts asking questions from Steve about when and how he realised his gay desires, and to whom he is out; however, he does not talk about himself. When the two boys start wrestling playfully on the bed, they share an intimate moment, suffused by erotic desire, Steve tries to kiss John, but his repression gets the better of him. He jumps out of the bed, refuses to be called gay and runs away in panic.

The second time they meet in Steve's room is also structured by a struggle with desire and repression. After a school party, the drunk John – having fought in vain to restrain his feelings for Steve – goes to Steve's house and enters his room. He embodies his contradictory feelings: he kisses Steve violently, says sorry and asks for help. He is lost, and afraid of himself, of his parents' reaction, of the school, of society in general. However, finally, in the safety of this closet space he starts talking about himself, and his fundamental first experience with gay desire. He also shares that ever since that trip to Cornwall he has been trying to find excuses and repress his feelings, however, he lost control because of Steve. He recalls strategies that

[26] A sobering experience for Steve is when he bumps into the man he imagined himself in sort of a relationship with at his father's photo studio where he arrives with his wife and child to get family photos taken of them.
[27] The viewer is in a similar position as Steve, since we cannot see who is in the next cubicle either.

Cass calls “special case strategy” (227): he tried to make himself believe that it was only that one guy, that single gay experience, and otherwise he is heterosexual. However, as his feelings and desire for Steve grow, he cannot hold on to this strategy, hence the heightened sense of fear. After his opening up, they spend the night together, and become a couple.

As opposed to John, for whom the room means a safe, hidden space, for Steve it is increasingly important to go outside, and gain some visibility and publicity. However, at the same time, he is also afraid of the public – John is even more terrified and warns Steve that if anyone finds out about them, he will end the relationship. As an in-between space they go to the local forest, which has a reputation as a “dangerous place.” Its representation and function – as another closet space – is contradictory. As they walk among the trees in the dusk, the poor lighting and the grey-blue shades do communicate a certain sense of danger, and when Steve is caught by the police in the end, he is taken home and given a lecture about the perverts and junkies that inhabit the forest. On the other hand, as the film depicts the two boys in an intimate, peaceful situation, talking about their future, Steve sitting casually in John’s lap while leaning to a tree, the space is also characterised by affection, intimacy and a fleeting sense of safety.

As Steve desires more visibility, his closet experiences differ from John’s, and are primarily characterised by the repressive feature of the closet. For him, it is the school that constitutes the most oppressive closet. In the heteronormative milieu – even if he is not out – he constantly suffers from verbal abuse and bullying. The most symbolic scene of the repressive heteronormative atmosphere characteristic of this environment takes place at a school dance. John is there with his girlfriend, while Steve spends the time with his friend Linda (who, as an overweight girl suffers from a different type of bullying). When a slow, romantic song is played by the DJ, the two couples start dancing close to each other, and they are positioned in a way that John and Steve can maintain eye contact. As the camera is circling around them, the viewer can feel their desire towards each other, yet, symbolically, the two female bodies separate them, and reinforce the heterosexual model that is characteristic of the school (Fig. 11.).

In order to fight for a space of visibility, Steve joins the school paper, and writes an anonymous article about gay youth, but the headmaster prohibits the publication of the article. His climactic coming out scene at school is still connected to the paper: he receives a prize for another article he wrote, and – after suffering a queer-bashing which even John joins in order to avert the suspicions about their relationship and his sexuality – he decides to turn his acceptance speech into an extraqueer, public coming out. When he is on stage, he struggles to find the words, to collect his courage, and “when he finally does come out, his speech includes

references to many of the classic and contemporary points of the gay struggle: the anger at having to act straight, the fears to speak out and lose family and friends, and the need for understanding and equality" (Fouz-Hernández 159). In other words, he successfully transgresses the borders of his closet spaces and blurs the lines between strict heteronormativity and gay desires. He "cross[es] the boundaries of those spaces that, in guarding gay 'safety', also guard the state's interests of control over homosexuality" (153). By the end of the film, Steve achieves the climax of his coming out process, and successfully queers the strictest closet, the school.

Fig. 11. Separated by heteronormative structures. (Shore 00:40:41)

If *Beautiful Thing* is a coming out film with a sensitivity towards social issues, then *Kisses and Scratches* is a film of social realism with a queer sensitivity. György Szomjas' piece is the first queer-themed film in Hungary after the regime change, when "it was only prudery that obstructed the topic, not censorship" (Kelecsényi 145). The film captures the strange moment after the regime change when the fall of the state socialist regime gave rise to parallel, complementing, and exclusive discourses on sexuality. As Robin Griffiths describes this turbulent period:

> The fall of the Iron Curtain had, inevitably, led to a quite momentous shift in the cultural and geopolitical landscape of Central and Eastern Europe. As the camply termed 'Velvet Revolutions' of 1989 produced the urge to reject many of the ideologically embedded assumptions and repressive regimes of the communist era. But in stark contrast to the positivist political rhetoric that was circulating during this period of dramatic 'transition' (viewed through the utopian lens of an allegedly inclusive 'new' Europe), the peoples of the region were far from prepared for the sudden and all-encompassing social, cultural and moral changes that were occurring. In the aftermath, a number of national, ethnic and religious conflicts re-surfaced that were not so easily resolved under the new democratic regimes. And the cautious emergence of an open and unashamed queer subculture became an unsurprising target for public dissent ("Bodies" 130)

The immovable, rigid and oppressive attitudes were complemented by new, previously marginalised, excluded and oppressed voices. Around different points of reference competing value systems and discourses were being formed, which appeared side by side not only in the public discourses, but even within a single person. The film maps the emerging attitudes right after 1989, in the first years of the new system: it depicts a culturally schizophrenic society, where homosexuality is partly tabooed, but a new demand for dispute and cultivating public knowledge appear as well.

Kisses and Scratches focuses on Angi, who works as a social worker, a newsvendor, and an au-pair simultaneously. In her day-to-day routine she encounters gaping social differences: she sees poverty but also has access to the houses of the *nouveau riche*. She experiences both extremes, but does not belong to either of them: she creates and lives in her own world. Unlike Szomjas' previous protagonists, she is not depicted as a caricature or a stereotype, but as the active, self-creating lesbian girl, the most progressive character in the film, who tries to disperse homophobic misconceptions by rational, sober arguments.

Kisses and Scratches is a narrative of a developing and turbulent relationship between Angi and Ildikó (her employer as baby-sitter), which is built around empathy, the mental, emotional, and physical support they provide each other with. Their attractions, affections, and emotions, furthermore the way they experience and process them, are depicted in the context of tolerance and acceptance. Angi approaches her own otherness with a high level of openness and honesty, which is suggested by her outspokenness and critical attitude towards the heteronormative value system. She argues for the naturalness and normality of same sex relationships, and is open to discussing her feelings with Ildikó, for whom homosexual desire is an utterly new experience: "I can't explain something I have never encountered and seems alien to me" (Szomjas 01:49:40). Their conversation echoes the heritage of the state socialist regime and its criminalising attitudes, as Ildikó is not even sure whether their relationship is legal.

Opposing notions are verbalised in a tense scene, in which Angi's conversation with Antal (Ildikó's ex-husband) turns into a heated argument. Here, the film reconstructs contrasting discursive positions, on the one hand popular perceptions and stereotypes of homosexuality, while on the other the perspective of the queer community. Angi argues fiercely against Antal's homophobic statements and emphasises that her feelings are completely natural. The ex-husband faces Angi's sexual otherness without prudery, in fact he is the one who utters the word "lesbian" for the first time in the film, however, he represents the attitude of systemic

homophobia. As a successful entrepreneur, a member of the *nouveau riche* and the benefactor of the regime change, he is a person who successfully adapted to the new economic conditions without altering his social or cultural attitudes. His discursive position mirrors the processes that were taking place in Hungarian society during the socialist-post-socialist transition: in his profession he is building a new world, but his ideals of family and sexuality are strictly heteronormative. As a reminiscent of previous attitudes, he finds it legitimate to regard homosexuality as a form of sexual deviance, a perversion merging with bestiality[28] and paedophilia. In his indictment against homosexuality, he incorporates earlier marginalised Christian arguments as well, arguing that "God created man and woman for each other" (01:01:40). Furthermore, in one of his "memorable" sentences – "you cover my life in mucus like a snail" (01:06:56) – he deprives Angi of her anthropomorphic qualities and defines her as abject.

Although in its educational attitude *Kisses and Scratches* is similar to the British examples, the closet is represented as having an even stronger grip. The basic spatial representation of the closet is the family home and the bedroom, similarly to the two British movies. It is in Ildikó's home where the two women touch each other for the first time, and their more erotic, passionate embraces are also confined to the bedroom. The visual strategies of the film emphasise the affective quality of their relationship, and several close-ups of their entangled body parts provides erotic overtones as well.

Although the queering of public spaces does not happen in *Kisses and Scratches*,[29] intraqueer gestures of coming out do happen, when Angi, who is already a member of the queer scene, takes Ildikó to the Angels Bar, which is the first such representation in Hungarian cinema. The bar reflects on the contradictory features of the closet: it is a hidden space, located in a cellar, but it offers a chance for opening up and meeting other queer people. In its furniture and interior design, it resembles an ordinary bar, emphasising the film's (and Angi's) arguments about the normality of queerness.

Parallel to the political, social and cultural changes that affected the UK and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the analysed films show a transformation in the strategies of representing queer coming out. As opposed to the activist attitudes behind *Nighthawks* and *Coming Out*,

[28]Antal is not only afraid that her own daughters – seeing their mother's lesbian relationship – will turn into lesbians themselves, but also that it will be Angi who takes their virginity at too young an age. He also draws a parallel between homosexuality and bestiality, when he states: "I'm not doing it either with an animal or a man" (Szomjas 1:06:14).

[29] When the two women occupy the same public space in the end, the film ends in bloodshed: Ildikó kills Angi.

these films display positive, educational images and narratives of queer people. All three films pay attention to the whole spectrum of coming out and different closet spaces accordingly, and feature characters on various levels of openness – some of them are struggling with self-acceptance, while others fight against social invisibility. As the central tenets of the films' pro-gay, educational politics, the characters represent a whole group – queer people – and the films convey a message to the still homophobic society: there is no need to be "afraid" of queerness.

4. "I don't feel good in my skin like this."[30] – Individuals' closets in the 2000s

In the 2000s both British and Eastern European films turned their focus on their queer characters' individual struggle with coming out, and the personal uniqueness of the closet. In these films the central figures and narratives are not consequences of an activist plight behind the film, nor are they embodiments of a whole group in order to communicate educational, positive images of queer people – and therefore their coming out stories are not always in accordance with the more generalised aspects of coming out theories and models. Even if they show some characteristics of different stages or phases, they are queer individuals, in highly specific life-situations; and the films (from the UK, Hungary and Poland) reflect on the personal nuances of closets and the "several alternative paths of development, or strategies of action, within each stage" (Cass 220) or within each act of coming out.

Andrew Haigh's 2011 *Weekend* reworks the strategies and attitudes of the coming out genre which usually applies only positive queer images, and features characters who embody the queer person as such. As opposed to that, *Weekend* foregrounds individualised characters, who might identify with certain trends within the queer community, yet the film applies those to their individual, unique situations. As Dennis Lim summarises:

> *Weekend* is the exception that proves the rule: as gay experiences have become more varied and as the conversation about being gay has evolved, gay films have largely failed to keep up. And while it's easy to identify and celebrate markers of progress—social acceptance, legal recognition—the template of the coming-out story hasn't proved sufficiently elastic to deal with more insidious forms of discrimination and alienation. While Haigh never turns his characters into mouthpieces, Russell and Glen to an extent embody conflicting impulses—assimilation versus separatism—and *Weekend*s shows that both positions have their attractions, and that both exert a toll. (Lim)

The short, but intense weekend the two main characters, Russ and Glen, spend together[31] highlights that "to meet someone new, not least a potential partner, is also to rethink who you

[30] Till 11:28

[31] Since Glen travels to the US to take part in a two-year long academic programme, their time together is limited to one weekend.

are, an invitation to shape and refine the self you wish to be" (Lim) and captures two different trajectories of coming out: the anxious, half-closeted Russ manages to slightly open up inspired by Glen's proud and out queerness, while Glen, who uses his queer fighter attitude as a shield against emotions, opens up towards affective connections.

The film depicts Russ as a partially closeted gay man, who is "so eager not to alienate anyone that he neurotically conceals and downplays his sexuality even when he doesn't have to – even when his reticence itself alienates" (Brunick 63). The opening images position him in space accordingly: the second frame of the film is shot from his window, however in a way that the camera is put in a considerable distance from the window, therefore, instead of a broad, open perspective we are presented with a limited view and a sensation of being entrapped. Other areas of the flat are similarly in-between total narrowness and openness, since although the doors are open, the rooms are narrow and slightly claustrophobic. When we finally catch sight of Russ, his naked body in the bathroom is half-covered by the bathroom curtain (Fig. 12-13.).

Fig. 12-13. A half-closeted home. (Haigh, *Weekend* 00:00:38 and 00:00:58)

This half-closeted home is the only space where he feels at ease, every other situation imposes a certain level of anxiety and distance on him. When he meets his best friend – a

heterosexual, married man, who knows about his sexual orientation – Russ is depicted as an outsider and behaves awkwardly in the heterosexual group: he does not take his jacket off even when he is invited to sit down and have dinner with the others. He leaves the party early only to go to a gay disco to feel similarly awkward there. He leaves his jacket on here as well, and he is standing separated from the otherwise lively crowd. As already Cass notes while introducing her model, there is a distinction "between private (personal) and public (social) aspects of identity. [...] It is possible for P [person] to hold a private identity of being a homosexual while maintaining a public identity of being heterosexual." (220) Even though Russ does not actively try to pass as a straight man in public, he does not open up about his gayness.

Another telling example of his discomfort – especially with sexuality – is the morning after his one-night-stand with Glen, when he wants to include him in an art project that features gay people talking about their sex life. Their positions on the bed are exemplary of their attitudes: Glen is lying comfortably on the bed, his body is relaxed and communicates openness, while Russ is sitting in a closed position, grasping his legs and his face is out of the frame, as in hiding (Fig. 14.) He is even more uncomfortable, or rather panicking, when Glen shouts back to some homophobic comments they can hear from the park in front of the high-rise building. His fear that "they're gonna fucking chuck bricks through my window" (Haigh 14:49) is extreme and unrealistic, since – as Glen immediately points out, he lives "fourteen flights up" (14:52). Although he cannot be open about his sexuality in public, he is really intrigued by the idea of coming out, and has a diary of men he slept with, mostly concentrating on their stories of coming out. His self-reflexive description about his feelings reflects McCarn and Fassinger's ideas about the possibility of accepting one's own sexuality, but hiding it from the world due to a heightened sense of oppression and homophobia (528):

> When I'm at home, I'm absolutely fine. [...] Completely. I don't care and I don't even think about it. I just... I'm not embarrassed, I'm not ashamed, and I don't want to be straight. [...] It's when I go outside [...] it kind of feels like I got indigestion [...], it just makes me angry, you know that I feel like that because it's so fucking pathetic. You know, I'm a grown man, and I look at you and I see you and you can do it and you're amazing. I just don't understand why I can't. (1:16:02)

Fig. 14. Hiding outside the frame. (Haigh, *Weekend* 00:15:28)

Glen is at the opposite end of the spectrum. He is a queer artist, whose goal is to make (not just queer) sexual behaviour public. He wants to fight for queer visibility through talking openly about sex, because as he puts it: "gay people never talk about it in public unless it's cheap innuendo. I think it's cos they're ashamed." (29:46) He openly argues with anyone about heteronormativity, sometimes he even picks fights – like when he retorts the inconsequential homophobic comments from the playground by shouting "I swear to god, if you don't quit, I'm gonna come down there and fucking rape your holes" (14:31). As Paul Brunick characterises him:

> Glen revels in transgression: rearranging Russell's fridge- magnets to spell faggot, eagerly provoking homophobic reactions in public so he can strike back at them with arguments memorized from Introduction to Queer Theory. Most of his complaints, of course, are absolutely justified: the "boy meets girl" hegemony we're steadily fed from birth, the gay-bashing violence and casual cruelty so relentlessly meted out, the sex-less persona gay men accept so as not to offend. [...] Yet we see how emotionally deadening it is to be so relentlessly embattled, to turn a gesture of tenderness like holding hands into an act of aggression. (63)

If Russ is afraid of taking his queerness out to public spaces, Glen has problems with letting other queers in: he avoids emotional attachment. He categorically states that he "doesn't do boyfriends" (Haigh 38:17) and "doesn't do goodbyes" (50:44). He also tries to avoid staying for long in one place, as "everything gets cemented" (52:39) and he has a negative opinion about long-lasting friendships, because "[i]f they see you trying to crawl out, they're very happy to drag you back in" (53:06).

Their short weekend together has an impact on both of them and unsettles their comfort zones within their own personal closets. Russ is opening up step by step: he meets Glen after work and walks home with him (he even gives him a ride on his bicycle); then he joins Glen's farewell party in a straight club, where he does not dare to kiss him, but at least he is there; on the day of Glen's leaving Russ talks about him to his best friend, who actually gives him a lift – ditching his daughter's birthday party – to be able to say goodbye to Glen at the railway station. Meanwhile, Glen also goes through a change, and opens up towards the possibility of emotional attachment: although he states that he avoids relationships, he admits that Russ "would make an amazing boyfriend" (Haigh 1:07:17); and in spite of his refraining from farewell situations, he still invites Russ to his send-off party.

Their final goodbye is the culmination of both of their transformations, and the climax of the film's emotional commitment. Although Glen does not want Russ to be at the train station when he departs, he still shows up, and the two share a moment that is moving for both of them: they kiss each other on the platform. For Russ this means facing his fears about visibility and openly showing affection, while Glen is also confronted by the recognition that he closeted himself in queer activism as a protection from attachment – he bursts out sobbing because he realises that he is going to miss Russ. The ending scene also strengthens Russ' transformed attitude towards visibility and Glen's changed opinion about emotional intimacy: as a parting gift he leaves the tape of Russ talking about their first night together, which, after arriving back home, Russ starts listening to while leaning out of his open window.

Ben A. Williams' 2016 film, *The Pass* portrays a closeted gay professional footballer's life-long struggle with repression and attempts of passing as a heterosexual man. By choosing a professional footballer as a protagonist, the film also settles on an area with a heightened sense of homophobia. As Eric Anderson points out:

> research has shown that organized, competitive team sports are highly homophobic in Western cultures (Anderson 2000; Hekma 1998; Messner 1992; Pronger 1990). This is because sports, particularly contact sports, have an institutional culture in which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and defined: An athlete is thought to represent the ideal of what it means to be a man—a definition that is predicated in opposition what it means to be feminine (250-1)

The three-act piece focuses on the devastating effects of repression by depicting three glimpses into Jason's closeted life with five years of difference between each sequence. The three acts are all set in hotel rooms, inner spaces that represent on the one hand the continuity of the closet and Jason's outcast existence by their sterility and impersonal features.

The first sequence takes place in Bucharest on the eve of two young footballers' most important match in their lives. Although the hotel room already carries the connotations of being closeted, this sequence could be a promising start regarding Jason and Ade's relationship and their approach to their sexuality. The atmosphere of the night is filled with tension, yet the two young footballers keep up a playful mood, constantly alternating between respect, rivalry and childish pranks. The environment is quite homosocial on its own, as the two half-naked men are constantly close to each other, wrestling on the bed, or Jason filming – from quite an erotic angle – Ade's muscular body with a camcorder. The scene takes a step further towards homoeroticism when, while wrestling, Ade gets an erection. At first Jason acts as if he were abhorred and threatens Ade that he is going to tell everyone, who is rightfully scared, implying that he already struggles with hiding his gay desires from his teammates. However, Jason resolves the tension: calls his teammate doughnut, kisses him and goes into the bathroom.

The next montage takes place five years later in another hotel room, however, Ade is not there. From Jason's recollections we learn that five years ago, at the all-determining football match he did not pass the ball to Ade, who was in a better position, but – probably as a result of luck –he managed to score a goal. He did that, he says, because "when it comes to it, there is no room for emotion" (Williams 29:28). Since then, Jason has become a star while Ade completely disappeared. His career rocketing also decided his relationship with his own sexuality: he perceives of the football scene in accordance with Anderson's above quoted statements as a homophobic environment, so much so that the idea of a gay footballer is a paradox for him: "Of course I'm not gay. Look at me. I'm a footballer." (39:08) His – partly self-induced closet – has such a strong grip, and his fear-ridden perception of society assumes such high levels of homophobia that he believes, "it's fucking 1966 out there, darling. It's fucking 1066." (40:09)

It is implied by the rumours surrounding him that he cannot always repress his queer sexual desires, and as a result, he is going through a divorce. However, he desperately tries to uphold the heterosexual image, so he arranges that a young woman have sex with him in front of a hidden camera, so he can leak the footage to newspapers, distracting attention from the gay rumours and strengthening his straight persona at the same time. He is in total denial about his sexuality, – even if he most probably occasionally has gay sex – a gay identity is unimaginable for him: "the whole world is full of people pretending to be something they're not. No one else decides, so if I say I ain't gay, I ain't gay." (Williams 40:43) He seems to strictly differentiate sex from attachment and identity, which strategy is mentioned by Cass as well as a possible (foreclosing) outcome of identity development: "homosexuality becomes redefined and

restricted to certain boundaries that do not include P's [person's] own behaviour. For males, showing emotion, mouth kissing, and repeated contacts with the same person might be perceived as homosexual, whereas genital contact is simply "fooling around."" (Cass 224)

In the third sequence, another five years later, we can see Jason in another hotel room. His career took a downward spiral, his physical health is deteriorating – he has recently suffered a serious knee-injury – and his mental stability is also cracking up under the continuous pressure of repression. He lives off alcohol and painkillers. As a last resort, he invited Ade to meet him in the hotel, under the pretence that he wants to hire him for a renovation of a Greek villa he bought. Ade completely left behind the professional football career and leads a civilian life as a plumber, and as an out gay man. Jason struggles throughout the scene to still maintain the image of the straight, "asshole" footballer, bosses Ade around and acts as a stereotypical rude, egotistic footballer celebrity. However, from time to time he falls out of the role, especially when Ade urges him to talk about their last shared memory, the night in the Romanian hotel room. Although Jason states that he "did it to get in your head, throw you off balance, make sure you weren't right for the game" (Williams 1:00:37) in an attempt to create explanatory narrative, Ade refuses it: "you keep telling that to yourself all you want but we both know what went on in that room" (1:00:06).

Jason's repressed desires resurface in this sequence from time to time, and – even if still in a closeted manner – he talks most openly about gayness in the whole film. He asks inquiring – but also disbelieving – questions about Ade's life as an out gay man, who is an embodiment of what Jason believes to be impossible. Even if Ade plays football only as a hobby now, when Jason learns that he is out to his teammates, his fears from the homophobic football scene are questioned. However, the life-long grip of repression and being in the closet pull him back into his straight performance, and he acts in an increasingly extreme manner. At first, he orders a screwdriver to take the television set off the wall in order to throw it out of the window, and then invites the young hotel worker who brings it to stay and drink with them, but the party turns more and more aggressive and violent.

When Ade sends the young man out of the room, Jason finally tells him the real reason of his invitation. It seems that he can no longer control his queer desires, so he wants Ade to have the Greek villa and live – although not put so explicitly – as his secret lover, because Ade is "the last thing [he] remember[s] of any value" (Williams 1:15:10). When Ade refuses the offer – he is in a loving relationship – Jason resorts back to his straight act and tries to avert the responsibility or the actual significance of his words: "it was just a suggestion. I don't know

why you're making a thing of it." (1:15:53) However, in the end – urged by Ade to talk honestly about the night they spent together in Bucharest – he finally cracks up. When Ade asks him whether he really did it just to get into his head, he answers, sobbing: "I don't know" (1:18:18)

That admission of self-doubt, the open uncertainty and crumbling of his heterosexual narrative is the closest the film comes to coming out, and Jason to self-acceptance. When Ade leaves, Jason tries to pull himself together in the shower, but he seems unable to push back into the closet what transpired between the two of them: as he wonders around the dark hotel room, the film cuts to his memories about the Romanian night. Finally, we can see how Ade followed him to the bathroom, how they touched each other full of desire under the shower, and how they spent the night in each other's arms. On the one hand this flashback signifies that after ten years of repression Jason is finally willing to recall that night without covering it up in explanatory, heterosexual narratives; but on the other hand, it also symbolises the destroying effects of the closet. Ade leaves, so that night can never happen again, and the viewer is left doubting whether Jason will ever leave his hotel room closets.

As its title already indicates, *The Innermost Room* (2006) – a metaphor for "the subject's internal space, for intimate, secret privacy" (Kis, "Identity" 166) is a gloomy narrative of the closet's devastating effects. I agree with Katalin Kis, who describes the film as a depiction of "quintessential the homosexual closet" (ibid). The story is structured around two men's secret love affair ripped apart by the consequences of being closeted. One of them is a lawyer, who is more out than his partner and yearns for making their relationship visible and legitimate. The other man, however, is not only married but as a doctor has recently been promoted to a higher position and needs to be politically irreproachable, which suggests that – although the visibility and acceptance of queerness in Hungary improved since the 1990s, for instance the legal context for gay registered partnership was being developed – the film still creates and reflects on a society where the public knowledge of one's queerness is a threat to one's career While telling their story, *The Innermost Room* uses spatial metaphors of the closet extensively, and is framed by the tragic consequences of repression.

Although their relationship has been going on for four years, the total secrecy surrounding it proves to be too much for the young lawyer, who has already fought battles for coming out of the closet, even if it meant serious losses in his life. He recalls his coming out to his parents: "I remember when I told my mom and dad. I saw disappointment and sadness in her eyes. But my father ... No one had ever looked me as disdainfully as he did." (Szekeres 46:02). However, his partner clings to secrecy, which places both of them into the closet. Quite

tellingly the "the viewer never actually sees the two lovers together" (Kis, "Identity" 167), except for a single moment when the lawyer lets his partner into the room. Yet, as he enters and the door is closed, the camera is left outside and the two characters are locked inside the "innermost room".

The pressure of the closet and "the innermost room" he is forced into have their impact on his suicide as well. As his body is being cremated the camera is placed within the cremation oven and we can see his body being put into this lethal closet-space. This visual strategy tightly connects his death to the imagery of being locked up, and his coffin becomes his final closet. Although his death may be understood as a final attempt of escaping the closet, he is, in actuality, a victim of the closet: the claustrophobic space his dead body is placed in reflects on the pressure and repression his partner's closetedness put him while still alive. As a final gesture, his sister – who supported him all along – sends his ashes to his partner with a note: "he is yours. He wanted you to bury him." (Szekeres 58:01)

The sequences that frame the film depict the consequences of his death and his sister's decision to send the ashes to his partner. The opening images depict a man walking along a narrow, scantily lit corridor, and entering a hotel room. The room is no less suffocating than the corridor, furthermore, parts of the frames are always blocked by doors or opaque windows. At this point we know nothing about the situation, but the claustrophobic, choking atmosphere of the space is apparent. He is alone here for a while, but later a woman arrives. They try to be intimate, but in the next scene we can see the man in the bathroom fully clad, without the atmosphere of post-coital pleasure.

The second part of the frame story cuts back into this hotel room, and this time the viewer is aware that the doctor and his wife are trying to spend a romantic night in the very same hotel room which he used for years with his secret lover, what is more, he has the ashes with him in his bag. The already uncomfortable situation gets even worse when another man shows up – he is the husband of one of the doctor's patients, and his wife had to have a hysterectomy in order to save her life – to take revenge on the doctor. During the scuffle, the young lawyer's ashes are found in his bag. Both the angry man and his wife start questioning him about it, and as they tower over him with their pressing, demanding interrogation, they embody the epistemology of the closet, "a regime of knowing" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 67). In this situation the dead gay man's ashes locked into the urn become the secret at the heart of the closet. When the doctor finally breaks under the pressure, his coming out is a "symbolic [...] self-annihilation" (Kis, "Identity" 167). The pressing questions about the urn and what it is,

why he has it, are answered by his desperate scream: "[t]hose are the ashes of the man I've been fucking for four years right here on this fucking bed" (Szekeres 1:04:24). After that both the man and his appalled wife leave the room, and the last images we have of him depicts him crying, terrified, lying on the couch.

Attila Till's *Panic* (2008), which "while lacking any explicit sexual representations, [...] still manages to visualise the most intimate gay couple so far on the Hungarian screen" (Kis, "Identity" 169), is a compilation of several different storylines with panic, anxiety being the point of connection between them. One of the threads focuses on a gay couple, and their different attitudes towards being closeted and coming out.[32] The two partners cannot come to an agreement about coming out at their workplace. Dino, the younger men is tired of passing as a heterosexual, and of the double life being closeted means to him – he wants to embrace and embody the idea of the gay policeman, because "it can happen in America, so it can happen here as well" (Till 10:16). As opposed to him, the concept of an out gay policeman is a paradox for Dick, his older partner, and when he contemplates about the possible consequences of Dino's coming out the captain, he can only imagine negative outcomes, such as demotion, getting fired, and he even takes into consideration killing his partner and then committing suicide. As Katalin Kis describes the gaping differences in their attitudes:

> Dino and Dick embody two types of homosexuals of different generations. Dick is 37, keen on demonstrating his traditionally masculine identity, full of internalized homophobia and terrified by the idea of coming out in fear of losing his job. Dino is twenty-something, comfortable with his gay identity. He tells Dick that he wants to come out to their boss because he is fed up with lying ("Identity" 170)

As a result, their attitude towards certain closet spaces differs as well: the film depicts their yearning for and anxiety about visibility and openness through three spaces: the personal, intimate, safe home they share; their behaviour in their car; and their position in public spaces, especially their workplace, the police station.

The only space where Dick can express and to a certain extent accept his queerness is in the protective seclusion of their shared home. However, his closetedness is so severe that this space is clad in phallic imagery, there is "a framed picture of technical drawings of rifles hanging on the wall of [their] living room" (Kis, "Identity" 173) on the one hand; and he is even wearing his jockstrap while coming out of the bathroom, a metaphor of his repressed queer

[32] It is important to note that although the narrative of the gay policemen is embedded in stories of people dealing with clinical levels of anxiety, it is the repression due to highly homophobic environments that is placed among other mental pathologies and not homosexuality.

sexuality. His relationship with Dino is the only sustainable area of his homosexuality, within the safe and secure walls of the apartment they share. Still, – resembling Russel's idea of indigestion in *Weekend* – he regards his gayness as an unwanted burden, a disease that should be kept secret and at bay: "[i]f there was a pill that could turn me into a heterosexual, I would take it. I would take it like a contraceptive." (Till 12:53) From behind the desperately guarded walls of his home closet he perceives the world as a hostile and dangerous place that can only be survived by passing as heterosexual.

In contrast, Dino – although he feels at home in their flat – desires more publicity and visibility. When the above-mentioned drawing of rifles is displayed in a scene, he is sitting right in front of it, and as the camera is placed in a slightly lower position, the image appears to weigh on his shoulders and pressing him into the ground. In other words, the representation of traditional super-masculinity burdens him and engulfs him in this closet (Fig. 15.). So, it is not a lack of identity development that keeps him in the closet, but the concept of masculinity and his partner's fears of coming out. Most tellingly, when he talks about his plans to reveal his gayness in front of the captain, he is standing in front of the window, staring yearningly out of the closet, into the buzzing public space.

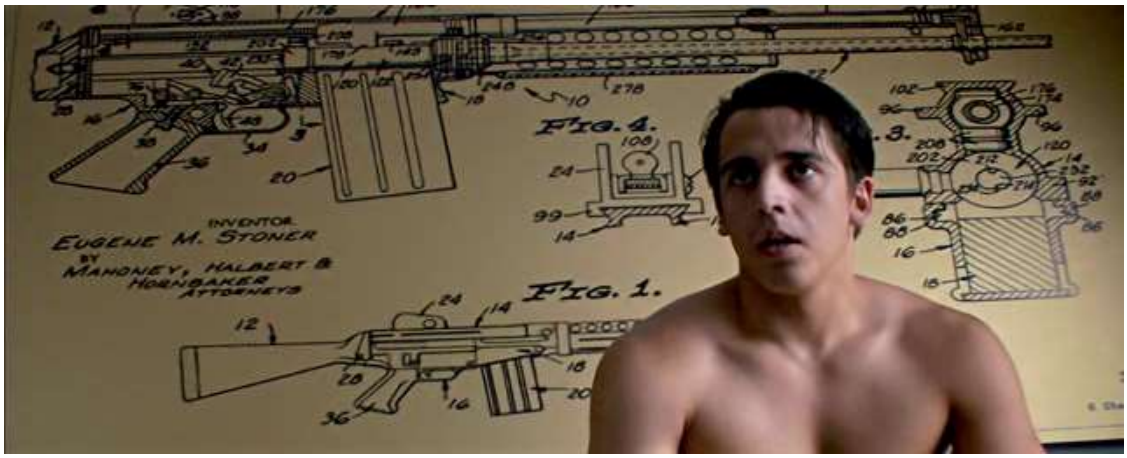

Fig. 15. The pressure of super-masculinity. (Till 00:09:36)

Their shared car-ride is also exemplary of their highly different relationships with space and visibility. The in-between space of the interior of the car, on the threshold of public and private, open and closed, is a conveniently habitable space for Dino. He intimately places his hand on Dick's shoulders and starts stroking the back of his neck; however, for Dick this is too much visibility: he perceives of the car as a public, visible space without adequate protection. He strictly forbids Dino to touch him in the car saying "we're not on the German *Autobahn*" (Till 13:20).

The third space that is inseparable from the notion of the closet is the police station, where they work as elite SWAT-policemen. For Dick this is the strictest closet if we interpret the closet as the metaphor of oppressing queerness. He perceives of the space and his colleagues as the representatives of all the homophobia in the world, and embodiments of the strictly straight idea of super-masculinity that he is also affected by. Their captain's view about the role of policemen reflects on the idea of masculinity connected to the station: "the police officer is a man, an armed gentleman, on whose shoulders society can lean its head and rest" (Till 27:38). As a result of his anxiety and perception of the precinct as a highly homophobic, repressive space, Dick feels betrayed by Dino's decision to come out to the captain, because he believes that the public knowledge of Dino's gayness will contaminate him as well (see Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 80-1). In contrast, Dino assumes the possibility of coming out at the precinct, because he perceives of the captain as an understanding and tolerant man. Furthermore, probably he is also more aware of the underlying homosociality, even homoeroticism of the space which is represented as an "undercurrent of their super-masculine commando operation" (Kis, "Identity" 173). Both the underlying homoeroticism of well-trained male bodies in action and the compulsory closet is exemplified by a scene during their training: in order to get him into a better position for a shot, Dino stands on Dick's legs, while Dick faces his partner's crotch from up close, however, as part of their protective gear, a strong and hard surface separates him from the erotic body parts (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16. Separated by the protective gear. (Till 01:00:06)

The outcome of Dino's coming out attempt summarises the dynamics of their relationship and their highly different attitudes towards the closet and visibility. After having argued all day (at one point they even draw their guns and point them at each other), finally, Dino is in the captain's office at his personal hearing he asked for. The space is choking, the walls seem to be closing in and the captain's figure fills the screen – and Dino's perspective as

well. It seems that the fear of homophobia finally gets to him, however it is something else he panics about: he puts himself in Dick's position and imagines the situation from his perspective; and understands what his partner is going through. Furthermore, in his mind he can also see Dick's reaction: suicide by shooting himself in the head. As a result, he changes his mind about coming out, and pretends to have arranged the personal hearing in order to demand a pay rise. Then, he joins him in the toilet and helps him scrape off homophobic tags from the walls. However, as he leaves the captain's office, the camera stays inside for a moment, and we can hear the captain murmuring: "two greedy faggots" (Till 1:18:45), which signifies "the radical uncertainty closeted gay people are likely to feel about who is in control of information about their sexual identity" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*79). It turns out that their relationship is already common knowledge, and even if the captain uses a homophobic word, he does not really care about his employees' sexual preference.

Tomasz Wasilewski's 2013 *Floating Skyscrapers* is a story about a professional swimmer wrestling with gay desire, so we could expect a narrative of homophobic professional sport and the struggle it means to be a gay professional sportsman as in *The Pass*. However, that is not the case with the swimming pool depicted as a quite queer space. The film opens with sounds of oral sex, and we can also see two young athletes in the toilet; later on, the two protagonists, Kuba and Michael are shown in a homoerotic situation in the water while other swimmers are also there. Instead, it is the heterosexual family structure that serves as the foundation of his closet and the main obstacle in the way of embracing gay identity.

Kuba lives with his mother and his girlfriend in a suffocating family home. Narrow corridors, crowded rooms and gloomy wallpapers characterise this space. His mother is extremely controlling, and in an unhealthy relationship with his son – she interrupts Kuba and Sylvia when they want to be intimate, pressures Kuba to wash her back when she is taking a bath, and expects Kuba to watch a film with her instead of spending time with his girlfriend in their shared room. While Kuba's emerging relationship with Michael might offer escape from this family structure, they find it difficult to deal with being confined to the closet. Two symbolic scenes express this in spatial terms: in both scenes we see Kuba and Michael in a car, circling first up and then down in a high-rise garage building, but neither road reaches its destination. Both scenes end before they could reach the top or the bottom. Quite understandably Kuba's girlfriend is often there as an obstacle. The triangle leads to awkward and tense situations, such as the three of them going on a trip (other friends unexpectedly cancel last minute) or sharing a lunch that Kuba meant to cook for Michael, but Sylvia arrives home

early. Kuba also tries to rebel against the prescribed norms and refuses to play by what is expected of him, when he purposefully loses the swim race that could rocket his career.

At first the mother opposes the romance between Sylvia and Kuba – she especially hates the idea that the girl will live with them –, probably as a result of the controlling, possessive mother-son relationship. However, when his son's affair with Michael surfaces and after Kuba's off-screen coming out to her, she changes her strategy, because the heterosexual relationship still seems a better option. It also turns out that Sylvia is pregnant, and this makes the two women allies in an attempt to force Kuba back into the traditional, heterosexual family model. We see him break up with Michael, while Sylvia is standing warningly behind him, and the film ends with a modified repetition of the mother-son bathing scene: this time Kuba is washing Sylvia's back. However, after a long silence, he stands up, leaves the bathroom, and the film ends. Whether that signifies his refusal of taking part in the reproduction of the rigid and possessive heterosexual family, or his frustration about being stuck in it, is hard to decide. However, with Michael beaten to death (unknown by Kuba) the film ends on a quite gloomy note about escaping the closet.

Although the films analysed in this section span across a ten-year period and come from three different countries, they approach the issues, spaces and situations of closeting and coming out through a shared focus on individuals and their specific circumstances. Due to individuated life situations their spatial metaphors of the closet also differ. For some characters the closet means safety, for others, it is a weight of systemic repression, but each character has their unique closets. Even though the films apply different spatial metaphors of repression, one aspect is shared by all of them: the closet is a continuous and individual burden.

Chapter 2

From Fucking to Making Love:

Affective Spaces and Practices of Queer Sexuality

"I will fuck with you."

(Lee 30:11)

1. Affect, space and queer sex

There are three sex scenes in *God's Own Country*. The first takes place at an animal market, where Johnny is on business, selling one of the family's cows. In the lunch break he picks up a young, local farmer and they head to the cow truck for a quick hook up. The act depicted in a way which constitute what I call – also in later parts of the dissertation – fucking: the representation and experience of queer sex with an emphasis on bodily functions, lacking emotional, affective or bonding aspects, often bordering on a medicalised conceptualisation of queerness (homosexuality) as a bodily necessity, an impulse, which occasionally needs to be satisfied. In the trailer, we see the young man blowing Johnny, however, when he stands up in an attempt to kiss Johnny – which could infuse the experience with a sense of intimacy – he quickly turns the young man around, uses his spit as lubricant, and roughly, even violently fucks him. Fucking is depicted as isolating (clothes on, bodies hardly touch), animalistic, even aggressive, without any consideration of the other person's pleasure. It is also impersonal, as Johnny refuses any personal attempts from his sexual partner (such as an invitation for a pint of beer). In *God's Own Country* as well (and very often in other films) fucking takes place in abject spaces, such as public toilets or dirty alleys, surrounded by excrement, dirt and stench. Since "space and sexuality do not just interact with, or reflect, each other but rather are mutually constituted" (Johnston and Longhurst 4), the features of these sexual acts and the spaces they take place in are inscribed on each other and reciprocally constitute each other as impersonal, functional and abjected. Johnny's face and behaviour reflect angry enjoyment and shame. "Sexual arousal [...] is a fragile and highly vulnerable experience [...] challenged by moments of shame as self-consciousness (Nathanson xix), which vulnerability and shame are heightened by Johnny's unaccepted queer sexuality, and desire to keep it repressed and hidden. Furthermore, as Sarah Ahmed points out, "[i]n shame, more than my action is at stake: *the badness of an action is transferred to me*, such that I feel myself to be bad and to have been 'found' or 'found out' as bad by others" (*The Cultural* 105, emphasis in the original). Therefore, he is constantly peeping out of the window slid of the truck, to check whether anyone is coming

in their direction. Here, queer sex is represented – and experienced by Johnny – as mostly a bodily function, lacking gentle emotion, bordering on a functional (even medicalised) conception of queer sexuality: a shameful bodily necessity, an impulse, which occasionally needs to be satisfied in order to be kept at bay.

The first intercourse between Gheorghe and Johnny is as aggressive and animalistic as Johnny's affair at the cow auction, it starts with and looks light a fight in the mud. As they are away from the farm house for the lambing season, they have to sleep in a half-ruined cottage, on straw, with their bodies only inches from each other. Sexual tension builds up gradually: we see Johnny clutching on a handful of straw to subdue his desires, and he cannot sleep because his lust for Gheorghe is so strong. The next night he follows Gheorghe who goes out to take a piss, and forcefully grabs his penis. After this the two men seem to engage in a physical fight, but their queer desire transforms the fight into sex. However, this fuck is different, it is more intimate. What differentiates their night together from Johnny's previous experience is desire. This sexual act is not propelled by desperation to find a quick release from repression, but desire, even lust, felt for the other. Gheorghe's presence is emphatic. The boy in the cow truck could have been anyone, but here, it is the Romanian queer migrant whom Johnny desires. Although at first Johnny wants to proceed in the same manner as in the cow truck – he avoids kissing, spits and tries to fuck Gheorghe immediately – the latter does not let him. He holds Johnny close to his chest in a tight embrace, expecting his own pleasure as well. Johnny realises that he cannot go on with his usual conduct and yields to the idea of mutual pleasure: this time he is the one to give Gheorghe a blowjob. Although in terms of space and representation the scene is still quite abjected – the shades are greyish with the coldness of blue hues, the atmosphere is cold and their dirty bodies in the mud bear a close resemblance to pigs – "the mutualisation and maximization of positive affect" and "the mutualisation and minimization of negative affect" (Nathanson xxi) transforms the sexual experience into an intimate carnal union, "a sexual act in which each attempts to *devour* the other in an impossible attempt to *be* the other, without either giving himself or herself *to* the other"(Kosok 66).

Their second sexual encounter is radically different, mirroring the drastic changes going on in Johnny's perception of himself. Instead of the mud, they have sex in their shared cottage, in the straw. This space is more protective and protected, the whole scene is a lot more affectionate, colours are warm, body parts are eroticised by close ups, and the extreme close ups even give a haptic effect. This is the visualisation of sexual comfort, which, in Sara Ahmed's words "suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it also suggests an ease and easiness. [...] To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environments that it is hard to distinguish

where one's body ends and the world begins." (*Queer* 134) This is not fucking any more, it is (even visually) love-making. It is definitely a "good encounter" in Cameron Duff's terms, which "involve[s] the transfer of power from the affecting body to the affected body and so invest that body with joy and an increase in its power of acting" as opposed to the very first sex scene, a "bad encounter," which "involve[s] a decrease in the power of the affected body and so invest[s] that body with sadness" (Duff 885).

Although the spatial qualities of the three sex scenes do not differ significantly (all three are connected to animal farming, excrement and dirt), the practices and experiences are distinct: from a quick, shameful, anonymous, even rough hook-up in the cow truck where mutual pleasure is not a concern for Johnny; through a mucky, passionate, lustful, and most importantly mutually pleasurable fuck in the mud, the film – and Johnny – arrives at sensual, gentle, tender love-making in the hay. In this chapter I focus on British and Eastern European films[33] that represent sexuality as an integral element of queerness, and I explore how the films approach the affective matrix between individuals, spaces and sexual practices. I argue that – although certain spaces and practices might seem to have an inherent affective quality– it is fundamentally the interplay between individual affect, space and sexual practice that constructs the affective milieu of spaces and practices (Fig. 17-19.).

The examination of the interplay between affectivity, spatiality and sexuality should begin by noting that sexuality and space are inherently connected. Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst argue that "[t]here are no spaces that sit outside of sexual politics" (Johnston and Longhurst 3)." Brown, Browne and Lim also contend that sexual politics – "regulations, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires" (4) – are in close correspondence with space, however, they also emphasise the role of sexual conduct – action – in the correlative relationship between the construction of space and sexuality:

> "[t]he spaces, whether sexualised, heterosexualised or even homosexualised, are constituted through the enactment, negotiation and contestation of norms of appropriate sexual conduct [...]. What we do makes the spaces and places we inhabit, just as the spaces we inhabit provide an active and constitutive context that shapes our actions, interactions and identities." (4)

[33] *Nighthawks* (1978, dir. Ron Peck), *Coming Out* (1989, dir. Heiner Carow), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991, dir. Isaac Julien), *Kisses and Scratches* (1995, dir. György Szomjas), *Beautiful Thing* (1996, dir. Hattie Macdonald), *Mandragora* (1997, dir. Wiktor Grodecki), *Get Real* (1998, dir. Simon Shore), *This I Wish and Nothing More* (2000, dir. Kornél Mundruczó), *Endgame* (2001, dir. Gary Wicks), *Men in the Nude* (2006, dir. Károly Esztergályos), *Chameleon* (2008, dir. Krisztina Goda), *Greek Pete* (2009, dir. Andrew Haigh), *Weekend* (2011, dir. Andrew Haigh), *Floating Skyscrapers* (2013, dir. Tomasz Wasilewski), *Land of Storms* (2014, dir. Ádám Császi).

In other words, "the spatial and the sexual constitute one another" (Bell and Valentine 2); space affects what can be done in it, but at the same time, what is performed in a given space shapes that very space: space and sexual conduct actively, reciprocally affect each other.

Fig. 17-19. Three sex scenes in *God's Own Country*. (Lee 00:07:29; 00:34:25 and 00:46:25)

However, as soon as human conduct – doing sex in this case – enters the equation, another factor should be added: affect. As Nathanson points out, for Silvan Tomkins, the seminal author of affect theory, "all life is "affective life," all *behavior*, thought, planning, wishing, *doing* ... There is no moment when we are free from affect, no situation in which affect is unimportant" (xx, my emphases). It follows that the examination of sex and space – both of which can elicit heightened affective, emotional states – must be coupled with the consideration of the affective qualities of space and sex. Being in space is already infused with affective layers. As Cameron Duff points out, "[a]ffective atmospheres capture the emotional feel of place" (881).[34] Furthermore, she also explains that affective spaces (in her terms, places) also influence the affective characteristics of the actions in them: "[a]ffects are, in this sense, not only indicative of the subjective mood of certain places; they also frame the array of activities and practices potentially enactable within that place" (Duff 884).

It might seem that as a result, certain spaces only allow for certain affects and certain practices, such as the public toilet as being suitable for only quick, anonymous, ashamed and

[34] The use of "place" and "space" is diverse in spatial theoreticians' texts. In some cases, "space" is used to describe the experienced, culturally constructed environment, while "place" denotes the physical spatial reality, in other cases it is just the opposite. In this dissertation I use the former.

fearful fucks, or the bedroom as determinative of intimate and joyful love-making. However, Sedgwick points out, that "[a]ffects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects" (*Touching* 19). Conversely, if anything can be the object of an affect, its reverse statement must be true as well: a given object (place, space, practice, situation, etc.) can trigger any affect depending on the individual taking up that space or taking part in the practice. Therefore, no space and no sexual practice "can be labelled as either inherently liberating or essentially oppressive (Sawicki, 1991: 43; Echols, 1992: 66)" (Glick 24). Through reading various cinematic examples of different affective qualities and dissimilar sexual experiences within the same physical places, I point out that no sexual practice or space can be seen as unquestionably shameful or enjoyable, and it is the quality of the individual's affective reaction that shapes the affective quality of the practice and space as well. Affect, space and sexual practice constitute a circular matrix, in which space influences the practice, sexual conduct shapes the space, and both are impacted by affective states. In what follows, I explore this complex matrix of affect, space and practice through the most prominent spaces (and sexual practices attached to them) represented in films: I claim that although fearful hustling on the street, exciting innuendos in parks, shameful quickies in public toilets, interesting hook-ups in gay bars, and joyful love-making in bedrooms are the expected affective constellations of spaces and sexual practises, they are not the only ones.

2. Sex in public

Public space has an ambiguous relationship with sexuality. On the one hand, (hetero)sexuality, as being part of one's "personal life," is relegated to private spaces, and therefore, the public appears to be an asexual space. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner summarise these mechanisms: "its conventional spaces presuppose a structural differentiation of "personal life" from work, politics, and the public sphere," furthermore, "the normativity of heterosexual culture links intimacy only to the institutions of personal life" and "mak[e] sex seem irrelevant or merely personal" (553). However, when someone outside of heterosexual normativity tries to inhabit this seemingly asexual public space, it turns out that heterosexuality does infuse the space, only it is "so naturalized as to be virtually invisible to the straight population" (Duncan 137), and "it is commonly assumed to be 'naturally' or 'authentically' heterosexual" (Valentine 145).

Heteronormativity however does not only affect public space, but private spheres as well. Therefore, queer sexuality is relegated to the margins, cast out of both public and private spaces:

> [g]ay people often have no freedom to be gay in the privacy of their homes, due to family and neighborly pressures. When they seek out sex in "public places" such as parks, beaches, or restrooms, their actions are not always accurately described as "elective." Lacking a secure privacy, they may find an insecure privacy and a selective publicity among similar seekers in such places. In this manner sexual repression and social oppression may eroticize risk and danger in certain persons over time (Tucker 17)

In addition, as Nancy Duncan points out, "members of such marginalized groups have experienced acute spatial dissonance" (127): they were faced with the necessity of creating counterpublics – "alternative spaces that probe and resist normativity to offer subordinated communities different possibilities and divergent logics" (Engel and Lyle 967) – in order to find and construct places that provide opportunities for queer sex and new kinds of "intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation" (Berlant and Warner 558). In this subchapter I analyse cinematic representations of queer public sex[35] in the street, in public toilets and parks, the role of gay bars, and the affective consequences of the "acute spatial dissonance" that results from the ambiguous relationship between sex and public space.

2.1. Streets

The street, and its adjoining highly public places such as the train station, as spaces of sexual practices are most prevalent in films representing the commercial aspect of queer sex: hustling, especially in the Eastern European examples of hustler films: *Mandragora* and *This I Wish And Nothing More*. The main characters of these films are "doubly stigmatized" (Koken et al 222) on the one hand for being involved in prostitution, which "is regarded by many citizens as a *deviant enterprise*" (Weitzer 2, emphasis in the original); and for making non-heteronormative sexuality (as in sexual practice, not "simply" sexual orientation) too public and too visible in the heterosexual public sphere, even when no actual sexual conduct takes place on the street – just the "foreplay" which in this case is picking up clients.

Wiktor Grodecki's *Mandragora* is a central film in 1990s Eastern European queer cinema, although it is also highly problematic. It is "the concluding fictional drama" after two

[35] Tim Dean defines public sex as "erotic contact outside the home; its occurrence outside the domestic sphere accounts for no small measure of its appeal. [...] public sex violates not personal privacy or bodily integrity but only a privatized, deeply misleading conception of the sexual." (184-5)

documentaries, depicting the Czech sex market in the 1990, in all three of which "while masquerading as "objective" and "frank" investigations into the "heart of darkness" of the gay sex trade in the Czech capital city of Prague, Grodecki alternately presents a manipulative triptych that is ideologically slippery, exploitative and yet, undoubtedly, *queer*" (Griffiths, "Bodies" 129). In terms of handling commercial sex, the film reflects an attitude that Weitzer calls "the oppression paradigm" (5). By choosing exclusively very young characters as hustlers and portraying them as being seduced by malicious pimps and forced by dire circumstances into hustling, Grodecki deprives the hustler figure from free will and agency, and focuses solely on the exploitative aspects of sex work.[36]

Mandragora opens with a scene depicting a teenage boy arriving at the Prague Central Station; alone, lost in the foreign place. The station, with its cold, hard surfaces and operational orderliness, constitutes a space designed for function: the satisfaction of the travelling public's needs. It is a world founded on time-tables, itineraries, and signposts showing people where to queue, buy a ticket, find the right platform, and get on the right train. The functional space of the railway station could also be characterised as an "abstract space." Michael P. Brown, applying Lefevbre's concept, explains: "it [abstract space] hides and conceals personal and intimate relations like sexuality. Abstract space is the space of authoritative rationality that has become so hegemonic in recent times. Abstract space has little room for desire." (60) The first people the boy sees are young rent boys and their pimp, who embody the logic of this impersonal, desire-less space: they are the human duplicates of spatial functionality (Fig. 20). The pimp immediately recognises his bewildered, helpless state, and goes after him. Even though Marek fearfully tries to avoid him, the pimp catches up and follows him into an arcade. Here he starts "seducing" him, stating that "I could use you" (Grodecki 06:58). His words signify Marek's future: as a teen prostitute he will be deprived of his agency, he will be an object body to use for pimps and customers.[37]

[36]On the opposite attitude, "the empowerment paradigm" (Weitzer 5) see the analysis of *Greek Pete* in the part "Sex in private – bedrooms".

[37] The Polish-German co-production, *Piggies*, follows Grodecki's take on the horrors of teen prostitution, his main character, Tomek, being even younger than *Mandragora*'s teenage rent-boys. The business depicted in this film definitely belongs to the area of child prostitution, and therefore I am deliberately excluding it from the analyses, as paedophilia and homosexuality are too often blurred together by homophobic public discourse.

Fig. 20. Prague central station (Grodeczki 00:04:59)

The street appears as the site of prostitution in *This I Wish And Nothing More* as well. The bodies of male prostitutes are also constructed here as commodified objects, as the first images depicting them loitering on the street represent only fragmented bodies, and their faces remain invisible. After all, "a prostitute, in particular, is all body, no face" (Peršak and Vermeulen 13). The sexual practices in the street are also constructed in a functional, business-like manner: the customer and hustler head to the stairs on the Danube bank after a short discussion (most probably about the service and price – the viewer, as not part of the transaction is excluded from the conversation and is left with images only), where the customer fellates Bruno, the main character. His face reflects repressed, restricted enjoyment, however, as soon as he climaxes, his face turns blank, devoid of emotional signs, reinforcing his earlier statement: "I do it for the money" (Mundruczó 14:41).

In these films the street – although it is in a close connection to sexuality – is represented as a place of a functional, impersonal and impassionate foreplay. It is in different places where hustlers actually engage in sexual intercourse, which – as will be pointed out in the parts discussing public toilets and rooms –are denser affectively than their street experience.

As opposed to the functional, sometimes dangerous, foreplay of picking up clients, and in a fashion also different from cruising as in finding anonymous sex partners, the street can serve as a contradictory intimate space for queer sex. In *Floating Skyscrapers,* a back alley of a street provides the only place where the central couple, Michal and Kuba, can consummate their growing love. A key difference from the hustlers' experience is that this act is based on mutual desire. Although most of their clothes have to stay on – signifying a certain amount of fear from being caught –, the two young men try to touch as much of each other's skin as possible while kissing passionately. Also, mutual desire results in mutual pleasure: before

penetrating Michal, Kuba orally stimulates him, pays attention to proper lubrication, asks for Michal's help when entering him. During the scene there is nothing else audible, just their sounds of pleasure. Their movements start slowly, and as their enjoyment rises, their speed increases, and culminates in orgasm. Even though the space they occupy is constructed as a public place, their sexual practice transforms it into a space of intimacy: they are making love.

2.2. Parks

When considering the non-commercial area of queer sex, the most important sexual practice is cruising, i.e., walking around streets and parks in order to find a partner for casual sex, which "represents an indispensable component of urban gay life" (Dean 177). Although in sociological and geographical accounts cruising is described as a central element of gay life and even community building, and, accordingly, it is remembered in documentaries as an important, and fundamentally positive experience,[38] cruising in feature films is depicted as a dangerous and risky sexual practice.

In Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* cruising in the park, and the resulting one-night stand, are depicted as objectifying and dangerous. Philip goes to the park in a desperate state of mind, after he lost Mathias as a result of lies and secrecy. Philip is visibly cold, which infuses the space and the practice with coldness and alienation. The park is lit by the sharp light of street lamps, which produces a strong contrast of objects and bodies. The faces of loitering – cruising – people as a result look shady and dangerous, the atmosphere is far from being positive or welcoming. There is hardly any communication between the participants; when, eventually, Philip finds someone – who resembles Mathias – the only communication that takes place between them is a discussion about whose apartment to go to.

Young Soul Rebels depicts both the dangers and erotic aspects of this sexual practice. Although the scene takes place at night, and the darkness embeds the space in a sense of danger, the beginning of the sequence utilises the warm lights of small match fires, used to lit cigarettes, to illuminate the unknown faces, which – together with the soft focus of the camera – provides a mysterious (hiding practice) and erotic tone for space and cruising. By contrast, the second part of the sequence highlights the extreme dangers of this spatial and sexual practice. When TJ, the cruising character, leans on a tree and waits for someone to show up, the lighting method changes: instead of small, warm flames he is lit by a sharp light from above, similarly to the

[38]See for instance: *Among Men – Gay in East Germany* (2012, dir. Ringo Rösener and Markus Stein); *Hot Men, Cold Dictatorships* (2015, dir. Mária Takács)

lights described in *Coming Out*. Although when a hand touches him from behind and their bodies press onto each other there is still a certain amount of eroticism, the scene quickly changes course: instead of a quick but pleasurable hook-up, cruising in the park ends up in murder (Fig. 20).

Fig. 20. Eroticism and danger in the park. (Julian 00:03:00 and 00:04:20)

The park appears not as a space of cruising for anonymous sex partners, but as a temporary refuge for the young lovers in *Beautiful Thing*. After Jamie and Steve spend an enjoyable afternoon at the local gay bar, "the sequence finishes with a cut to the two of them running through and kissing in the woods to *Make Your Own Kind of Music*; they are simply two normal lads who just happen to love each other" (Wharton 110). The atmosphere is playful as they run around chasing each other, and then it turns into teenage erotica, when they share passionate kisses leaning onto a tree in the soft lights and shadows of the woods.

2.3. Public Toilets

The public toilet, even without considering its connection with certain sexual practices, is a complicated and ambiguous space. Public toilets possess "a number of distinctive spatial qualities: they are multiple, contested, ambiguous spaces of heightened affect and sensory charge" (Barcan 28). First of all, public toilets are inevitably perceived as non-hygienic places, loaded with unpleasant sights, smells, and bacteria: they are dirty spaces, evoking disgust:

> Dirt is an "offense against order," against the categories that help promote social stability. It is, therefore, that which a society feels it needs to eliminate, conceal, or purify in order to preserve order. Sounds, smells, sights, objects, or even people that cross boundaries threaten the purity of social categories and are causes of psychological and social unease. […] Bodily waste is an obvious and potent form of dirt thus understood, since its potential for contamination conjoins the literal and the symbolic. This makes even the cleanest of public toilets, culturally speaking, a "dirty space." (25)

In other words, they are abject spaces, where the liquidity and fluidity of bodily fluids linger as a menace above the otherwise sealed-off bodies unloosing themselves here (28). Furthermore, the smell and sound of certain bodily functions inevitably cross the walls, which adds to the

vulnerability of unsealed bodies, and generates "disgust (for others) and shame (at self)" (38). As a result, the use of public toilets is expected to be as effective as possible: enter, unseal, reseal, exit. In Longhurst's words "[t]oilets/bathrooms were largely understood as functional spaces rather than spaces in which relax and linger" (76).

Furthermore, the ambiguity of the borders of the body disclosed in public toilets threatens hegemonic masculinity, which is based on the holistic, strong, invulnerable, completed, and erect ideal of the male body. As a result, public toilets pose "a fear of (homosexual) contamination by 'circuits of fluid'" (Longhurst 69). Elizabeth Grosz also observes, that the "flow moves or can move in two-way or indeterminable directions [...], the possibility of being not only an active agent in the transmission of flow but also a passive receptacle" is an idea that "phallicised masculinity abhors" (*Volatile* 201). Consequently – even though public toilets are highly subversive and even homosocial spaces – social geographers and researches of cultural studies point out that (hetero)normativity is stronger in toilets that presumed. As Bryan Reynolds contends: "the men's room is [...] a normative space with regard to sexuality, which is to say that it is constructed as heterosexual space" (44).

Still, public toilets are one of the "principal scenes of criminal intimacy" – as Berlant and Warner call outlawed queer sex (560) –, and "represent a kind of subcultural scene within the gay community" (Nedbálková 71). The sexual practice is influenced by the affective qualities of the space. Katerina Nedbálková argues that toilets are spaces "for anonymous sex without further commitment" (69) where homosexuality is reduced "to the performance of sexual encounters" (72). In other words, the functionality of the space results in the possibility of experiencing queer sexuality as sheer bodily function: fucking. However, the affective circumstances of fucking in public toilets – as represented in *Floating Skyscrapers*, *Get Real* and *This I Wish And Nothing More* – depend not only on the spatial atmosphere provided by the toilet itself, but also on the attitudes and affective reactions of the user.

How the perception and affective mental state of an individual transforms the space of the toilet is well explored in *Floating Skyscrapers*. After a training session, Kuba is in the bathroom with other swimmers. Reflecting his desire for the well-built male bodies, the camera is panning over the eroticised, muscular, naked, wet bodies. Following a discrete change of glances, he follows one of them to the toilets, which – here and also earlier in the film[39] – are

[39]The film opens with a static, highly symmetrical frame representing the cubicles, with the sounds of oral sex and pleasure. The whiteness of the space and the symmetry of the image highlight the functional and impersonal milieu of the toilets.

depicted as functional and impersonal. In the toilet Kuba is sucked off by the other young man, his face reflects restraint, and he does not utter sounds of pleasure. Although dirt, lack of hygiene, and disgust are not present spatially in this remarkably clean toilet, after he climaxes, and his partner would expect mutual enjoyment, Kuba runs away, fearful and ashamed. As Elspeth Probyn points out, "[m]ost experiences of shame make you want to disappear, to hide away and to cover yourself," (39) so Kuba runs out of the cubicle, away from his casual partner and away from the camera – from the gazes that witnessed his sexual arousal, excitement and enjoyment (see: Ahmed, *The Cultural* 103). After his orgasm, these experiences do not fade away, but he becomes conscious of them, and as a result, the affect of shame is triggered:

> Alone of the innate affects, he conceptualized it as a mechanism triggered when something interferes with the experience of positive affect—either interest-excitement or enjoyment-joy—but does not turn it off completely. Shame affect has evolved to call attention to the presence of some stimulus that distracts from the preexisting positive affect but does not displace it. (Nathanson xix)

So, the spatial qualities of this particular public toilet – cleanliness, orderliness, functionality – are not in an immediate correspondence to disgust and shame, still, Kuba – as a result of his own mental state of not yet being completely out to himself – reacts in shame.

This I Wish And Nothing More depicts the ambiguity of the toilet through two opposing affective constructions, based on the perception and mental state of the users (Fig. 21-22.). When one of the main characters, Ringo, a hustler identified as gay enters a public toilet, it is represented as a clean, not abject place with white walls, tiles and lights. The underground, shady aspects and sexual overtones of the space are also reflected on by using slow-motion as Ringo enters on the one hand, and by the meaningful, suspicious glances of the men loitering in the toilet on the other. However, for Ringo, this is a place of excitement and business. His half-smile upon making an entrance and checking himself in the mirror and his confident walk signify that he is not ashamed of being here; on the contrary, he seems to enjoy experiencing his sexuality in this way. Even if he perceives of the toilet and his hustling without shame, the functionality of the space and practice is also reflected: the scene totally lacks verbal communication, and when a customer finally approaches him, there is only one word uttered: the price of the service.

Fig. 21-22. Opposing affective constructions within the toilet. (Mundruczó 00:19:42 and 00:45:51)

As opposed to Ringo, the bathroom and the toilet signify disgust and shame for Bruno, his hustling partner, who identifies as straight and claims to be in the business only out of financial necessity. For him, the toilet becomes the space of attempted (and impossible) self-cleansing, when, after being anally penetrated by a customer he tries to wash everything out of his anus. By washing out the man's sperm of his body, he tries – and fails – to wash away the shame of queer sex he feels. However, as Sara Ahmed points out, shame affects and transforms the person instead of the act: "[s]hame in this way is bound up with self-recognition" (*The Cultural* 105). He is forced to face the gaping incongruency in his identity which results from the paradox of taking part in queer sex and identifying as heterosexual, a paradox that leads to his disintegration:

> Bruno's frontal medium close up used as he is washing his buttocks leaning forward, used as a cutscene, is a lyrical and ghostly representation of the disintegration, torment and destruction of both body and soul. Afterwards, he bursts out in tears, weeps and falls into the bathwater. Images of his suffering body and face follow each other by jump cuts; the broken images parallel to the seemingly continuous audio (desperate, laboured crying and the splashes of body in water) embody Bruno's torment, the process of losing his bodily and mental identity. (Kis, "Abjekció" 142)

This dual affective quality of the toilet appears in *Get Real* in the same sequence, within the very same public toilet, through the different perceptions of the two main characters, Steven and John. As discussed in the previous chapter, Steven is characterised as having already gone through personal coming out, and has an active sex life. He describes sex as a bodily function, which is contrasted with love: "Just find someone to do it with, find somewhere to do it, and do it. [...] As for falling in love, nothing prepares you for that." (Shore 02:36). The "somewhere to do it" for him is the public toilet in an out-of-the-way corner of a park. Although the toilet is depicted in the film as an abject space – dirty mirror, disgusting walls and floor (one can smell it only by looking at the images) – Steven perceives it as an exciting place, somewhere he can experience his sexuality. He is visibly inpatient while exchanging written messages through a

hole in the wall separating cubicles, but not because he wants to escape from this space, but because he is excited about the outcome: he is just as impatient while waiting for his unknown sexual partner on the bench in front of the toilet. Another factor that counterweights the spatial abjection of the toilet is the extradiegetic music: when we see Steven entering the toilet, the song, "Love is All Around" is applied as background music, suggesting that anonymous sex is not the only form of contact in public toilets, which is proved to be true by the film's plot – this accidental meeting grows into a passionate relationship.

As opposed to him, John, the boy he meets in the cubicles, is still struggling with self-acceptance. He is not even depicted within the toilet, it is only after they exit the toilet and meet at the bench nearby that we learn that it was him on the other side of the cubicle wall. On the one hand this strict separation within the toilet signifies the anonymous, hiding aspects of using the toilet as a place for sex (as in finding sexual partners), but it also emphasises John's ashamed hiding. When he *is* seen in front of the toilet, he is extremely embarrassed, and tries to explain away the whole situation as foolish experimentation and reckless curiosity on his part. Still, their shared toilet experience leads to John's opening up about his queer desires, and propels his coming out process.

2.4. Gay Bars

In accounts of sociology, queer history and cultural geography gay bars are often described as the first spaces signifying the queer community's ability to carve out their own space, which not only falls outside of the heteronormative regimes, but also provides a safe environment, where "individuals feel relaxed and that they can shed their masks" (Nedbálková 73-74). As Steve Wharton describes the role of gay bars as safe spaces:

> Any group thus segregated and isolated – often subject to persecution – will naturally seek 'safe space' in which its members may gather, gaining, thereby, a feeling of solidarity […]. In the case of the persecuted homosexual, this could be the 'gay bar', itself often tucked away off the main drag of venues in towns and cities, in insalubrious areas, often on the margin (as was, indeed, its clientele). (108)

Bars arguably provided a protected space for excess, self-liberation and empowerment, which is reflected in the affective atmospheres that characterise the representations of gay bars in *Coming Out*, *Beautiful Thing* and *Kisses and Scratches* as spaces of exciting transgressions and joyful belonging to a community.

The bar scene in *Kisses and Scratches* features a cross-dressed duo – including the lesbian protagonist dressed as a man doing masculine dance-moves and a gay man wearing

feminine clothes and pulling off a submissive, feminine dance choreography – performing on stage the reversal of prescribed gender and sexual norms and playfully embrace the fluidity of sexual and gender categories. The playfulness of their performance reflects the emancipating and unchaining spatial environment provided in bars and condenses the enjoyment and exuberance of transgression and empowerment (Fig. 23.).

Fig. 23. Enjoyment, transgression and empowerment. (Szomjas 00:49:14)

The gay bar presented in *Coming Out* takes this subversive gesture even further. The reversal of gender roles spreads beyond the stage and the space allows guests to express their sexuality by extravagant clothes, make-ups and body-language. Furthermore, as deep emotional bonds develop not only between partners but various members of the bar, the cheerful, excessive and enthusiastic crowd gradually transforms into a community. Philip is depicted at first as afraid and embarrassed about being here, however, he soon finds his place in this community, and by the end of the night his face reflects true excitement and joy.

Similarly, the local gay bar in *Beautiful Thing*, The Gloucester, acts a space of safe exploration of queer desire, and provides a homely atmosphere for the teenage boys. As Wharton describes the scene:

> [w]ithin the bar the cinema-going audience sees men and women enjoying themselves (some kissing) as a drag show goes into its interval to the strains of *Hava Nagila*: "Bless our nation". Ste and Jamie are then gently teased by the drag artiste as first-time visitors, the artiste emphasizing their youthfulness and attractive qualities whilst also appearing protective or maternal. The boys show no sign of appearing threatened (though at the

> beginning Ste appears briefly shocked by such open displays of affection in the bar as kissing) and are made to feel completely at home, among their own. (110)

Apart from the gay bar being represented and experienced as an exciting and joyful space and "a locus for self-realization," (Wharton 115) the common element in these three films is that the bar experience is not directly related to sex: the bars provide a homely space of individual and community development, but they are not depicted as spaces of sexual practices. As opposed to that, in *Nighthawks* and *Weekend*, where the bar has a close correspondence with sexuality (it serves as a space for finding sexual partners), the sexual practices performed in bars resemble the attitudes and affective milieu of cruising, and highlight the impersonal, functional attitude towards sexuality. Although in both films the bars are represented as lively, crowded, loud and colourful places, the two main characters are distanced from these places, because instead of anonymous one-night stands – which can undoubtedly be depicted as exciting in certain cases – they desire meaningful, long-term relationships. The repetitive bar scenes in *Nighthawks* emphasise the functional – and after a while boring – impersonality of cruising in bars; the meaningless small talks, objectifying gazes (especially through the cruising eye shot technique) and loitering queues in front of the toilet reflect Jim's affective relationship with the bars. O'Rourke points out that "[t]he cyclical pattern of Jim's life on the commercial scene also adds to the impression that he is trapped on the pub-club-disco circuit" (126). The early bar scene in *Weekend* also highlights the distancing, impersonal aspects of sexual experiences in bars. Russell is visibly "out-of-place," he is embarrassed even from this amount of publicity, and he is quite clumsy in picking up men. Glen even makes an ironic comment about his behaviour later: "you followed me into the toilet and tried to eye me up at the urinal – hot" (13:50).

The negative affective experience of bars is taken to an extreme in *Mandragora*, in which the gay bar appears as a hostile and exploitative work place for the unfortunate teenage hustlers. Although the bar itself seems similar to any other gay bar represented in cinema – colourful lights, dancing crowd –, its affective milieu is radically different as it is depicted from the perspective of the young prostitutes. Therefore, the bar appears as a place of exploitation, signified by the threatening, aggressive and even violent presence of pimps, and also as a space of rivalry for clients among the hustlers: the more experienced workers (if it is right to use the phrase "sex worker" while describing forced prostitution) demand "taxes" from the newcomer Marek. When he refuses, he is beaten up. Furthermore, as a result of Grodecki's homophobic attitude in all three of his films depicting the Prague sex trade circuit, the gay characters – the customers – are depicted as disgusting, lustful, mostly old, Western men, with whom the only

form of communication is the discussion of prices. Consequently, the empowering atmosphere that is often associated with gay bars is absent, and the space turns into one other circle in the hell of the Prague underground commercial sex scene.

3. Sex in private – bedrooms

Home, and especially its most intimate place, the bedroom, is usually imagined, depicted and experienced as a space of comfort, safety and intimacy. Furthermore, in terms of sexuality, when the bedroom should be associated with a sexual practice, it is love-making, which bears the same connotations that characterise the bedroom: it is comfortable, safe and intimate. However, the bedroom, along with other spaces of "the familial home […] are governed by the law of the heterosexual majority and thus become spaces of 'masculine' and 'heterosexual' performance" (Fouz-Hernández 153). As a result, the private spaces of the home are infused with heteronormativity, which, for queer people, can transform them into repressing, closeting spaces:

> [h]ome, for many people, is taken for granted as a place of comfort, a retreat from the world, a place to be oneself. For many lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans identified people, however, home can be uncomfortable and alienating, shaped by the assumptions of heterosexuality that are present in their social relations with parents, siblings, neighbours and others in and around the home (Brown et al 3)

Therefore – as seen in the cinematic examples analysed below – in order to be able to use domestic space as suitable for making intimate, joyful, queer love, the characters must overcome at least some of the shame imposed upon them because of their queer desires. In other words, steps in the personal processes of coming out must be completed in order to transform the heteronormative space of the bedroom into a queer love nest.

The representation and John's perception of Steven's room in *Get Real* reflect this process. Visually, the room itself is depicted as Steven's personal space, a teenage boy's room that is both his safe place and closet at the same time: he decorates it with posters of footballers, which, for the outsider, not privy eye only represent a masculine sport and would go unnoticed, however, for him they embody sexual attraction. When John first enters Steven's room after they accidentally meet at the public toilet, he is uncomfortably aware of the sexual connotations of the room, even if Steven acts in a neutral, friendly way. For the closeted John, the room signifies an entrance into queer sexuality, which makes him visibly uncomfortable, jumpy, out-of-place. When they playfully start wrestling on the bed, sexual tension grows, however, when Steven attempts to kiss John, he denies being gay and runs away: the erotic turn of the events and the sexual overtones of a kiss prove too much for him.

When he visits Steven in his room for the second time, his perception and therefore the atmosphere of the room change as a result of his slightly different attitude. This time – after consuming a considerable amount of alcohol at the party – he is more open about his confusion, fear and desperation felt about his sexuality. Steven's room is depicted differently this time, it is less of a child's room, and with the most light directed on the bed, it is transformed into a space of sexuality. First, the bed becomes a space for opening up, talking about sexual desire, and then a space for acting on that desire: after he shares his first experience of sexual arousal triggered by another man with Steven, the two of them look at each other's face, start kissing passionately, and the frame goes dark. The next scene represents John in the morning, naked in Steven's bed – a traditional visual euphemism for the omitted love-making scene.

Coming Out reflects the different affective milieus of the same bedroom by depicting two highly different sexual experiences in the same room. The first one is a love-making scene: after Mathias' birthday party at the gay bar, they head to Philip's flat to spend the night together. Here, Philip has faced some of his repressions regarding his queer desires, as he wrote a break-up letter for his girlfriend before he left for the party. As they are standing in front of the window, touching each other, holding hands, it is clear that the goal of the night is not just sex, but affective connection. Although when it comes to sex Philip seems to be uncomfortable at first, Mathias manages to break the ice by citing an erotic poem written by his grandmother. As they are laughing at the poem, they start undressing, and the previous anxiety turns into excitement, joy and mutually shared desire for the other's body. Although the love-making scene is omitted here as well, their post-coital embrace is depicted in a long sequence: as they are lying in bed, embracing each other, the camera spans along their naked, entangled bodies and follows their hands as if it were caressing their bodies as well.

The next sex scene takes place after Philip loses Mathias and is again engulfed by self-doubt, fear and misery. He picks up a young man resembling Mathias while cruising in the park (as described previously in this chapter), takes him home to the same flat, and has a one-night-stand with him. During their undressing there is no laughter this time, Philip's face is distant, reflective of doubt and frustration, the lights are sharper, stronger than in the previous scene, furthermore their movements are not so soft and fluid. The whole sexual experience therefore gains a sense of rigidity, functionality – it is not driven by such strong desire for the other, only by sexual arousal (and in Philip's case a yearning for Mathias, who is substituted, but cannot be replaced by a similar body). Post-coital snuggling is totally missing from the sequence this time, and the anonymous young man leaves soon after with a distant "that was fun, see you" (Carow 1:31:54) as good bye.

When sex is only about fucking, it is not depicted in *Weekend*. The first night Russell and Glen spend together after they hook up in a club is only evoked verbally, but not visually. The second time they have sex is represented as a passionate, lustful experience, as the shaky camera portrays the eroticised male bodies pressing to each other, the room's atmosphere is infused with sexual infatuation and sexual tension. Although their desire is mutual, and the affective milieu is filled with excitement and joy, this cannot be called a love-making scene: this is a scene depicting a highly and mutually enjoyable, intimate fuck, resembling Johnny and Gheorghe's first time of having sex in *God's Own Country*. The centrality of "pure" sexuality is emphasised by the outcome: a close-up of Russel's sperm-covered belly.

The last night they spend together is no less passionate or erotic, however, it is portrayed as more intimate and emotional. Although they spend only a weekend together, their shared time is mutually transformative and allows them to open up to each other. This time their touching bodies are even more eroticised through extreme close ups of body parts and often undistinguishable images of skin, lit by soft, warm, dimmed lights. The room is filled with sounds of pleasure, without any music in the background. Here, the sequence is not cut short, the camera does not turn away from their love-making. As Russell is sucking off Glen, the scene comes considerably close to soft porn. The mutuality of the experience, and the desire to *share* the pleasure is well reflected in the scene when Glen – knowing that Russell has certain doubts and hesitancy about anal sex – waits for his agreeing nod before penetrating him. As the scene ends with them cuddling in bed at dawn, it signifies the difference between the two sex scenes: an intimate fuck and making love.

Sexuality and private, homely spaces fuse in *Land of Storms* as well. The relationship of the two young men, Szabolcs and Áron, develop after the former moves back to a secluded Hungarian village and tries to rebuild his grandfather's house – his inheritance – as his home with the help of the latter. It is during refurbishing the building that they fall for each other. Apart from their first sexual encounter, which takes place under the stars, all other sex scenes happen within the house, which serves as an intimate queer shelter on the edge of a highly heteronormative and homophobic village. The film has a shy attitude about depicting sexual intercourse, therefore the two young men's sex life is substituted by kissing, cuddling and the two characters lying on each other wearing less and less clothes. Nevertheless, these "sex" scenes create the house as a personal, romantic, safe space, with warm colours and a homely atmosphere.

The last sex scene, however, reveals how the homophobic attitudes that press down on the couple can change the affective milieu and therefore the use of space as well. This scene is shot more explicitly, their kiss is depicted through extreme close ups of their touching lips and

tongues; furthermore, this time the scene does not shy away from representing anal sex either. However, the joyful atmosphere of their first time of total intimacy turns into a murderous embrace: Áron, who has been humiliated, beaten and excommunicated by the villager community, kills Szabolcs, the queer-bringer, with a splinter of glass. As Szabolcs is lying on the ground – where moments ago they were making love – the house, their attempted queer home, falls apart and turns into a space of terror and anguish (Fig. 24.).

Fig. 24. Home as a place of death. (Császi 01:38:44)

When the mutuality of desire and pleasure is out of question, the bedroom is inscribed with highly different affective qualities. In Eastern European films about queer prostitution – as the male prostitutes most often identify as straight and are forced into hustling either by financial desperation or by exploitative pimps – sex in the bedroom appears as the space and practice of utmost humiliation. Even in *Men in the Nude*, in which the central prostitute figure's situation and involvement in the business is not emphatically as a result of misery and hopelessness, the sex scene that takes place in a middle-aged writer's home still evokes fear and shame. Here it is not the young prostitute's perspective – whose face reflects physical discomfort, but not anxiety or embarrassment – that transforms the otherwise comfortable and intimate space, but his customer's, who lives in a heterosexual (failing) marriage and has repressed his queer desires ever since his first (and only) homosexual experience in his youth. As Katalin Kis describes the sex scene:

> Fear, threat, bodily disintegration and death are associated with the homosexual intercourse with Zsolt. The threatening association is strengthened by the dog-tag around Zsolt's neck (which is even more emphatic on his naked body), which connects Zsolt to death, and signifies him as the embodiment of the unity between desire and destruction. [...]. The scene ends with a close up of his face during the intercourse, interrupted by an image of a hospital bed with a bucket and puddles of blood on the floor. [...] Homosexual anal intercourse is framed by [...] abject images of bodily disintegration, explosion. ("Abjekció" 145-6)

As a result of his closetedness, Tibor, the middle-aged writer cannot experience queer sex as liberation, however, since he cannot fully repress it anymore, he is trapped: his family home is

turned into a suffocating, repressive space when it is used for queer sexual encounters and, also as a space of his failing, heterosexual marriage.

His repressive affective state that turns space into a suffocating closet is condensed in the film into a highly symbolic, rather elusive space, the red room (Fig. 25.). This room appears several times during the narrative, appearing in different houses, and reaches its climax at the end of the film, when after being found out by his wife, the main character enters this room only to never leave it. This space carries at least two layers of symbolic meaning. First, its colour is contradictory: red evokes the notion of love, and also its bodily manifestations, lust, passion and sexuality on the one hand, and aggression, violence and blood on the other. Furthermore, when being embarrassed or ashamed, the body often reacts by blushing: "shame impresses upon the body" (Ahmed, *The Cultural* 103), and cheeks turn red. He is locked up within the scarlet cheeks and walls of the room of shame, in a confined space without an exit. The room turns into the prison of the body. On the one hand, it confines, hides and locks up the "malfunctioning" queer body, on the other hand, it is the queer body tied by self-loathing, repression and shame, this "intense and painful sensation ..., a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body" (103).

Fig. 25. The red room of shame (Esztergályos 01:32:42)

Shame also plays a central role in the spatial-affective configuration of the bedroom in *This I Wish And Nothing More*, however, it is not the customer's but the prostitute, Bruno's

shame that is connected to anal sex.[40] While being undressed before the intercourse, he is "flaccid like a doll, his gaze is empty, his body is passive" (Kis, "Abjekció" 141). In an emotionless tone he soliloquizes about how he hates everything connected to gay sex, about his wish to go back to the countryside and be with his wife, and asks the customer to turn off the lights: "Make it dark, I don't want to see myself" (Mundruczó 44:35). His desire to hide even from himself signifies the humiliation he feels about taking a receptive part in anal sex, which is even more emphasised by the bathroom scene described previously in this chapter that follows this scene.

The bedroom as the utmost space of terror, humiliation and destruction appears in *Mandragora*, Grodecki's "highly manipulated and manipulative" (Moss, "Who's Renting" 2) film about teenage prostitution. As the young prostitutes "were forced to surrender their masculinity and sexuality" (Griffiths, "Bodies" 131), mutuality, but even consent is questioned.[41] The depiction of Marek's first night in the sex business leaves no doubt about the lack of his free will and consent to what is done to his body: he is taken to a flat of a stereotypically represented gay man – smug smile, silken robe, feminine gestures – where he is drugged and raped. As he is sitting in an armchair while the customer is surveying him, the pimp is standing behind the chair, looking down upon his objectified body as an evil menace lurking above the innocent "fresh rabbit" (Grodecki 12:25) (Fig. 26.). With the drugs already in his body (consumed unknown by him mixed in his glass of coke) he is ushered into the bedroom, which is depicted like a sex dungeon: a huge bed, mirrors and red light. He loses consciousness and when he comes about, he is being raped: even though he begs the man to stop he finishes "breaking in" the boy.

Fig. 26. The pimp and his victim. (Grodeczki 00:13:45)

[40]The sexual practice of anal sex is central in Bruno's shame, since during other sex scenes, when he is not penetrated, he is not depicted as being ashamed of his occupation.

[41]Although the films are presented as honest depiction of the exploitative sex trade in Prague, Grodecki uses the topic to create a highly homophobic and anti-Western narrative "that serve[s] to enforce "normal" sexuality while demonizing various "abnormal" sexual practices. At the same time they portray these practices as an import from the colonizing capitalist West." (Moss, "Who's Renting" 2)

The exploitative attitude of the commercial sex business transforms another bedroom into a chaotic, abusive and humiliating space: as Marek slides down in the ever-darker circles of prostitution and is cheated of all his earnings, he has no other choice but take part in porn shooting working with the infamous director, Krysa, who uses his own family home as a porn studio (Fig. 27.). As Marek enters the flat, the ambiguity of the place is compressed into one frame: in the foreground, the wife, with a baby on her arm, provides the actors with porn magazines in order to perform an erection, Krysa states that his "film is about fucking" (Grodecki 1:36:40), while in the background two young men are actually fucking in front of a camera. The supposedly nice heteronormative family home is transformed into an exploitative, abusive, objectifying space as a result of Krysa's attitude towards his actors: he treats them as some sort of bio-robots who can get an erection when ordered to, and even though they voice their concerns about HIV, he does not let him use condoms. Furthermore, after the shooting it turns out that one of the actors *has* been infected with the virus, therefore the room gets inscribed with notions of sickness, physical suffering and eventual death.

Fig. 27. The family home as a porn studio. (Grodeczki 01:29:45)

The 2001 British *Endgame* also depicts prostitution as embedded in the underground crime scene, and constructs its prostitute figure as a disempowered, abused, objectified body.[42] The film opens with a montage that creates a sharp contrast between customer and rent boy. The customer – a shady businessman – is depicted as an active, busy person out on the move, surrounded by people who tend to his needs – waiters, his driver, even his family adjust to his schedule –, while Tom is depicted inside a dark flat, smoking on the couch, passively waiting for time to pass. As opposed to the fully clad businessman in a suit, he is only wearing underwear, and the sharp contrast created by lighting emphasises his pretty, muscular body.

[42]The childhood tragedy of the main character – assembled by the flashbacks throughout the film – emphasises his disempowered position and adds a layer of predestination to his position as a prostitute: he was abused by his foster father, his foster mother killed the man for that, and he ended up losing the only family he ever had.

The dark but luxurious flat provides a space for their relationship, which is based on power, ownership and abuse. Tom expresses his situation as follows: "I'm a rent boy. But I only get fucked by one that keeps me upstairs like a trophy." (Wicks 55:48) This is also reflective of their sex scenes: his customer – or rather, owner – treats him like an object, he often beats him, scratches his body, rips off his clothes, without even noticing Tom's painful cries or the anguish on his face. Furthermore, he even forces him to have sex – get fucked – by one of his business (crime) partners, who treats Tom just as badly: he is nothing for them, except for an ass to fuck. As Tom describes it: "Do you know what it's like to be fucked on demand? You're a lump of meat, trash, nothing. You feel your whole body shutting down like a fucked car." (1:42:30) As a result, the flat, and especially the bedroom he is kept in, is inscribed with notions of fear, suffering and oppression. The grey, white and blue colours imprint coldness and a forced emotional distance on the place, while the sharp pink lights in the bedroom evoke the image of a sex dungeon, designed not for the mutual satisfaction of queer desires, but for one-sided, abusive and exploitative power plays.

The affective environment of humiliation and abuse culminates in the outcome of their relationship. In a jealous rage for Tom making friends with his neighbours, the business man tries to rape him. Tom is begging him to let him sleep, to let him go, but he ties up his hands and rips off his trousers. As Tom is fighting for freedom and survival, his perpetrator's head gets knocked in the corner of a table and he falls to the ground, blood drooping from his skull. As he loses his abusive power in death, and becomes an objectified body, Tom proceeds to treat him as he used to treat him: he knocks the body around, beats it and smashes it until he himself is also covered in blood.

While *Mandragora* and *Endgame* present the "oppression paradigm" in relation to prostitution, the British docu-drama, *Greek Pete*, reflects "the empowerment paradigm" in which the "focus is on the ways in which sexual services qualify as work, involve human agency, and may be potentially validating or empowering for workers" (Weitzer 5).[43] A striking difference from the other hustler films is that here they identify as non-heterosexual, furthermore, consistently describe their position as "escorts." They "embody what Unger calls "positive marginality," the experience of persons who learn to take pride in their marginalized status while resisting and redefining the social meanings associated with their group identity" (Koken et al 226). Also, Pete states at the very beginning of the film that he likes escorting

[43] It should be noted that "[b]oth the oppression and empowerment perspectives are one-dimensional and essentialist. While exploitation and empowerment are certainly present in sex work, there is sufficient variation across time, place, and sector to demonstrate that sex work cannot be reduced to one or the other. An alternative perspective, what I call the *polymorphous paradigm*, holds that there is a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and worker experiences." (Weitzer 6, emphasis in the original)

(Haigh 00:46), which sets a different tone for the representation of sexual practices performed on the job. He later emphasises that he is in the business freely, for financial benefits. Since he is depicted as a self-conscious escort, his job does not engulf his whole life, and his professional and personal sex life are visually differentiated in the film, even if he uses the same place, his bedroom, for both. Early in the film we can see him with a client, engaged in penetrative sex, however, the camera keeps a distance from them, it is placed outside the door, and the images are constructed as objective shots; signifying the personal distance within the sexual practice. In contrast, when he is depicted having sex with his boyfriend, the slow-motion images of them touching, kissing and slowly taking off their clothes emphasise the connection and intimacy within their relationship. As opposed to the first sex scene, here the noises and sounds of sex are inaudible, which romanticise the scene. *Greek Pete* depicts how the very same room can be used for professional fucking and gentle love-making as well.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I elaborated on the complex matrix of space, affect and sexual practice. Through reading various examples from both the British and Eastern European context, I pointed out that the films depict an active, multifarious interplay between affectivity, use – and production – of space and sexual practice. I argued that although certain spaces are affected by normative structures, and are expected to trigger certain affective reaction, and therefore predicted to allow for only particular sexual practices, the films depict a more fluid and changing – changeable – relationship between space, affect and sex in relation to self-acceptance, mutuality of desire and pleasure, and consent. Affect, space and sex are represented in these films as inseparated and mutually constitutive of each other.

Chapter 3

Obsolete Fathers and Queer Sons: Masculine Crises and Queer Presence Away from the Metropole

"I'm just here to slog me guts out
cos you're fucking fucked."

(Lee 23:00)

1. Countryside, crisis, queerness

"Fucking fucked." This is how Johnny characterises his father, Martin's situation in a heated conversation in *God's Own Country*. Although the rude words reflect the young farmer's anger and frustration with his own situation, the father's position is truly desperate. His body, his farm and even his family are falling apart. Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst emphasise "the importance of the nuclear family and the uncritical acceptance of rigid and stereotypical gender roles and relations within rural households and rural communities" (96), however, as a result of the father's disability, the centre of this grounding structure is shaken. His wife, Johnny's mother left the family years ago, because she could not cope with the harsh conditions, therefore it is Deirdre, the grandmother, who has to take up the tasks of a wife: she cooks, cleans the house, has a share in tending to the animals and works around the house. Although these roles still comply with the stereotypical gender roles Johnston and Longhurst mention, it should be highlighted that after the father's second stroke during the course of the film, he regresses into a childlike state, and needs assistance with such simple tasks as eating and bathing. The new tasks are taken up by both Johnny and Deirdre, which upsets the traditional assumptions about gender roles and further questions the masculine power of the father: the grandmother now acts as both wife and mother to the same person, while the son has to act as a caring father of his own father. Furthermore, as the only son is a gay man, it is predictable that the traditional family structure, based on biological inheritance and bloodline, will come to an end with his generation.

Johnny's above quoted sentence also reveals that he blames Martin for his own situation: he has to "slog his guts out" because of the disability and inaptitude of the father. Since the father functions as the embodiment of the failing heteronormative structure that infuses the spatio-cultural environment, Johnny's bad feelings towards Martin are symptomatic of his

perception of the homophobic, repressive normative regime, which, although in a state of crisis, still affects his life and puts his queer identity in the closet. Queering this petrified environment – the father's traditional rural masculinity, the decaying farm, the dysfunctional family and the war-zone like representation of the Yorkshire countryside – will become feasible only after the arrival of Gheorghe, the queer, post-communist migrant worker.

In this chapter I focus on how queer presence is represented as reconstructive of the non-metropolitan environment in different cinematic depictions of the two areas. I point out that in both the British and Eastern European socio-cultural and spatial contexts the representations of non-metropolitan areas show signs of masculine crises, which are highlighted and/or reconstructed by queer presence.

Metropolitan areas are frequently perceived and imagined as spaces of opportunity, freedom, liberation, especially in connection with queer experience: gay bars usually can be found in large cities and Pride parades are also mostly organised in capitals and metropoles. Both the Eastern European and British films contrast this queer metropole with a space that is imagined as the opposite of metropolitan geography: the Eastern European films (*Go West* [2005, dir. Ahmed Imamović], *Beyond the Hills* [2013, dir. Cristian Mungiu], *In the Name of* [2013, dir. Małgorzata Szumowska], *Land of Storms* [2015, dir. Ádám Császi]) choose rurality, the countryside as the opposite of the queer metropole, while in the British examples it is Northern, industrial urban areas that stands in contrasted with a sexually more open city.

Although the two different spatial structures the logics behind those binaries show similar characteristics. In connection with rural spaces Johnston and Longhurst argue that

> [a]s opposed to metropolitan areas, [r]ural spaces are often represented as natural or pure spaces, [...]. Rural spaces are frequently epitomized as tranquil and have long being associated with those who wish to be "closer to nature." Life in the country is commonly characterized as providing a space of refuge away from the oppressive spaces of the city. (95)

Furthermore, they point out that– partly as a result of being perceived as connected to nature (and hence, the naturalness, the "biological imperative" attitude towards sex, sexuality and gender) – rural spaces tend to be linked to more traditional structures of gender arrangements: "[t]he persistence of highly traditional attitudes and expectations about masculinity, femininity, and family formations means that heterosexuality has become the dominant norm in many rural spaces" (96). Traditional gender structures also imply the heteronormativity of rural areas, and very often in public discourse and popular representations, the countryside is presumed to be strictly heterosexual, repressive of queer, "decadent" sexualities:

> large cities are often understood as sites of homosexual freedom, affirmation, and inclusivity and places where same-sex desires can be enacted openly. Rural spaces, however, tend to be understood as sites of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender oppression and absence where same-sex desires remain hidden. The urban-rural spatialized imaginary suggests that queers belong in the city, and hence are rendered invisible in the countryside. (105)

However, when contrasted with the presence of queerness – as will be analysed in the cinematic representations – the traditional formations of heterosexuality and binary gender divisions of non-metropolitan areas show severe problems and their viability is strongly questioned. The most severely affected area of the heterosexual matrix is the concept and performance of non-metropolitan masculinity, which "has traditionally been less heterogeneous and more heteronormative than what might be encountered in urban spaces" (Carrington and Scott 651).

James Knowles points out that in public discourse the industrial, working-class North is similarly marginalised and shows similar traits of imagined homogeneity and traditional gender formations. Here, it is the South – and London – that represent the centre, liberation, sexual freedom, sophistication (often associated with gay sexuality), which is contrasted with the harsh, but true, traditional and strong realities of the North (131-5).

All the analysed films that focus on the presence of queerness in non-metropolitan areas, represent local masculinities in crisis, which concept "here is defined as "a moment when observers begin to notice that assumptions about masculinity and expected male behavior are being undercut by circumstance and social psychological changes"" (Gilbert qtd. in Starck and Luyt 432). As "crises have frequently been analyzed as single points of rupture that produce a restructuring of the social and political arena generally, and the gender order specifically" (Starck and Luyt 432), in the following sections I focus on the representations of crisis in non-metropolitan masculinities both in Eastern European and British films, and analyse how the introduction and presence of queerness in these spaces act as a highlighter of masculine crises, and at the same time provide an alternative, a chance to reconfigure the binds of these hegemonic masculinities, which do "not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life" (Connel and Messerschmidt 852), but still act as formative and imperative constructions.

2. Queer in the Eastern European countryside: homophobia, masculinity, crisis

As opposed to the representations of the countryside as a natural or pure space that Johnston and Longhurst talk about, in Eastern European cinema rural spaces and the people that inhabit them "are often on the borders of several worlds: they are at the same time civilised and

uncivilised, human and inhuman, spiritual and instinctual. In short: they incorporate all that carries the binary of familiarity (being civilised) and threatening alienness (wildness)." (Sághy 15) Although the countryside is often depicted as the antithesis of the city, in the Eastern European context – especially in queer-themed films – this contrast constructs rural spaces as "filled with negative connotations" (Csurgó 44). The films in the Eastern European cinematic corpus chosen for analysis in this subchapter often define their relation and to rural space already in their titles: *Land of Storms* (2015, dir. Ádám Császi) positions itself in a specific rural area within Hungary, while *Beyond the Hills* (2013, dir. Cristian Mungiu) outlines its locations more vaguely, but still evoking connotations of the countryside.– *Go West* (2005, dir. Ahmed Imamović), establishes its position in the East-West binary, and *In the Name of* (2013, dir. Małgorzata Szumowska) implies religious connotations.

The films depict the countryside as backward developed, aggressive, highly heteronormative and homophobic, and a container of what is considered traditional masculinity in their cultural contexts. Although the male characters' masculine power is still effective to a certain extent, the films – by representing the dysfunctionality of father figures (the embodiments of traditional masculinity) and heterosexual family units (the institutionalised structure of heteronormativity) also highlight the crisis of such traditional formations. The crisis of masculinity is a recurrent motif in Eastern European cinema, especially after the regime changes. As László Strausz points out, "the trauma of social change impacts on the inflexible masculine identity constructions of post-Wall Eastern Europe in a distinctive way" (209). In these films queer characters are introduced into this spatio-cultural environment as a change, as providers of a new type of masculinity. However, since these characters come from the outside – from the West or from the city – the villagers perceive of them as a threat and regard them as their others, as a compensatory strategy for their own perceived inferior status.

2.1. Representations of rural space

Land of Storms tells the story of a young man, who, rejecting the dream of a Western football career (dreamt by his father) returns to a secluded corner of the Hungarian countryside, moves into his grandfather house in the middle of nowhere, and – together with the house – attempts to rebuild his life. The country house, Szabolcs's heritage, is a ruined, isolated, dirty and abject space, which he intends to refurbish without success. The roof provides no protection from the rain, doors and windows are missing, the only chance to bathe is the well outside the house, and the only "blanket" he gets is the cuddling of a shepherd dog. Furthermore, the Great Plain of Hungary does not symbolise endless freedom and possibilities – as in Hungarian literary

evocations of the region–, instead, it turns into an endless prison and a wasteland of hopelessness. As Kalmár points it out in connection with similar representations of the region: "the plain becomes a prison as well: its infinity, similar to that of the desert, holds no promise of liberation" (*Formations* 12). This is how Szabolcs describes his surroundings after his disappointment in the remote and hidden place: "I am in a house in the middle of nowhere. Completely alone. There is nothing here. It's dark and silent." (Császi 51:07)

Although the Polish film, *In the Name of*, a story of a gay priest who works as a helper in a home for troubled youngsters, sketches an eye-catching picture of the natural scenery surrounding the charity home it is set in, the building, its surroundings and the village are run-down and in constant need of refurbishing. Manual labor, without the utilization of modern technology, is a staple element of the inmates' daily routine. We never see the results though, which suggests that the renovation is a never-ending process, without the hope of achieving a comfortable and modernized infrastructure. The village also fails to support present-day architecture or lifestyle, as houses stand as reminders of the previous century – and previous regime –, they offer little comfort and pleasure either for the viewer or the characters who inhabit them. The whole atmosphere is so grey and sandy that the appearance and bright light of modern technology – a laptop – seems anachronistic within the dim milieu.

The Romanian *Beyond the Hills* takes the temporal lag not only a step further than *In the Name of*, but places its contemporary narrative into a medieval environment (Fig. 28.). Although the story is set in an Orthodox nunnery, the space is deprived of every aspect of modernity in terms of technology, comfort, liberation or gender dynamics: "without electricity or plumbing, they live in a modest way like a rural family…, everyone does their duty, the Pater works in the church, grants absolution, and issues orders, the Mater organises, plans and mediates, and the daughters work with certitude" (Margitházi 47). The bare stone walls, weak candle lights and the strict scripture (mis)interpreted by the priest enclose the women in the absolute past, without any hope for a modern future. In this world the patriarch's word is as sacred and unquestionable as the word of God, creating unlimited authority within the walls of the monastery. Instead of the official –and already ambiguous – "father" they call him "Papa," which is closer in meaning to the English word "daddy" and is certainly more informal, more familial than the official title, emphasising the Patriarch's position as the father figure, the head of the family. What is more, the nuns totally internalise his voice: Voichita, the protagonist, for instance, repeats the patriarch's words about love, faith and forgiveness almost without any change, which signifies how her own, earlier identity vanishes under the inscriptions of the new Voichita, as constructed by the patriarch. This radical change in her personality is emphasised

by Alina, her previous (girl)friend, who – filled with frustration and fear – demands to speak with the "old" Voichita.

Fig. 28. Medieval circumstances in *Beyond the Hills*. (Mungiu (00:09:42)

The barren landscape of rocky mountains without any vegetation, war-stricken ruins of formerly lively villages, and the exploited environment are formative elements of how Ahmed Imamović's *Go West* (2005), "the first film about gayness during the [Yugoslavian civil] war" (Vravnik and Sremac 72) constructs the spatio-cultural image of this part of Eastern Europe. Apart from visual representations of the desolate countryside, two characters verbalise their despair through a condemnatory description of their country. Both emphasize the lack of happiness, peace and development. Milan's father makes harsh criticism about his country: "[t]here is no happiness here. Maybe there would be if we drove away all the Muslims. And that handful of Croats and in the end us Serbs, too. They should exile us all into hell. Then they should populate Bosnia with normal people that will be able to enjoy its beauty" (Imamović 1:04:20). Lunjo, Milan's best friend emphasizes the temporal elements in his critical remarks about the environment: "[w]e're slaughtering each other like in the Middle Ages. Abroad, they're making computer chips. … And where are we? Persecuting each other on hills and forests like we didn't have anything more intelligent to do." (1:29:30)

2.2. Dysfunctional fathers and families

As Ewa Mazierska points out, "after 1989 we also notice a proliferation of 'poisonous fathers' in Polish and Czech cinema, as indeed in the films of other ex-socialist countries – overpowering, cruel or at least authoritarian men who are unable or unwilling to understand their children" (*Masculinities* 127). The rural fathers in the analysed queer-themed films, however, are not just cruel or lack understanding, but are themselves dysfunctional. Not the

omnipotent heads of patriarchy any more, their masculine strength, and especially authenticity is failing.

Maybe the most dominant and powerful father figure is the abbot of the monastery in *Beyond the Hills*. He knows and sees everything that happens in the community, dictates the rules, and there are certain chambers that – according to the dogmas of the Orthodox faith – can be entered exclusively by him. However, as it turns out, he is an inept patriarch. First, the community usually lacks basic supplies such as food and firewood. Second, he fails to carry out a successful exorcism: according to his beliefs, Alina's schizophrenic symptoms are the signs of possession by the devil which can be cured if the devil is driven out of the girl. However, instead of curing her, his inhuman torture, the series of purging and fasting kills Alina. Third, as a result of his disagreements with the leaders of the diocese, their church building remains without consecration, a profane space.

In *Land of Storms* there are two father figures in Szabolcs's life: his German coach, a symbolic father, and his biological father in Hungary. Although the two men are depicted as different in their mentalities, they can be interpreted as the embodiments of the same idea of fathering. As opposed to mothering, the term fathering usually only refers to the conception of a child, and lacks the caring overtones attached to the former. The two fathers exemplify a strong, ruthless, insensitive and intolerant attitude to youngsters, however, neither succeeds. The German coach fails to turn Szabolcs into a professional footballer, partly because of his cruel and humiliating coaching methods that prompt Szabolcs to return to Hungary and give up professional football altogether. His biological father is no less a failure. First, we learn that the professional football career was his and not his son's choice. The father's self-pity dominates his paternal attitudes, and his failure as a coach (of a nameless local team in a nameless football league) is amplified by Szabolcs's eventual rejection of football. He is equally unsuccessful in preventing his son's love affair with Áron, the village boy. Although he catches the two boys sleeping in each other's arms in Szabolcs's run-down house and grabs his son by the hair to take him home, after a quarrel he stops the car and lets him go. His tense silence is not a sign of accepting his son's decision, but the inability to prevent it.

The paradox of power and the crisis of masculinity are most pronounced and prominent in the figure of the village priest in *Go West* (Fig. 29.). On the one hand, he proclaims and prescribes what positions, worldviews, belief systems, and social structures people should stick to. His discourse is highly normative, xenophobic and violent. He excludes (or rather excommunicates) anyone who dares to differ from the norm. Although he represents a religious

institution, which advocates turning inward, to God and the holy scripture, most of his religious speeches are filled with aggressive nationalistic jingoism, violence, destruction and the propagation of war. In his character (sexual) normativity, religion and nationalism are intertwined, and he represents the "religio-sexual nationalisms [which] are organized around erotic discourse, heteronormativity, patriarchal (often militarized) masculinity, heterosexual hegemony and the gendered order of society" (Vravnik and Sremac 73). He is voice of authority in the rural community, which is further emphasised by the constant, unbroken silence of his permanent helper, a nun. It is impossible either to disagree with him or silence him; the only way to evade his hate-ridden preaching is to leave the church or close one's ears. For instance, the protagonist's father, Ljubo, leaves the church when he cannot cope anymore with the aggressive nationalism of the priest, and when his son is killed in the Yugoslav Wars, he forbids the priest to perform the burial ceremony. It is impossible to escape from the priest's fanaticism as his voice, his presence is echoed by religious music playing and church bells ringing in the background of many scenes.

On the other hand, his body is vulnerable, impotent and physically dysfunctional. We do not know the cause of his paralysis, but he is repeatedly and exclusively portrayed as having a destroyed body, capable of speaking, but not moving. His disability is emphasised by a recurrent scene in the film: as he is incapable of walking, he has to be lifted up to the local church (standing on top of cliff) sitting in his wheelchair, using a pair of rails and a winch; manually. The film emphasis the strenuosity of this process by long, uncut scenes that portray his whole, slow journey up the hill. It is not the villagers who help him reach his culprit on top of the hill, but a nun, a silent, bat-like figure, whose only function in the film is to secure the superior position of the priest. Although broken at his core, the priest has not lost the symbolic power of language and discourse.

The nuclear family, as a basic unit of heteronormativity is also in close association with rural spaces, as Jo Little contends: "[t]he association between the family and the rural community has always been very strong; the sense of friendliness, honesty, supportiveness, tradition etc. celebrated as part of the rural community being frequently linked to the survival of the family" (368). Similarly to father figures, the family is also depicted as dysfunctional, or even non-existent in the films, none of which present a happy, functional or even complete family.

Fig. 29. The village priest and his helper. (Imamović 00:19:15)

In the case of *Land of Storms* and *Go West*, mothers are missing: we know nothing about Szabolcs's or Milan's mother, yet their lack is felt as a haunting cavity in the fabric of the traditional family. Furthermore, when the mother is present, as in the case of Áron, the other central figure of *Land of Storms*, she is chronically ill and permanently needs his son's help: she is depicted as a burden, as if she were the dysfunctional heritage or the morbid consequence of the patriarchal crisis burdening the son's future. The domestic space is also symbolic, most significantly in Szabolcs's case: when attending the Sunday service, the father locks up the still sleeping son in the family house, who after waking up leaves the house through the balcony as if escaping from a prison. Furthermore, in *Go West*, the only mother figure present in the village is Ranka, the "witch" who eventually causes Milan's death and Kenan's suffering.

Beyond the Hills and *In the Name of* approach the dysfunctionality of the family through its lack. *In the Name of* is set in a home for troubled youngsters and young adults with unexplained family backgrounds. Although the newly transferred priest attempts to create a familial atmosphere founded on caring, "the characters almost unnoticeably cross the hardly perceptible, but always corporeal limits of masculine bonding, playfulness and teasing" (Gyenge 32) and become violent. The monastery in *Beyond the Hills* also functions as a sanctuary hardly better than the orphanage where the two protagonists grew up. Both places come through in the film as founded on discipline and fear rather than nurturing love.[44]

[44] Although Alina's foster family could provide a positive example of a supporting family, Alina decides to leave them in order to force herself into the role of a nun, only to live with Voichita in the monastery. Seemingly her

2.3. Queering the countryside?

Even though the films themselves depict the countryside as a backward, bleak and highly heteronormative space, the queer characters move into these areas searching for peace and a place of their own. They seem to perceive rurality in a different light than the films' representations: the countryside seen as a reminiscent of the past is only one attitude in public discourse about rural spaces. As Bernadett Csurgó emphasises, the countryside is a discursive construct made up of different perceptions: "[o]ne of them views the countryside as the remnant of the past. According to the other, the countryside is a haven of peace and safety as opposed to the uncertainties of urban spaces." (51) The queer characters' approach towards rural spaces is closer to the second one, which looks at the countryside from a more idealising and romanticising perspective. Mostly, these characters regard rural spaces as a blank canvas, ready for their dreams and visions.

The visual styles of the films and images of rural spaces in these films certainly employ the first attitude. However, In *Land of Storms*, Szabolcs attempts to use the secluded region of the Hungarian countryside as a space for cleansing and developing a more authentic identity. He believes that his native village (or rather its outskirts) can provide a safe and harmonious environment for such development. He approaches the wild rurality in a different way than the film does and he believes it to be the land of endless possibilities and a natural state of existence.[45] The film signals this in its visual style. Images are usually darkened by grey and pale brown shades, and a dull and bleak immobility signifies the film's approach to rural space. However, when around his bees – Szabolcs starts keeping bees and hopes to make a living as a bee farmer– the images are dominated by sunshine, green leaves and the vitality of buzzing bees.

Even when the movement towards rural spaces is not entirely voluntary, protagonists show a great degree of ignorance towards the complexities of rural spatio-cultural politics. In the case of *Go West*, for instance, the motivation, or rather, force, that drives Kenan and Milan to the latter's native village is the chaos and menace of the civil war. Yet, the two gay men truly believe that the village will be a safe hiding place before they proceed to the desired destination: Western Europe. Although they are aware of the strong heteronormativity of the village –

foster-parents care about her and try to make her stay, the fact that they have already got a new girl to fill Alina's place, and Alina's comments about how she had to pay rent while living there, and her warning to the new girl about how the foster-parents will try and rip her off, undermine the possibly positive image.

[45] Csurgó also calls attention to how the idealising attitude towards the countryside is complemented with the notions of "stillness, peace of mind and soul, being close to nature and belonging to a community" (52).

Kenan is dressed as a woman and is introduced as Milan's fiancé – they fail to recognise another characteristic of rural life: the strong sense of belonging to a community, where it is impossible to keep secrets. For a short time, their plan seems to succeed, but Kenan's camouflage is inevitably recognised.

The central character of *In the Name of* does not move to the village as a result of his free will either: as a priest, he follows the orders of his superiors, what is more, it is implied in the film that his transfer to this marginalised rural space is an attempt of the Church to hide him and his previous exposures as a gay man. As opposed to the film's approach to rural space as a futureless and hopeless void, the priest makes an effort to make the most of it: on the one hand, he becomes a caring father figure who attends to the needs of the boy in the institution. On the other hand, he also uses the space for penitence. His struggle with his homosexuality is pronounced throughout the film, and he –unlike Szabolcs, who hopes to liberate himself from past constraints –chooses to repress his sexuality not only as a duty of celibacy, but as a part of his identity strategy.[46] As a recurring motif, he jogs in the in the forest near the village, which is filled with complex meanings. It is clearly an act of penitence, and evokes medieval monks' self-inflicted tortures, such as metal cilices or flogging, for the extreme punishment of the body. However, especially because of the enhanced corporeal experience, it also becomes an attempt to reconnect with the body, which is in sharp contrast with attempts to completely repress sexuality. Furthermore, it is in the very same forest that he and his love interest, Humpty, first connect intimately: he teaches the boy to swim in the lake.[47] Paradoxically, the rural space – both the village and the forest – becomes a space of facing his sexual otherness.

Both the negative and the more idealising attitudes towards rurality are present in *Beyond the Hills*. Alina, the emigrant girl returning from Germany, views the peripheral monastery a remnant of the past, while Voichita, the inhabitant of this space approaches it as a shelter. It must be emphasised that her staying there is not an act of free will: although she decides to become a nun of the strict institution, her circumstances never really offered her another choice. Lacking a family (both girls are previous residents of an orphanage), financial stability and a supporting community, Voichita chooses the monastery as her only resort, and her perceptions of the place as being safe and providing a substitute family are shaped by her being grateful for having a place to live. In contrast, Alina, who comes back to "rescue" her

[46]Instead of giving up the chance of sexuality in the bodily sense, he tries to leave behind sexuality as part of one's identity.

[47]Although the age gap between the priest and his love interest might seem improper for some, I must emphasise that Humpty is clearly not underage, therefore neither the film nor its central character is connected to paedophilia.

(girl)friend from this place, cannot pretend not seeing the unbearable aspects of the monastery, its bareness reminiscent of medieval religious prisons, where inhabitants –especially the Father – attempts to hide Voichita away from her. Even though she comes from the same background as Voichita, she sees the establishment as a prison for women without a choice.[48]

As a result of their failure to recognize the complexities of rural space, most characters more or less consciously attempt to queer the rural space, in other words, use it in a markedly different way, disregarding or ignoring the "reality" of the countryside, a matrix of multiple and very often irreconcilably opposing layers of discourses and practices inscribed upon each other. As they dream about temporal or permanent happiness in queer relationships, their struggle to transform the space, their direct revolt against or resistance to patriarchy and heteronormativity, and their disregard for the stratified nature of space usually ends in tragedy. They forget that "[t]he space in which we live in […] is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, […] we live inside a set of relations." (Foucault 23) Both the films –by representing negative aspects of rural space –and the queer characters who approach this space as a blank canvas with their dreams, repressions, frustrations and cultural-sexual politics painted on it forget that the "reality" of the countryside is not equal to the sum of urban discourses about it. They leave aside how urban discourses about the countryside, the awareness present in rural space about these discourses, and rurality's own discursive practices create a space with its own dynamics, mechanisms and frustrations. Instead of approaching this complexity as a "heterogeneous space" the films and their characters pick specific layers and remove them from the stratified context of rural space, therefore treat it as a two-dimensional embodiment of either ruthless patriarchy or an idealised familial community which the sexual others attempt to reformulate, or restructure on a social and spatio-cultural level.

Due to the queer characters' ignorant intrusion into the village space, their arrival and presence are perceived by the inhabitants as a threat. Since the rural position is already discerned as inferior, and in crisis, they pass on their own frustration and treat the queer characters as their own others, as a compensational strategy for their marginalisation and peripheral position in relation to mainstream society. As Madina Tlostanova puts it: "[t]hose who are unhappy with their place (which is the case of many postsocialist Eastern European countries reduced to service states) are frightened to think of losing this precarious position or being associated with those who are still lower in the hierarchy of humanity" ("Postcolonial"

[48]It is emphatic in the film that most nuns or would-be-nun chose this place because they have nowhere else to go; their motivations vary from violent husbands through financial bleakness to having nothing and nobody in the world.

30). The new inhabitants represent different politics of gender and sexuality, and are perceived of in the homophobic villages of the films as occupying an even more marginalised position in society than the geographical and cultural periphery of rural spaces. Therefore they are an "ideal" target group of victimization and othering, or – as Tlostanova asserts – for "projecting their humiliation onto those who are still weaker and more dependent" ("Postcolonial" 40). Apart from being perceived as even lower in socio-cultural hierarchy, the attempts of queering rural space are also considered and experienced as threats to the already failing masculinity and patriarchy of rural spaces.

The films depict different instances of this restructuring, which usually end in tragedies, and even in "milder" cases in the repression or rejection of homosexuality as a result of their ignorance of certain elements of rural complexity. In *Beyond the Hills* Alina cannot and does not want to comprehend the forces that drove the inhabitants of the monastery to the decision of living as nuns, furthermore, she deliberately refuses any kind of cooperation with the abbot or the nuns, she neglects their religious beliefs, lacks the understanding of the reasons behind the women's desperate decisions to move into the monastery, and considers her own behaviour as a war for the liberation of the trapped Voichita. As a result, Alina (and sexual otherness) is experienced and interpreted by the religious community as the temptation of the devil. Furthermore, she develops symptoms of schizophrenia, which is the others perceive as possession by the devil himself. Therefore, she is subjected to exorcism. As she is trying to protect herself, her legs and hands are chained to boards, which – unnoticed by the inhabitants of the monastery – create a cross. After three days of starvation, thirst and torture, Alina dies on this cross, on the threshold of the religious and the secular worlds.

Religion and religious symbolism are also central to Szabolcs's death in *Land of Storms*, where he is stabbed with a splinter of glass by his lover, Áron on his side, just like the crucified Jesus by the soldier, who wanted to make sure he was dead. However, here it is not only religion that plays a part in his tragedy: he rather becomes an expiatory offering for the insulted heteronormativity of the village. Áron does not kill Szabolcs for religious beliefs, but because the rural community puts him under immense pressure, and it is them that he is compelled to conciliate. Yet, "Agnus Dei," the Christian ritualistic music of sacrificial offering, playing during the scene of Szabolcs's death, transforms him into the sacrificial lamb killed to propitiate heteronormativity.

In *Go West* religion is only one factor in play in ensuing tragedy, and the complex stratified nature of rural space becomes visible. First of all, the film depicts how Ranka, the

"village witch" performs pagan-like rituals to curse Milan to death, which is in sharp contrast with institutionalised religion be that Christianity or Islam. The visuality of these rituals is also radically different from the religious sermons carried out by the village priest. The church and occasionally the cemetery are depicted as well-constructed, public spaces with a recognisable authority figure. As opposed to that, Ranka's ceremony is represented as being performed at night, in an unrecognisable space. The whole sequence is like a nightmare from a horror film, the source of light in the background is unidentifiable, which gives an unearthly atmosphere to the images. Apart from that, everything is dark, forms and figures only appear as shades. Kenan's tragedy is also caused by Ranka, who, after learning that the young man will never be "hers" since he loves Milan, castrates him next to Milan's grave. [49]

Although it might seem that religion – or religious faith – have a lot to do with the tragedy of the two men, Kenan emphasises at the beginning of the film:

> The Serbs who are of Orthodox religion, hate Muslims. The Muslims of faith don't like the Serbs. The Croats also live there, they're Catholic, sometimes they like Muslims, mostly they don't. […] But this will end some day. They will lay down the guns and forget about the massacres. But they will continue to hate homosexuals as before. (Imamović 01:35)

In other words, it is not his religious difference (Kenan being Muslim) that turns him into a victim of physical assault and mutilation, but his sexual otherness. This marginal rural space might tolerate religious otherness under cover, but it does not allow for sexual otherness. As Kenan puts it, "on the Balkans it is easier to bear if someone in the family is a murderer rather than a faggot" (02:27). Homosexuality is the limit of tolerance and acceptance, it is too great of a transgression to be endured.

The preservation of sexual otherness in the countryside without tragedy seems to be possible only in the narrative of *In the Name of*, however the priest's strategy has its own limits. After his semi-self-acceptance and coming out to his sister via Skype, we can see him in the next scene leading the Pentecostal march. Although from a queer point of view it might be interpreted as a regressive, surrendering movement, it seems that the priest's strategy outlined in this scene is the only method of queering rural space that has a chance of avoiding tragedy in the heart of wounded patriarchal masculinities. On the one hand it is an attempt of the priest to channel his individual crisis into a communal form, since the rural population is present here as a community. On the other hand, this marching community consists of people who are

[49]She discovers that Kenan is a man, but fails to recognise his homosexuality, therefore she imagines that with Milan dead, she might be able to keep Kenan for herself.

marginalised, put on the periphery of society either as a result of geographical, cultural, financial distances or sexual difference: I interpret this scene as a specifically Eastern European Pride March (Fig. 30.). What is most stunning at first in connection with the scene is the discrepancy between images and music. Instead of religious songs traditionally sung by people during such marches, the scene has extradiegetic music: a rock ballad, a secular song. As a result, the original, religious meaning of the march –celebrating Christ's ascent to heaven –is distanced from the spatial and cultural environment. We could also say that the religious tones of the march are silenced. What remains is a march decorated with flags and people's best clothes, led by a man with concealed homosexuality, who is followed by people marginalised for different reasons. It is significant that right before this scene the priest acknowledges his homosexuality in front of a close kin, which – although concealed from the village-community– is transferred into this next scene as well. I argue that this scene represents the priest's utterly intimate, hidden and secretive relation to and also reinterpretation of space and culture. This "pride march" loses its political, resistive and revolutionary edge (which lead to deaths in the other analysed films), and cannot be interpreted as an act of public coming out. Instead of revolting against the established power structures and normative practices, this Eastern European pride march offers an intimate and private connection with space, and results in a split consciousness, nearing schizophrenia, which is also visualised during the scene. As he is carrying the monstrance, it covers half of his face (Fig. 31.). In other words, religion and patriarchy, are inscribed upon his body, emphatically, upon his face, the primary signifier of identity and subjectivity. It is only in these short moments when re-interpretation of established practices and meanings is possible: the priest most probably will not change anything in the course of heteronormativity, his secret self-accepting moments cannot be communicated to the public, however, as opposed to the other films, tragedy seems avoidable.

Fig. 30. A special Pride March. (Szumowska 01:21:29)

Fig. 31. A split consciousness. (Szumowska 01:19:52)

3. Queering coal and steel: masculine crises and queer presence in three British films

The three selected British films that link the ideas of masculine crisis and queerness – *The Full Monty* (1997, dir. Peter Cattaneo), *Billy Elliot* (2000, dir. Stephen Daldry) and *Pride* (2014, dir. Matthew Warchus) – being set in industrial, Northern areas, define the spatial binary of urban/rural along the opposites of North vs. South, industrial towns vs. London and industrial vs. service sectors. Furthermore, they are all connected to the deindustrialisation and massive scale unemployment that resulted from Margaret Thatcher's reforms of the British economy. As Ewa Mazierska points out, "[t]he 1980s profoundly changed the political and economic situation in Britain. The victory of Margaret Thatcher resulted in a worsening of the position of the working class due to high unemployment, following factory closures, mostly in the North, and an erosion of workers' rights by curbing the power of trade unions." ("Introduction" 20). Darren Nixon also notes the consequences of Thatcher's economic reforms, and adds that it was primarily male unemployment that resulted from factory closures: "[d]eindustrialization (particularly during the 1980s and 1990s) and the continued globalization of production have resulted in large-scale male job losses in the manufacturing and extractive industries, and a falling demand for skilled, and particularly semiskilled and unskilled, male manual labour (Alcock et al. 2003; Nixon 2009)" (53). Therefore, what might seem at first a strictly economic or industrial issue, is actually highly gendered. Since "[w]aged employment [was] identified as a core element in the social construction of a masculine identity" (McDowell 3, referring to Connel), the economic reforms and the resulting unemployment crisis brought with itself an identity crisis, traditional values of masculinity proved to be unsustainable, and had to be re-constructed, re-structured and re-formed.

The three analysed films offer a new type, or formation, of masculinity as a liveable and sustainable replacement after the shaken working-class masculinity of the pre-Thatcher era. *The Full Monty*, *Billy Elliot* and *Pride* represent the crisis of traditional masculinity, and show how a queered construction of masculinity – adopting behaviour patterns that used to be considered as queer by hegemonic masculinities – is more adaptable to the changed circumstances, what is more, how this queered masculinity is offered by the films as a chance for survival for these broken, shaken, suffering men. However, even if the films, through their happy endings, gleam an image of a queered, viable masculinity, I argue that it is only a fantasy: although on the level of individuals, small groups, the queer solution seems successful for a moment, the concept of traditional, working-class masculinity cannot be "queered out" of its crisis.

3.1. Obsolete fathers

The films focus on a specific construction of masculinity that is defined with regard to space, time and class: Northern, industrial, working-class masculinity; the foundation of which is, obviously, having paid employment, which not only gives the breadwinner status to men, but "provide[s them] with independence, economic and symbolic power, and status" (Nixon 56). However, male unemployment in the wake of Thatcherite reforms "disturb[ed] one of the most pervasive and longstanding social 'norms' of industrial society—the male breadwinner/female homemaker/caregiver ideology" (54). All three films emphasise these spatial, temporal and class-related aspects of the masculine constructions they depict, furthermore, they represent the crisis, obsoleteness and unviability of this type of masculinity.

The Full Monty is set in Sheffield or the "Steel City" characterised by its steel industry, which – as it is emphasised in the opening sequence of the film – turned the city into "the jewel in Yorkshire's crown" (Cattaneo 00:49). The opening of the film emphasises the spatial specificity of the (masculine) crisis it depicts:

> *The Full Monty*'s opening credits are played over a promotional film from the 1970s advertising Sheffield's great virtues. These optimistic images of a modern, vibrant city are then rapidly followed by a cut to 'reality': derelict factories, empty steel mills and the town's proud history reduced to a works' brass band (but with no works and no workers!) (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 128).

The once blooming Sheffield is 25 years later only an abject space, characterised by dirt, wrecks and abandoned factory buildings.

Although the protagonist, Gary (Gaz) Schoefield, struggles to maintain the image of a "macho man" (Djundjung and Irawan 14) which used to characterise his idea(l)s of masculinity

as a working man – approaching women with an explicitly sexual, cat-calling style, whistling after them, objectifying them as scores on a scale –, in reality he has difficulties in all areas of his life. He loses all the pillars that used to hold up traditional, working-class masculinity:

> [i]n industrial societies, 'real men' defined themselves in three ways. Firstly, they earned money in the public work force and supported their families through that effort (the man as provider and breadwinner). Secondly, they (should) have had formal power over women and children in those families (the man as head of the house). And finally, 'real men' were unquestionably heterosexual. (Lemon 62)

First of all, as an unemployed man, he cannot afford basic comfort in his living conditions: his flat (on rare occasions when he is shown being there) is depicted as a confining, shabby, tiny apartment; and, as it turns out from his son's complaints, heating is a luxury that is often unaffordable for Gaz. Furthermore, although it is only implied by the film, his divorce can be assumed to be a result of his loss of employment, emphasised by his ex-wife's new partner, a moderately well-to-do, middle-class man, with a stable job, income, and a comfortable house for the family.

His divorce already connects to the second aspect of Lemon's definition of 'real men,' signifying that after becoming unemployed, he also lost control over the woman in his family. Furthermore, his partial power over the one child he has – his right to see his son – is also threatened, because of his inability to pay the monthly child allowance. However, it is not exclusively the lack of money that endangers his connection to his son. As a desperate father, he encourages, even forces, his son to take part in all the activities he does, because he cannot imagine other ways of spending quality time with the boy. For example, he takes Nathe with himself when they try to steal some steel from their old, now closed-down company, but the boy resists these patterns of masculine survival: he asks his father "[c]an't we do normal things sometimes?" (Cattaneo 03:37), and when Gaz insists on the normality of these activities, Nathe simply leaves. The boy's embarrassment and frustration with the old but now struggling formations of masculinity are emphatic throughout the film, and affect their father-son relationship negatively.[50]

Apart from these basic aspects of working-class masculinity – which are mostly related to earning money through physical labour – Nixon points to other, more nuanced aspects of maintaining manliness: being masculine in such a context, according to him, means "holding male values and following male behavioural norms . . . male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill,

[50]The third pillar in Lemon's definition, heterosexuality, will be analysed later in the chapter.

group solidarity, adventure and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body" (56). Although Gaz and the other characters still possess some of these – such as courage, aggression, adventure and solidarity – their mental, and most emphatically bodily toughness is seriously questioned in *The Full Monty*. As opposed to the fantasy of "the musclebound male body [that] carries on it the badge of labor" (Farrel 121), male bodies in the film are all emphatically *ordinary* (Fig. 32). All of them are either too skinny or too fat, or simply just too old to provide aesthetic pleasure on the one hand and the sensation of masculine strength on the other. The camera lingers on their half-naked, often clumsy, bodies for the viewer to muse on their ordinariness. Not by chance, being forced to face their own bodies generates issues with their self-perception for most of them. On top of that, Dave develops impotence, Gerald lies to his wife for six months about losing his job and Lomper at one point even tries to kill himself. These male bodies are

> never permitted to be safe or even comfortable. It is instead suspended in a state of subjective uncertainty. No longer able to cling to the boat of traditional male identity formation, the male body in *The Full Monty* is a social castaway. […] the male body belongs nowhere and is left to inhabit the old steel factory, a deserted island of disused, unwanted space. (Farrel 120)

Dislocation, the lack of a fully-possessed, safe space is another loss the men in *The Full Monty* have to face. After the loss of their industrial, manual jobs, they are expected to tackle a feminised job market, taking on service-sector jobs that are coded as feminine (Nixon 63). Furthermore, apart from "[w]omen's growing economic independence and the 'feminization' of the work space" (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 132), the men of *The Full Monty* are deprived of their masculine space, the Working Man's Club, since it is appropriated by women as the venue of a Chippendale performance, which "generates extreme anxiety for the men" (Farrel 120).

Fig. 32. Ordinary male bodies. (Cattaneo 00:44:04)

Billy Elliot and *Pride* are both set in coal mining areas (Durham Coalfield in *Billy Elliot*, South Wales in *Pride*) during the miners' strike in 1984-1985, which "was probably the most outstanding example of the painful and bitter social, economic and political readjustment of Britain under Thatcher-governments, which eventually led to the defeat of the unions and the closure of almost all British collieries" (Kalmár, *Post-Crisis* 117). As the industry was solely built on mining, the survival of these places was at stake. Both films depict the poverty that resulted from the Thatcherite restructuring by representing the sombre living conditions, and the violence that characterised the strike by incorporating images of the clashes between desperate striking miners and policemen on the picket line.

The embodiment of the "traditional" working class masculinity in *Billy Elliot* is Billy's father: he "clearly belongs to the world of "old, industrial man", the working-class version of the breadwinner type, "made redundant by the decimation of the heavy industry" (Beynon 105)" (Kalmár, *Post-Crisis* 120-1). His take on sport is a telling summary of how he sees the issue of masculinity: according to him, ballet is "for girls. Not lads, Billy. Lads do football or boxing or wrestling." (Daldry 27:25) In accordance with this statement, he pushes Billy to take boxing lessons even though he is not talented and does not even enjoy the training, and forbids him doing ballet which he loves. Symbolically, Billy's boxing gloves used to belong to the father, who inherited them from his father, denoting a form of masculine lineage, or the genealogy of masculinity. However, his generation belongs to a "world where men are "useless" (as Tony, the elder brother declares of their father) or "made redundant" (as Debbie says of her own father, Mr. Wilkinson), [...] where the miners' strike is defeated, ordinary men are beaten and humiliated by the police" (Kalmár, *Post-Crisis* 120). In terms of money, power and family structure his situation is similar to Gaz's in *The Full Monty*.

Since he is a proud worker on strike, his financial situation is increasingly sombre as the strike progresses. At the beginning of the film, it is "only" their shabby, cramped flat that signifies their financial instability. Later on, however, as the winter comes, the Christmas scene – with a proper meal as a Christmas gift – accentuates their difficult position. An even more striking scene is when the father cuts their old piano into pieces, because they ran out of firewood. Although his suffering for a cause could be interpreted in a positive light – as for instance *Pride* represents the miners' cause and their shared struggle with their families – in *Billy Elliot* it is the family's (especially Billy's) unwanted suffering that is emphasised, and the father is represented as a poverty-stricken man, who loses his ability to financially support his family.

Apart from the "breadwinner" status, the father's position within the family also reflects the crisis of masculinity he represents. After his wife's death – which in itself creates an incomplete family – his unprocessed trauma of losing her results in his inability to express or communicate emotions, as the traditional masculine attitude connects the open display of feeling as a sign of weakness. His only method of communication is violence and aggression. Parenting usually involves shouting commands at Billy, without talking or reasoning, he refuses to bend even when proven wrong, and at one point he even hits Billy, who reacts by running away from home. As David Alderson explains:

> [r]ather, and in a way that is definitive of his masculinity, his feelings are repressed, returning frequently as peremptory, inarticulate, and even violent attempts to assert his patriarchal authority over both Billy and Tony. In the same scene in which he first expresses his scepticism, he issues a blunt injunction to the piano-playing Billy to "shut it." But his authoritarianism is unstable — he is actually losing control (6)

His loss of masculine authority is severe with both his older and younger son. He cannot even control his older son, who is more incorporated into the traditional style of masculinity. Tony, the older brother engages in violence during the strike, and the father, trying to protect his son from prison, attempts to stop him from violence. However, his only way of action is more violence: he hits Tony when he tries to sneak out of their flat during one night, however, it is in vain – he leaves anyway (and is later caught by the police). As for Billy, no matter how he forbids ballet, grounds him, shouts at him or beats him, Billy's dedication to dance cannot be contained and repressed by the old, restrictive, heteronormative construction of masculinity.

The miners in *Pride* are in similar circumstances as in *Billy Elliot*. However, as *Pride* is a romanticising heritage film about the bond of solidarity that developed between the queer and the miner community, apart from a few examples of archival footage about violence and aggression between striking miners and the deployed police force, and some additional scenes with the characters demonstrating and bumping heads with police officers, the realist tone of *Billy Elliot* in terms of violent clashes is absent, and it is the hardships of poverty that is accentuated in the film. As the strike progresses, the state of the Welsh village declines. During their winter visit, LGSM (Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners) are taken aback with gloveless, cold children, cut-off heat supplies, Bingo for a tin of beef and the broken van of the mining community. From this perspective *Pride* does not hide how the old formations of masculinity proved to be unsustainable, as the men lose their role as breadwinners of the family, they are forced to accept their women's – and the queer community's (scandalous) – help, which is in sharp contrast with the traditional gender roles of the working-class community.

3.2. Dancing and queering

It is evident in all three films that this type of working-class masculinity became obsolete, and the necessity of its re-formulation is indispensable. As Gaz in *The Full Monty* puts it: "[a] few years and men won't exist. Except in a zoo or summat. We're not needed no more, are we? Obsolete. Dinosaurs. Yesterday's news." (Cattaneo 10:14) Although his sentences are filled with spite against change and yearning for the "good old times," he does touch upon the gist of the masculine crisis depicted in the films. The obsolete form of hetero-patriarchal working-class masculinity has to be restructured into a more flexible, more adaptable construction. Although queer individuals and communities are present in all three films as a catalyst for change, surprisingly, it is dancing that plays a central role in queering the obsolete masculinity of the workers. In *The Full Monty* it is striptease, in *Billy Elliot* ballet, and in *Pride* a casual, social form of dancing that provides a chance for restructuring old masculine behaviour and for adopting new masculine patterns. As Clare Croft explains, dance in itself has a queer potential:

> [d]ance, with its poetic porosity and generative failure to convey direct meaning, engages productively and provocatively with queer's slippery, shapeshifting sensibility. Bodies never do one thing or mean one thing. By embracing a messy, heterogeneous, even possibly contradictory queer, dance forges community, not in spite of, but through and with challenges and contradictions. (10)

According to working-class masculinity, as described by the characters, dance is considered to be feminine, and therefore, in sharp contrast with masculine values, since "dominant notions of masculinity [...] continue to be based on their differentiation from an inferior 'Other.' For men, women are the classic Other and to be masculine is to be not feminine, not a woman." (McDowell 19) However, dance is not only interpreted as feminine – and therefore emasculating – but as a queer threat to masculinity: dancing men are viewed as inherently "gay." In *The Full Monty*, when Gaz first sees the posters about the Chippendale performance in town, he calls the dancers "poofs" and jokes about how they must have a "tiny willy." Similarly, when Billy Elliot's father realises his son's love for ballet, at the core of his rage there is a panic-like fear that his son might be gay. We can see how even Billy incorporates these notions, as it is the ballet teacher's daughter, who explains to him that not all male ballet dancers are gay:

> Billy: What boys do ballet?
> Debbie: Nobody around here, but plenty of men do.
> B: Poofs.
> D: Not necessarily poofs. (Daldry 15:03)

In *Pride* it is a social, casual dance and not a staged performance that has the same effect in the end, but is viewed as "prancing about" at first (Warchus 43:16).

Furthermore, apart from embracing a type of movement that used to be considered "unmasculine," "feminine," "gay", the queering potential of dance comes from the fact that it offers a new way of using the male body, a new form of "embodiment [that] is a crucial part of their masculinity" (McDowell 13). Nixon points out the relationship between working class masculinity and how workers use their bodies: "[t]he use of the body as a tool within the labour process has been a defining aspect of low-skilled working-class men's work and has served to reinforce the masculine nature of manual work, and the masculine nature of the workers who performed it (McDowell 2003; Cockburn 1988)" (Nixon 59). This practical, even pragmatist approach to the male body is in sharp contrast with the fluidity of dancing bodies. Croft warns that "too often we talk of the body as an instrument or machine, disregarding the myriad ways bodies produce and respond to pleasure, desire, and normalizing forces" (15). In all three films it is this new kind of movement, new approach to the use of the male body that offers a different construction of masculinity and a chance for survival. *The Full Monty*, *Billy Elliot* and *Pride* depict three distinctive experiences and effects of dancing, but at the core of each there is a probability of queering the obsolete working-class masculinity that is in crisis.

In *The Full Monty* it is a highly staged and sexualised form of dancing, striptease, that serves as a means of queering the old type of working class masculinity. Its subverting potential is already emphasised by the way Gary and Dave first encounter this type of performance: as their Working Men's Club is appropriated by women for the night of the Chippendale performance, Gary sneaks in and peeps at the enthusiastic women through the door of men's toilets (see Farrel 120). Although at first they strictly distance themselves from this queer activity, they realise its financially fruitful potentials and decide to enter the market with their own show, which provides a sharp contrast with the old masculine norms. First of all, by becoming male strippers, they enter the service sector, which they used to strictly refuse as a potential career opportunity. Instead of using their bodies to create tangible, steel products, their bodies become the products. As a result, they have to face their own imperfect bodies, which is also symbolic in connection with their troubled masculinities, and learn to accept them to be able to go on stage.

Furthermore, with their transformation into striptease dancers, the power structures around the gaze also change (Fig. 33.). Even prior to the performance itself, as the news about their upcoming show leaks when they are arrested for indecent exposure during their rehearsal,

they become the targets of unwanted comments – the opposite of their earlier cat-calling behaviour. On the stage, the reversal of subject-object positions is even more explicit: "*The Full Monty* re-presents Mulvey-esque ocular arrangements through a portrayal of conventional structures of looking but then attempts to circumvent and confuse these structures by its placement of the male body in previously feminized subject positions" (Farrel 122).

Fig. 33. Changed power structures of the gaze. (Cattaneo 01:23:39)

The attempt at restructuring – queering –the old type of masculinity through dancing culminates in their final performance, where they do go for the full monty. Both literally and symbolically, they seem to embrace a new construction of masculinity: dancing gives a radically different experience and use of the male body, which proves to be empowering. They are able to proudly display their vulnerable, imperfect male bodies and receive tremendous appreciation from the women of the community, regain (even if only temporarily) their financial independence, and obtain a new kind of masculine empowerment.

In the case of *Billy Elliot,* it is a generational conflict, and two different – opposing – concepts of masculinity that are confronted through the issue of ballet, the femininity of which – and therefore queering potential – is never questioned in the film (Sinfield, "Boys" 166). As György Kalmár explains:

> the father-son conflict, which perfectly demonstrates the generational shift that took place between different ideals of masculinity in the 1980s and 1990s: in *Billy Elliot* the father clearly belongs to the world of "old, industrial man", [...] while the son is associated with the more sensitive, artistic, cosmopolitan, and more narcissistic "new men" that the 1990s' affluent, urban, yuppie consumer-culture gave birth to (see Beynon 99–107). (*Post-Crisis* 120-1)

Billy, who is before the initiation into working-class masculinity, represents a new type of masculine behaviour, and turns against the father's ideal. Symbolically he refuses the father's preferred sport, and also the intergenerational inheritance – the grandfather's boxing gloves. His story of "a striking miner's [development] son into a successful ballet dancer, [...]presents the transition to neoliberalism as one from a repressive and repressed "masculine" past to a more tolerant, expressive, cosmopolitan, and "feminine" present (Alderson 2).

Although the father himself never actually dances, his masculine identity is not left unaffected, and he has to restructure his views about masculinity to be able accept dancing as a proper career for his son, or in general, for a man. At first, he turns to ballet with stubborn refusal, since he is able to perceive of dancing only through the filters of the masculine discourse he is part of: it is only a fantasy of ballet as a hotbed for queerness that he can see. However, when he sees Billy dance – which is the boy's way of standing up for himself, of contradicting his father's beliefs and communicating his own desires, the father proves to be able to accept this new form of masculinity if not for himself, but at least for Billy. Yet, this change does not let his own masculinity unaffected: he is transforming into a new, supportive, emotionally more approachable father. The utmost proof of his changed views is that he would even sacrifice his working class, masculine pride of being a striking miner: he attempts to go back to work, to serve as a breadwinner not in order to assert his patriarchy but to express his support and responsibility.

It is not a staged performance, nor becoming a professional dancer, but the social activity of communal dancing that is central in changing the cold relationship between the London based queer community and the miner village in Wales. At first, even accepting LGSM's help is met with strong opposition within the mining community, let alone inviting them to their village and mingling with them. What breaks the ice between the two groups is a night spent together at the working men's club when Jonathan, an LGSM member first dances with the women of village and then pulls off a disco performance on his own. As the women explain, Welsh men never dance, because "they can't move their hips" (Warchus 40:30). In other words, the miners do not know how to "bend" both with regard to their lower spine and their hard owned masculine morals. It falls outside the possible corporeal and cultural experiences offered by their working-class roots. However, when the men see both Jonathan's joy while he dances and the women's pleasure in dancing with him, they realise the merits of a new approach towards masculinity. Not only the whole community cheers for Jonathan when he concludes his performance, but two men approach him after the party to ask for dance lessons. If we look at

their request on a symbolic level, it is not only a couple of steps and dancing tricks they want to learn, but how to bend.

3.3. Queered masculinity?

Although there are some positive changes depicted in the three films regarding the male experience and concepts of masculinity, we cannot claim that queering working-class masculinity is a total success and that crisis is averted for good. In *The Full Monty* when Gaz channels his energies into practicing their choreography, and opens up towards new ways of self-expression instead of stealing steel and catcalling after women, his relationship with his son does start to improve: although practicing for a striptease choreography might seem just as "abnormal" as the previous activities the boy was embarrassed about, this time he fully supports his father – even financially with his savings. Billy Elliot's father also changes: he starts supporting his son, even goes to extremes to provide the financial background for his career and is moved to tears by his final performance. The two young miners in *Pride* manage to get closer to women after Jonathan's dance lessons, and the film ends with the powerfully moving scene of solidarity between rural miners and urban queers.

As opposed to these positive signs, many researchers point out that the films do not offer a real solution to the crisis of masculinity, and the queering potential falls short. In the case of *The Full Monty*, although the one-night only performance provides some income for the men, it is only temporary: "for all its upbeat ending – with wives, girlfriends and female acquaintances shrieking out their support and approval – *The Full Monty* offers no evidence of a solution to the protagonists' unemployment and poverty" (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 132-3). (Fig. 34.) Furthermore, as Sinfield notes, it is not the restructuring of the system that the men are working on, but its maintenance: "*The Full Monty* represent tantalizing dreams of escape, but really the men want to go back to their customary work, together, whatever the exploitation and frustration. There is no prospect here of transforming the system. The struggle is to maintain it!" ("Boys" 169) In Billy's case, it is highlighted that his success as a professional ballet dancer should not be viewed as a success story of the whole community, rather, an exceptional individual's escape from working-class (Alderson 11). As Kalmár emphasises:

> the last few scenes of the film also make it clear that he is more of an exception than the general rule. The rest of the community is simply left behind, physically as well as historically. After Billy's leave, we never see them again: they have become a lost cause, a fossil of history, a defeated culture to be left behind so as to be dumped at the ever growing junkyard of history. (*Post-Crisis* 118)

In the case of *Pride*, although the 1985 London Pride March was led by the supporting mining community, and the solidarity that took place between the two distinct groups is exceptional, "the sense of unity did not last far beyond the campaign and nor was it widespread during the campaign" (Payling 257). Alderson also warns that

> [t]he extent of the changes that took place in mining communities, as well as the challenges that the miners' struggle prompted among those involved in feminist and lesbian and gay politics, should be neither romanticized nor exaggerated — nor should their durability after the strike ended, since they were bound up with a sense of solidarity generated by the specific conditions of struggle (Alderson 9)

Fig. 34. Temporary empowerment. (Cattaneo 01:27:02)

What the films do succeed in, in terms of queering hegemonic working-class masculinity, is questioning the pretended integrity of the behaviour patterns. All the three films reveal how this "new" type of masculinity has always already been part of the working-class community, even if in a secretive, hidden form. In *The Full Monty* two of the newly self-appointed male strippers turn out to be gay and end up in a relationship, in *Billy Elliot*, Billy's friend regularly cross-dresses and even reveals that his father does it too, and in *Pride* after the coming out of an elderly miner, it turns out that his homosexuality has been known in the community, only no-one dared to talk about it openly. By showing that queer people have always been part of the working class, the films suggest that dancing does not really offer a new, unknown construction of masculinity, only propels the revelation of the queer seeds of change never absent in working class communities.

Chapter 4

Minorities in Love
Intersections of Ethnic and Sexual Otherness

"You half-Paki or summat?
Pardon?
(Johnny pointing at Gheorghe's face)
Er, no, I'm from Romania.
Gypsy.
Please don't call me that"
(Lee 13:19)

1. Sexuality, ethnicity and queer couples

The brief conversation in *God's Own Country* which takes place right after Gheorghe's arrival brings into interplay and juxtaposes the postcolonial, ethnic and racial discourses and prejudicial realities of both Great Britain and Eastern Europe. Upon seeing their new worker's slightly darker complexion and black hair, Johnny immediately makes racist comments. First, he resorts to the obvious ethnic Other at close, the South Asian diaspora community, however, when he learns that Gheorghe is from Romania – the very country from where Dracula set out to infect Victorian Britain – he turns to the other Other: Eastern Europe, which, "after the breakdown of colonial empires [...] has supplied the West with a badly needed other, safely "Orientalizable" while seemingly racially unmarked" (Zabrowska et al 10). What is more, he evokes the ethnic tensions within Eastern Europe itself, by mentioning the most prominent and most discriminated against ethnic group, the Romani people. [51]

This seemingly simple, racist exchange between the dominant English and a defensive Eastern European person is much more complex than Johnny being prejudiced, racist and rude. It emphasizes a major thread in the discourse of the film: the intersection of ethnic and sexual marginalisation. For this interethnic gay love to blossom and fulfil an (imaginary) happy ending, Johnny has to face (apart from, of course, his other issues with repressed homosexuality and corporeal desires, spatial marginalisation, the heterosexist embeddedness of his home) his

[51] Although some Roma accept or even prefer the term "Gypsy" (which is derogatory in the public discourse) – in agreement with Iona Szeman – I will use Roma throughout the analysis, as it is the neutral, inner term for this ethnic community (singular: Rom, adjective: Romani). Others I quote use "Gypsy" – in those cases I will quote the original choices of words.

racial prejudices, and realise that being English means belonging to "after all, just another ethnic group" (Hall, "The Local" 21). He has to acknowledge the intersections of ethnicity and sexuality in his own identity position: he is not simply the universal gay man, but the English gay farmer. In order to bond with the new employee, he has to recognise his own multi-marginalised position in the gay, Romanian migrant worker, Gheorghe.

In this chapter I focus on the intersections of ethnic and sexual otherness, and analyse the social, cultural and emotional dynamics of interethnic, interracial gay relationships through reading two British examples – Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985, written by Hanif Kureishi) and Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) – and two Eastern European ones – Kriszta Bódis' *A Village Romance* (2007) and Ivana Mladenović's *Soldiers – Story From Ferentari* (2017), which all focus on the intersections of ethnic and sexual marginalisation by featuring interethnic/interracial gay couples.[52] My main goal is to find answers to the suggestive and striking differences between the British and Eastern European narratives: why is it that the British interracial/interethnic couples get their happy endings, while the Eastern European ones end in breakups and misery. Why are the British couples represented as being able to realise, accept and empower their intersecting identity positions? How can they be supportive and trusting with each other?

Before continuing along this line of thought, the cultural-political context needs to be tackled on both sides. At first sight there is a gaping distance between the British and Eastern European examples, as the former feature WASP-postcolonial couples, while the latter focus on Hungarian/Romanian-Romani love stories. Moreover, the British examples are not identical themselves, since *My Beautiful Laundrette* portrays a couple where Omar belongs to the Pakistani diaspora, while in *Young Soul Rebels* Caz is of Caribbean origin. Yet, in a British socio-political and cultural context, both of these ethnic-racial minorities have declared their shared experience of exclusion. As numerous researchers have pointed out, "the latter half of the 1960s witnessed a united front amongst Caribbean, African and South Asian peoples living in England in which these racialized parties identified themselves as 'black' to forge solidarity in the face of common experiences of racism" (Gariola 42). As Stuart Hall emphasises, this "united front" continued into the 1970s as well, and being Black in Britain did not mean obscuring the cultural differences between the various ethnic and racial minorities, but

[52]Although the corpus of this dissertation up until this point consisted of narrative feature films, as a result of the telling scarcity of the subject in Eastern European films, I feel compelled to include Bódis's documentary in this analysis.

recognising their own struggles within the other, and the political empowerment in the efforts against racism:

> I will tell you something now about what has happened to that Black identity as a matter of cultural politics in Britain. That notion was extremely important in the anti-racist struggles of the 1970s: the notion that people of diverse societies and cultures would all come to Britain in the fifties and sixties as part of that huge wave of migration from the Caribbean, East Africa, the Asian subcontinent, Pakistan, Bangladesh, from different parts of India, and all identified themselves politically as Black." (Hall, "Old and New" 55)

These marginalised groups realised a point of intersection in their various identity positions, and took up solidarity under the umbrella term, "Black-British." Still, Black-British identity did not become another solidified, compulsory identity position, and

> it continues to exist as an identity alongside a wide range of differences. Afro-Caribbean and Indian people continue to maintain different cultural traditions. "Black" is thus an example, not only of the political character of new identities—i.e. their positional and conjunctural character (their formation in and for specific times and places)—but also of the way identity and difference are inextricably articulated or knitted together in different identities, the one never wholly obliterating the other. (Hall, "The Question" 309)

Both *Young Soul Rebels* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* use this consciously diverse socio-cultural context. *Young Soul Rebels* is set in 1977 during the series of events commemorating the Queen's Silver Jubilee, and portrays the experiences of several marginalised groups and counter-cultural movements. Apart from delineating racial struggles, the film also pays attention to sexual marginalisation, class differences, the issue of cultural hegemony and the intersectional identity positions within its characters–we can see the union of soul boys and punks as they "funk the Jubilee." It challenges inflexible, stable identities, and "draws up some alternative templates for sexual and racial identities" (Rees-Roberts 275). Instead of separation, and demarcating a discrete space for these intersectional identities to develop, "[t]he film dramatizes a stance of inclusiveness. That was an important part of the youth culture emerging in the seventies – you could see it taking place on the dance floor in the clubs, the simultaneous reproduction of different audiences: gay, straight, black, white." (hooks and Julien 182)

My Beautiful Laundrette takes place in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister introduced systemic racism and homophobia into the public discourse and politics of the United Kingdom. Kobena Mercer recalls the political, cultural struggles of marginalised groups during this period:

> [i]n retrospect our activity can be seen as a microcosm of broader developments in the early eighties that were distinguished by three commitments: community-building through collaborative projects, trenchant critique of the New Left, and growing awareness of the "intersectionality" (Kimberle Crenshaw, 1989), or interdependence, of race, class, gender and sexuality, and other equally messy variables of social identity like nation and ethnicity. (10-11)

It is this heightened sense of intersectionality that Frears and Kureishi capture by "paint[ing] a compelling picture of the critical tensions within British society in the midst of change by problematizing the traditional binary oppositions between "the marginal" and "mainstream" society" (Swamy 145). Like *Young Soul Rebels*, this film does not attempt to construct a new, fixed identity position, but "adopts a self-consciously pluralist and flexible attitude toward political identity that cuts across many axes of difference, and carefully establishes the nonconformity of all its principal characters, in that none embodies precisely the celebrated white, male, heterosexual and petite bourgeois norm of Thatcher's brand of conservativism." (Beaumont 69)

The difference appears to be vast in the marginalising strategies and ethnic struggles in Eastern Europe. Post-colonial conditions are not applicable in the most populous ethnic group, as the first Roma arrived at this region several centuries ago as a result of their nomadic lifestyle, without previous colonisation. What is more, "they are a transnational, non-territorially based people who do not have a "home state" to provide a haven or extend protection to them" (Bárány 1-2). However, Eastern and Western European marginalising strategies are both connected to identity crises. English identity was severely restructured by the loss of the empire, the massive changes in their global status quo, waves of immigration from the former colonies and sweeping economic and industrial shifts in the second half of the twentieth century. In these identity crises, "Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers of the crisis of British society in the 1970s" (Hall, "Minimal" 31-32). Eastern Europe, although on different grounds, is also in a constant state of identity crisis:

> the very term Eastern European makes for a particularly confusing and schizophrenic position. On the one hand, Eastern Europeans have been defined and define themselves as "European," especially in distinction to their more "Oriental" neighbors. [...] But, on the other hand, Eastern Europeans, while not "other" as much as Asians or Africans, are also "not quite" European; rather, they are semi-European, semi-developed, with semi-functioning states and semi-civilized manners." (Kovačević 3)

In this continuous negotiation the Roma have been singled out as the ethnic group to pass on the frustrations resulting from the perception of being inferior to the West; a self-defining (and protective) mechanism. Romani people have not only been defined as the ethnic

group to which inferiority complexes can be dumped on, but, similarly to British Blacks, as the reason behind the economic, financial problems caused by the sudden shift into liberal capitalism in the 1990s: "[a]s Katherine Verdery notes in a discussion of postsocialist Romania, 'the principal group singles out as a dislocation all across the region is the Gypsies,'" suggesting that at issue is 'markets and the dislocation of economic reform, which Gypsies are made to symbolize'" (Verdery, qtd in Beissinger 32). As in the (successful) case of Black British, attempts of political unity and collaboration have been made by the Romani community since the regime changes, however those did not bring such results or strong collaboration as in the British Black movement (Bárány 3).

Due to their marginalised positions, and having to participate in the negotiation of "power, distinction, and social mobility as they construct their own sense of who they are, how they fit in, and how alterity informs their own identity" (Beissinger 32), Romani identity positions are also connected to multi-marginal intersectionality and hybridity. Furthermore, Romani identity is, in itself intersectional and hybrid: "[a]nother common misunderstanding about the Gypsies is that they are a homogeneous people. To the contrary, they are an extremely diverse ethnic group that can be differentiated according to lifestyle (peripatetic or sedentary), tribal affiliation, occupation, language, religion, and country of residence." (Bárány 12) As a result of this diversity within the Roma, "it is unclear what *the* Romani identity is – especially since many Gypsies do not consider themselves members of a cohesive ethnic group but instead identify with the subgroup to which they belong" (15, emphasis in the original). The various marginalising and segregation strategies of their host countries are built upon these already intersectional identities, complicating the position of the Roma even further.

So, Black in Britain developed into an empowering grassroots political concept and practice, bearing strength by signifying everyone who is not white. However, Roma in Eastern Europe could not achieve such empowering unity. Although the Romani are a various people, the concept does not unify, but rather, degrade all of them. Instead of grassroots initiations, the Roma became a political concept only for those in power representing the majority, as a socio-political problem to be (ab)used for various political purposes, which is anything but empowering (see Bárány 2).

It is this hybrid identity that *A Village Romance* and *Soldiers: Story From Ferentari* take as their starting point. Similarly to the British examples it is homosexual desire that serves as the other main axis of their marginalised positions, and they exist at the intersection of their sexuality and ethnic positions (see also: Dima). However, in both films, the complexity of the

main Romani characters is even more entangled, as ethnic and sexual marginalisations are amplified by spatial, financial and class-related marginalising strategies as well. *A Village Romance* takes place in a secluded village in a peripheral region of Hungary called Inner-Somogy, "in the middle of nowhere" (Bódis 01:03) cohabited by Romani and Hungarian population, where the Romani protagonist, Mari Kalányos lives in extreme poverty, exploited by a drunkard rapist as a husband. *Soldiers* is set in an impoverished area of Bucharest, where Alberto, an ex-convict Romani man lives with his exploitative and authoritative uncle. Their Hungarian and Romanian partners could pass as members of mainstream society: Mari Bán is a former musician in the underground music scene in *A Village Romance*, who moves to the village from the capital; and Adi is a PhD candidate in *Soldiers* who moves to Ferentari to do fieldwork on *manele* music. Still, these characters, too, live in several marginalised identity positions, and therefore the couples and the spaces that surround them, provide a fruitful ground for the films to elaborate on the segregational, marginalising strategies of mainstream Hungarian and Romanian societies.

Through the analysis of the four films in this chapter I examine, "how a variety of oppressions may intertwine and create an oppositional logic that insists on fixed notions of identity" (Spurlin 198-9). All four couples attempt to go against the heterosexist, middle-class, white logic of mainstream society, and instead of trying to identify with prescribed and fixed identity positions, they carve out their own fluid spaces. It seems that the British couples in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Young Soul Rebels* succeed in creating these spaces – the laundrette that surrounds Omo and Johnny with warmth and fluff, and the garage that serves as an illegal radio station for "funking London" in *Rebels*. However, the Eastern European couples seem to fail in this task, as the queer homes they build are crushed under the weight of the pressure put on them by the social environment.

To delineate the intertwining threads and processes that shape the outcome of the films, I analyse the characters and their relationships through the key concepts of multi-marginality, solidarity and trust. In the first part of the chapter I dismantle the various marginal aspects of the individuals' identity positions; I continue by analysing the relational dynamics when these individuals partner up with each other taking into consideration issues of equality, solidarity and hierarchy; then I proceed by considering the fragmented identities of couples, and point out that solidarity and equality within the relationships allow for the creation of shared spaces which provide opportunities for "forging a multicultural form of trust" (Carbajal 220). I argue that the British films construct a utopian narrative of recognition between individuals realising each other's multi-marginal positions, which can lead to solidarity and joined action. While the

narratives might suggest the success of intersectional unions, they are also too dreamlike to be accepted as real life. In contrast, in the Romanian and Hungarian examples the realisation of the other's hybridity and the apprehension of the point of intersection in their relationships do not take place. As a result, instead of solidarity, it is only unilateral attempts of help that occur. However, the Eastern European films choose the crossroads of multiple marginalities to articulate social criticism. Therefore, strategies of othering, social repression and marginalisation, and the (counter-)reactions given to them can be read side by side in the two cultural contexts, but we cannot praise the British films for success and condemn the Eastern Europeans as failures.

2. Multi-marginal positions

In all four films, individual characters are depicted as existing at the intersections of various identity positions. Although the same could be argued for each and every living person, as we all live at the crossroads of different aspects that influence our identities, these characters are subjected to more than one marginalising strategies – in fact most aspects of their identities belong to different margins – therefore I use the phrase "multi-marginal" to describe their identity positions. They are "multiply determined, regulated, and excluded by differences of race, class, sexuality, and gender" (Ferguson 120) and they also occupy peripheral ranks in terms of space, financial situation, and often in music as well (soul and *manele*), which have to be recognised as relational aspects in the never fixed positions of the individuals and couples. In what follows, I dissect the intertwining threads of marginalities in the characters' positions while bearing in mind that their multi-marginality results from the interplay of these threads. I point out how the films question traditional notions of a fixed, stable identity and a constant sense of belonging by featuring individuals in multi-marginal identity positions, and by placing their narratives and characters into similarly multi-marginal spaces.

2.1 "People should make up their minds where they are"[53] – British characters of multi-marginality

Omar, the main character in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, is a second-generation Pakistani immigrant in London, which in itself implies a position with multiple margins, however – as reflected in his aunt's words quoted in the subtitle – he is expected to acquire a traditional, fixed identity and a strong sense of belonging to either here or there. She might originally refer to

[53]Frears 14:26

geographic places (whether to live in Karachi or London), but the comment touches on other aspects of Omar's multi-marginal position: culture, ethnicity, tradition and sexual orientation.

In terms of culture and ethnicity, his second-generation immigrant position is further complicated by him being biracial as his late mother was English, which "exacerbates his in-betweenness, not just culturally but also racially" (Mathison 237) and "challenges a monocultural, racially pure conception of Britishness" (Carbajal 224). Apart from being affected by the English and the Pakistani diaspora both in terms of cultural and genetic belonging, he receives contradictory influences from within his Pakistani family.[54] The two father figures in his life embody and promote contradicting attitudes towards life and success. His biological father, who used to be a socialist journalist in their country of origin and is still an intellectual at heart even if he lives as an impoverished, alcoholic invalid in London, encourages – or rather demands – that Omar pursue higher education. His uncle, Nasser, the other father figure in Omar's life, introduces him to business life, which seems to be better suited for him and he proves to be talented at it. The differences between Omar's father and his uncle also influence the young man's financial hybridity: he comes from a poor background and lives with his father in a peripheral, tiny, messy apartment right next to railways; he is also an insider to his uncle's grand family home with spacious rooms, luxurious furniture and a blossoming garden.

His sexuality challenges straight and gay identity politics, and strict identifying processes. Even though he experiences (and acts on) same-sex desire with Johnny, he does not reject the idea of compulsory heterosexual marriage when his uncle basically commands him to marry his cousin, Tania, although he does not show any signs of sexual desire towards the young woman even when she tries to seduce him. He seems to plan a future where he can have both a heterosexual marriage and a gay relationship.

Although his contradictory, intersecting positions might confuse Omar and instigate a sense of identity crisis, he manages in all areas of his hybrid, multi-marginal position. He never hides his ethnic background and sternly refuses Johnny's racist past. He can navigate around the strictly structured and gendered spaces of his uncle's house, and he can smoothly and assertively communicate with male and female members of his extended Pakistani family. He openly refuses his father's will of him pursuing higher education, but does so without causing

[54] It should be noted that the film does not include the English side of the family: his maternal grandparents are totally absent from the narrative, therefore – despite his biracial background – culturally, his only family is that of the Pakistani side.

permanent hostility. He also co-operates with Nasser in business, but circumvents Salim, his cousin, and uses the man's illegal drug-trafficking business for his own benefit. Furthermore, there is no "drama" around his sexuality either (although there are some snarky comments from the Pakistani family), *My Beautiful Laundrette* is not a film about coming out. In other words, he embraces a sense of identity that is not rigid, fixed, unambiguous, but fluid, shifting and multiple.

In terms of ethnicity Omar's partner, Johnny, belongs to the dominant group of white Englishmen, yet, his gayness distances him from the heterosexual majority. Also, his class and financial position place him on the margins of WASP society: he is in the lower strata of the working class, he is near homeless, occasionally finding shelter as an illegal tenant here and there, and ends up working for Nasser and (with) Omar, which adds to his marginal position(s) within the white society. His racist turn in his youth –along with other white kids, he used to bully Black classmates at primary school which they attended together with Omar –can be seen as the result of his multi-marginal frustrations:

> Kureishi has argued that racism goes hand in hand with class inequality. [...] the relative powerlessness and inequalities experienced by a white working-class man or woman – whether that inequality is based on economic position, political power or cultural stereotyping – is often displaced into antagonistic relationships with "immigrants." Kureishi is suggesting, then, that class inequalities reinforce and perpetuate racism. Class antagonisms are then lived through the prism of race, fuelled not only by material impoverishments and disappointments but by an ideology of nation and national identity mobilized around the historical legacy of an imperialist past. (Kirk 366)

As such, Johnny's racist affiliations result from his other frustrations, and not from actual, personal hatred: "[i]t is obvious that race is not a personal issue between the two of them – they are, after all, an interracial couple" (Swamy 156).

Young Soul Rebels also depicts its main characters in multi-marginal identity positions. First of all, both Caz and Chris are embedded in the consciously intersectional and political subculture of soul music, which "celebrated black pride and meant fighting back the still segregationist white majority" (Fila-Bakabadio 920) and "echoed the political messages of the struggle for equality and the deconstruction of racial stereotypes" (922). The musical atmosphere of the film therefore establishes an interplay between multi-marginal identity constructions and the fight against fixed positions projected by stereotypes. Apart from placing its characters into this musical genre, the film comments on this fight on a narrative level as well, as Chris tries to get his tape into Metro, a prestigious radio station in London. Although

the station already has a soul programme with a black DJ, he points out that "[a]n hour of soul every week is an hour too much for some. We got these patriotic listeners." (Julien 12:58)

Furthermore, like Omar, these characters also challenge "racial purity and gender stereotype" (Rees-Roberts 279). Caz's appearance and behaviour conforms to traditional masculinity – he is good-looking and muscular, gentleman-like and family-minded –, yet he is gay. His best friend, Chris comes from a biracial background as the son of a black (absent) father and a white, English mother.[55] Compared to Caz he is quite "unmasculine" (ibid): he is into glamorous clothes, hairstyling, posing in front of the mirror, and he is not the "proper" man in his family either – he often refuses to help his mother. In contrast with stereotypes however, he is the straight one in the duo.

Caz's partner, Billibud, is less marginalised in his social and ethnic background, he is a middle-class, white English young man. He chooses to rebel against mainstream identity positions by being punk, dressing extravagantly, and handing out socialist leaflets among a patriotic crowd celebrating the Queen's Jubilee. What he does not choose as a marginalising aspect of his identity is his sexuality, which further distances him from mainstream white society. The London gay scene could be a stable point of identification, however, the hidden racism of this subculture somewhat alienates him as the boyfriend of a Black man. When he wants to enter a gay club with Caz, we witness the "conservativism of a specifically gay club, entry to which is almost barred for some young black kids until Billibud intervenes" (Rees-Roberts 284). The doormen keep asking for their membership card, however, it is clear that the "problem" is with their skin colour, since several white men enter the club without showing any proof of membership. This racist sentiment is also implied within the club, as Caz becomes the object of the gaze and is even touched by a "dinge queen"[56] (Julien 1:12:04) without consent as some exotic curiosity. This scene is also a neat reflection on the intersections of identity positions and continuous shifts of marginalisation and privilege. As a gay man, Billibud is definitely at a disadvantage compared to mainstream heterosexual society – the guards controlling admission to the gay club also reflect on a necessary secrecy and self-protection of the gay community –, however, within that community, he is more privileged than Black gay

[55] Similarly to *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the mother's family that could represent stronger ties to the white English community is completely missing from the film, as if marrying a black man meant total exclusion from that group. It is also worth noting that even though both mothers are English and white, neither of them is described as corresponding to the traditional, stereotypical notions of English femininity: in *My Beautiful Laundrette* Nasser tells a story about Omar's parents sexual affairs prior to their marriage, and in *Young Soul Rebels* we can see Chris' mother smoking marijuana with her son.

[56] A dinge queen is a white gay man who only dates black men.

men, who have to face not just homophobia and racism, but racism from within the gay community as well.

The spaces where the film places its characters also reflect on their multi-marginal status. The wider spatial context of the film is "the richly conflictual cultures of late-seventies London. This is a world of punks, skinheads, and young soul boys and girls: of identities in collision and collusion." (hooks and Julien 168) The London depicted in the film at that time became a space for unexpected encounters (of people, subcultures, political groups), shifts and changes in identification, interaction and interference between earlier separated, distinct groups. The opening scene establishes this different perception of the city: instead of clear, daytime images of well-known sights, the city is shown at twilight and moonlight, the alternative sources of light signifying a change in perspective, while in the background Chris and Caz – the two soul rebels – announce their illegally broadcasted radio programme, "Soul Patrol."

The two central venues in the film, the club and the park, are also connected to multi-marginal intersectionality. In the first part of the film Chris and Caz are excitedly preparing for a party, where they get the chance to play their music, advertise their illegal radio broadcast, and gain some recognition as DJs. What turns this club and the party into a symbolic space of intersectionality (apart from soul music) is the extremely mixed audience, who dance together through the night. Although most of the audience belongs to the black community, we can see punks there, gay desire and homoeroticism are openly depicted and experienced[57], and even Chris' soon-to-be-girlfriend, a black girl working at Metro radio station brings her white, middle-class friend, who ends up flirting with a punk boy. What is more, Caz and Billibud also meet here for the first time.

The park is established early in the film as a hiding place for multi-marginal people to express and experience their desires – we can see blurry, soft images of men of various colours having sex at night there – it is also openly connected to the tensions that stem from the cohabitation of different marginalised groups, and becomes the centre of racist and homophobic violence in the film. As mentioned earlier, one of Caz's friends is murdered here during what seems to be a simple, casual hook-up. Furthermore, violence erupts during the concert planned as a counter-event amongst the various official celebrations of the Jubilee. Even though this

[57]In a conversation between Caz and Chris about the latest albums for sale there are other referenced connections between the soul and gay subculture as well, such as the popularity of Donna Summer.

concert was supposed to bring various "counter-groups" together, it ends in violence, chaos, and a burning stage.[58]

2.2 "It's not just gays, they dislike the Roma just as much"[59]– At the crossroads of marginalities in Eastern Europe

The Eastern European characters occupy similarly multi-marginal positions, as ethnic, spatial, sexual and financial marginalisations intersect in their identities. However, it is their sexual and ethnic difference that severely set them apart from their surrounding communities, who regard themselves as the majority, even if – or because of – being subjected to some forms of marginalisation themselves, such as spatial and financial difference.

Mari Kalányos, one of the main characters in *A village Romance* is a Romani woman, living in a dilapidated house somewhere on the edge of an already peripheral village. In addition to spatial segregation, she is constantly fighting with extreme poverty, an abusive husband, a heteronormative community and lesbian desire (Fig. 35.). She is in a marginal position both in relation to the whole of Hungarian mainstream society and to the village community, who perceive of themselves as belonging to that mainstream, even if themselves are spatially and financially marginalised.

Her partner, Mari Bán is in a multi-marginal position as well: although she is not of Romani origins, she is an outsider within the village as she relocated there from the city. She is an out lesbian, which places her outside the mainstream regarding Hungarian society as a whole, but even more so within the heteronormative village community. Even though she lives in a comfortable, well-off house, she also has financial problems and often needs help from her urban friends or Mari Kalányos.[60]

Alberto in *Soldiers* is an unemployed Romani ex-convict, who constantly struggles with the lack of money and depends on his wealthy cousin. What is most telling about his extremely peripheral situation is the fact that he does not have an ID card or a birth certificate. According to his story he lost both, which trapped him in a loop, as in order to replace a birth certificate

[58]In the end it turns out that both instances of violence breaking lose were caused by the same person: a white young man, who first killed the black man, and then tried to hide the evidence by burning Chris and Caz's recordings at the concert. However, the film avoids blaming all white men for this violence, as it seems that the mental instability of this character was caused by his repressed homosexual desires – especially his desires for the black male body. So, it is repression, the firm grip of established, fixed and compulsory identity positions that is depicted as the source of violence.

[59]Bódis 09:13

[60] This latter fact seems to be more appalling for the non-Romani villagers than her sexuality and throws her downwards in the hierarchical ladder.

an ID card must be shown to the authorities and vice versa. In terms of his sexuality, he is quite open about it in Adi's company – "I fucked a guy in the prison, I'm not ashamed to say it" (Mladenović 18:20) – but his homosexual behaviour makes him a pariah within his own community and his family.

Fig. 35. Mari Kalányos. (Bódis 00:36:21)

His partner, Adi, is an outsider in Ferentari since he arrives in the district as a Romanian, non-Romani anthropologist, to do research on *manele*, which places him in a liminal position: his research method is participant observation, where he gets involved in the everyday of *manele* musicians, producers and also in the life of the district, yet, he has to keep a distance and try to maintain an objective (or supposedly objective) point of view. The camera often follows his perspective and, as such, visually underlines his observant position while walking on the streets, sitting in the local pub or an office where he does extra work. In financial terms he is better-off than the majority in Ferentari, but he still has budgetary problems, and it is implied at the beginning of the film that up until now his ex-girlfriend supported him.[61]

In terms of upsetting stereotypes, the two Eastern European films are not as conscious as *Young Soul Rebels*. It is only Alberto in *Soldiers* who subverts certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity. He is the big "Gypsy" hyper-masculine guy with prison tattoos, a high amount of

[61] In the case of the two men their sexual orientation is not commented on in the film: both of them show homosexual desire and behaviour, and also bonding in a same-sex relationship, yet neither identifies openly as gay.

belly fat and even more muscle (Fig. 36.). Yet, he experiences and acts on gay desire both bodily and emotionally. He also needs gentleness, cuddles and "sweet talk" (Mladenović 56:15), traditionally perceived of as feminine traits. Other characters rather strengthen stereotypes instead of questioning them: Mari Bán is the "tomboyish" lesbian, she is considerably masculine and refuses traditionally feminine hairstyles, make-up and clothing; while Mari Kalányos embodies the stereotype of the "gypsy lady," often wearing colourful skirts. Adi also resembles certain stereotypes, if not that of the "out and loud" queer, but certainly of the shy, weak, thin intellectual.

Fig. 36. Alberto in *Soldiers* (Mladenović 00:16:01)

In both films, the two primary elements of the characters' multi-marginality are their sexuality and ethnicity. Even if they are at the crossroads various marginalising strategies (spatial segregation, class issues, extreme poverty, etc.), the Romani ethnic background and same-sex relationships are emphatic. In *A Village Romance* the whole village is spatially marginalised and struggle with financial difficulties, yet, the white Hungarian villagers – identifying as the majority – dissociate from Mari Bán because she is a lesbian, and despise Mari Kalányos, because she is Romani. In *Soldiers* these mechanisms are most apparent in Alberto's situation. He becomes an outcast in the Romani community of Ferentari, especially in the eyes of his family: after his release from prison, he was denied a seat at the family table, was prohibited to meet his little nephews, and was made to take an oath never to have sexual relations with a man, because word got out from the prison that he had engaged in same-sex intercourse. However, the few white men he meets distrust and even fear him, because he is Romani. For instance, Adi's colleague and flatmate openly opposes their meetings and eventually moves out of their apartment because of Alberto's frequent presence. Furthermore,

when in an attempt to settle Alberto's paper issues (ID card and birth certificate) they ask one of Adi's gay friends to provide an official address for Alberto, he strictly refuses on the basis of Alberto's ethnicity: "Who'd let a huge gypsy in their home?" (Mladenović 1:34:23), just as the Black man is refused entrance to the gay bar in *Young Soul Rebels*. In short, the Romani community excommunicates him because of his sexuality, and the white (gay) world refuses him because of his ethnicity.

A major influencing factor in the characters' multi-marginality is the space they are embedded in. In both cases, the secluded spaces emphasise not only a geographical distance from the centre, but a separation from mainstream, hegemonic culture. They are Other spaces, ghetto-ised, separated and sealed containers of those that are not contained by the mainstream culture. Rob Shields emphasises that

> [i]n all cases the type of geographic marginality [...] is a mark of being a social periphery. That is, the marginal places that are of interest are not necessarily on geographical peripheries but, first and foremost, they have been placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other. They all carry the image, and stigma, of their marginality which becomes indistinguishable from any basic empirical identity they might once have had. (3)

Ferentari is "the main Romani quarter in Bucharest [...], an impoverished outlying district that houses a large number of the city's poorest inhabitants – most of them Roms" (Beissinger 35). The district lies at the intersections of various marginalities, such as ethnic segregation, poverty, organised crime, drug use, alcoholism and prostitution, which are emphasised throughout the film. Ferentari is represented as an impoverished, ghetto-like area with crumbling concrete houses where sometimes even windowpanes are missing, the roads are dusty and dirty, prostitution and organised crime are thriving, and the Red Cross is organising events to collect used syringes, which very soon fill numerous buckets. Long, slow shots of the high-rising panel blocks, of people staring out of paneless windows, the sight of a farm wagon within what is supposed to be the Romanian capital, the close-ups of syringe-filled buckets, and a total lack of the colour green – in forms of vegetation – serve as constant reminders for the viewer about the spatial embeddedness of the story (Fig. 37.).

Fig. 37. Emphasising poverty in Ferentari. (Mladenović 01:24:46)

What is most striking, however, is the internal contradictions in the representation of a space which according to stereotypes and public discourse should simply be an impoverished ghetto inhabited by Roma. The epitomic example of this is a wedding scene, where binaries of wealth vs. poverty, the beginning of a new life vs. the futurelessness of the space, happiness and celebration vs. total bleakness, and the beautiful white gown of the bride in the middle of dirty, gray concrete blocks imply the underlying structural binaries, yet the film does not represent these as in opposition, but as inscribed on each other, without value judgements, as a "natural" way of life in Ferentari. Everything is a bit "off" in this scene, but this uncanny property hints at the hybrid, multi-marginal nature of the space, where certain marginalities are in constant interplay (Fig. 38.).

The multi-marginality and hybridity of individuals and space are epitomised by the musical genre which characterises the atmosphere of *Soldiers*. *Manele* emphasises and condenses the binaries that determine the multi-marginal positions of the film. It is "an extremely popular and controversial genre which links to the Ottoman past and associations with Turkey and the Middle East. Hence Romani musicians find themselves at the crux of debates about identity, Europe and the "Orient," modernity and tradition – epitomized in critiques or praise for manele." (Szeman 99) In other words, *manele* is the musical embodiment of multi-marginality even in its origins, as it emphasises Eastern Europe's in-between position – being Eastern (Oriental) and European at the same time. Furthermore, its contradictory reception within Eastern Europe reflects on the area's uncertainties and frustrations, the fear of being too Eastern to be fully European.


Fig. 38. Binaries of space. (Mladenović 01:26:57)

The location of *A Village Romance* is similarly at the crossroads of various, intersecting marginalities: extreme poverty, ethnic segregation, alcoholism are just as present there as in Ferentari. An additional factor in the multi-marginality of this space is its distance from the city. The very first frames of Bódis's documentary depict a moving train arriving at an empty train station, which is not even the final destination of the travelling group, as the village itself is unapproachable via public transport. This village, "a dead end in the middle of nowhere" (Bódis 2007, 01:03) is the location of *A Village Romance*. Every word in its condensed description is symbolic: the village is a dead end, it is difficult to reach, and even more problematic to leave both in a geographical and a socio-cultural sense.

We must not forget that the communities of the village and Ferentari are perceived as, and therefore perceive of themselves as being on the spatial, social, cultural periphery of their respective countries, therefore what could be described as homophobic, xenophobic, often racist attitudes, can also be interpreted as self-defensive mechanisms of people who are constantly forced to negotiate their identity positions at the crossroads of spatial, ethnic, financial and class-related otherness. Therefore, the conflicts within the district and the village are also representative of the mechanisms which are employed by marginalised groups to pass on their own frustrations to other individuals – or groups – who they perceive of as even more marginalised than themselves. In order to battle their inferiority complex, these communities pass on their own frustrations by othering those who they perceive as even more inferior, more marginal than themselves.[62] Hence, the "white" villagers hate the Roma, the more wealthy Romani individuals despise and exploit the impoverished ones, and the heterosexual "majority" – no matter how many points of connection they have in terms of space, financial status or

[62] See also: Tlostanova "Postcolonial" 30

ethnicity – detest gay people. Éva Kovács notes: "compliance constraint often leads to stereotyping and disappointment: to binary oppositions and ethnic categorisation" (13).

3. Recognising the other

After delineating the different intertwining threads of the individuals' multi-marginal identity positions, the next step is analysing how these fragmented, multi-marginal identities relate to each other. As couples, they expose the intersections of various marginalising strategies and bridge the gaps between different dichotomies, in terms of race, ethnicity, class and gender. A key factor in the success of their relationships is whether they realise their own othernesses in their partners' multi-marginality. In terms of recognition, achieving equality and building solidarity, the fact that lovers are each placed at the intersections of various peripheral, oppressed and constantly shifting minority positions, provides a promising ground for the growth of solidarity, since "the members of a certain gender/sex or religious groups may experience solidarity born of common suffering or victimization" (Slote 36).

Although Michael Slote talks about members of equally oppressed groups bonding over shared anguish, a similar mechanism appears to be at work in the films' depiction of interracial/interethnic queer relations. Partners might not always belong to the same marginalised groups, but suffering and victimisation are shared experiences. By recognising the shared quality of oppressions, and the different reasons of their multi-marginal positions, they can learn how to "translate" their peripheral states and create a fluid language and fluid spaces of their own (see Mercer 27-8).

Furthermore, as a result of the same recognition, they can also find the intersections of their multi-marginal identity positions, and work towards a relationship based on equality, "a self-consciously pluralist and flexible attitude [...] that cuts across many axes of difference" (Beaumont 69). I argue that the key difference between the films' representational strategies of British and Eastern European multi-marginal couples lies in the realisation of the other's multi-marginality in relation to one's own. *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Young Soul Rebels* represent this recognition as a prerequisite of solidarity and the elimination of hierarchy; while *A Village Romance* and *Soldiers – Story From Ferentari* depict unilateral attempts of help, where the other is not recognised as equally marginal, but made even more vulnerable by maintaining a hierarchy between the two multi-marginal individuals.

3.1. "Black and white unite and fuck"[63] *– Recognition, solidarity and equality in* My Beautiful Laundrette *and* Young Soul Rebels

One of the most striking representations of realising the other's multi-marginality and taking up solidarity is Johnny's character development in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. He is introduced as a fascist, progresses into an employee of Omar's Pakistani family and eventually gets himself beaten up to protect Omar's hated cousin, Salim. His changing attitude during the course of the film reflects how his perspective on otherness changes: first, he compensates for his own multi-marginal status by associating himself with a racist group and takes his frustrations out on ethnic minorities, then he experiences the daily life of an ethnic family with peripheries and hierarchies of their own, and, in the end, he realises the intersections between their and his own multi-marginal positions.

The opening scene establishes both Johnny's marginal social status and his perception of racial difference. The first frame shows a door with debris blocking entry from the inside, and some shadowy figures trying to break into a flat: this is clearly a marginal, peripheral, hidden (hiding) space. This is where Johnny lives temporarily with a young man – hinting at his homosexuality – who is in an even worse shape than Johnny: he is visibly sick, wearing only a dirty coat and coughing heavily as they pack up in a rush to escape from the shady figures approaching them. The momentary ambiguity is very soon cleared: Johnny and his company are squatters, while those breaking in are the lawful actors. Emphatically, the people who manage the "unscrewing", as Omar's uncle calls such situations, belong to the Black British community and work under Salim's supervision (implying Johnny and Salim's relationship later). Apart from representing Johnny as a peripheral, marginal figure – in terms of space, class, finances, and even sexuality – the opening scene also grounds his relationship with the Pakistani community: it is a commentary on his social status that serves as the foundation of his racist attitudes. He is at the very bottom of the social strata, even those whom he despises on racial grounds are above him in the hierarchy, as they are the ones literally throwing him out of the illegally occupied flat.

Partly as a result of his desperation, the otherwise racist Johnny does not hesitate to accept his school friend, Omar's offer of employment (renovating the laundrette) when they accidentally meet. His dire financial situation might enhance his welcoming the livelihood, but it also marks his first step in leaving behind his racist affiliations. With Omar he has the chance

[63]Julien 1:14:54

to realise that his racism is not supported by personal experience of being threatened by immigrants, but results from his socially insecure position, a compensation for his multi-marginal status. Although the two young men quickly renew their earlier intimacy (having been destroyed by Johnny's racist turn), their relationship is troubled by arguments. After all, at this point Johnny is Omar's employee, just as subordinate and vulnerable as he was in the opening scene. Ruvani Ranasinha emphasises that the "power dynamics of Omar and Johnny's relationship need to be measured against the backdrop of the empowerment of this group of British Pakistanis and the disempowerment of sections of the white working class" (299).

Omar's business attitude and his resurfacing (post)colonial traumas also contribute to the dynamics that create tension between them. At first, he is purely, even childishly happy when they cross paths after years of absence. However, as his business career begins to prosper, and he is appreciated by his uncle, the reassurance of his familial and financial position influences his treatment of Johnny: he starts dominating over him that reinforces hierarchy between them. As Tania says: "Omar just runs you around everywhere, like a servant" (Frears 1:24:53). Johnny for a while believes that only financial success got the better of him, and warns Omar: "you're getting greedy" (1:08: 13). It is not only greed that urges Omar into his newly found dominant position though, but "the barely submerged histories of colonialism and racism erupt" (Gopinath 2): his memories of racially motivated school bullying resurface and usher him towards vengeance and domination. In his most bitter moment, he commands Johnny: "I'm not gonna be beat down by this country. When we were in school, you and your friends kicked me all around the place. And what are you doing now? Washing my floor. That's how I like it. Now get to work." (1:08:15) The visual staging of this scene reinforces Omar's perceived superiority: Johnny is in a vulnerable position, half-lying, half-sitting on his bed with only a few clothes on, while Omar is standing in front of the bed, towering over and looking down on him in his formal business suit. Furthermore, the sequence applies the shot/counter-shot structure, therefore the two never appear in the same frame, signifying the distance inflicted on their relationship resulting from Johnny's racist past and Omar's traumatic experiences.

Omar and Johnny's processes of realising each other's multiply marginalised positions run parallel to each other, which is reflected visually as well (Fig. 39.). Right before the opening of the laundrette, we see the two young men, facing each other through the semi-transparent window of the backroom in the laundrette. As they stand on two sides of the window, their faces and their reflections merge into one, emphasising the shared quality of their hybrid, marginalised identity positions. As Carbajal emphasises: "Johnny and Omar's reflection blend

together, creating a single superimposed image that gives the visual impression of an assembled identity" (228).

Fig. 39. "Assembled identity." (Frears 00:59:24)

Although from time to time Omar's dominating tone reinforces the hierarchy between the two of them, Johnny is continuously exposed to situations that contribute to his recognition of the other's multi-marginality, mostly stemming from his collaboration with and involvement in Omar's extended Pakistani family. After proving himself a useful employee for Omar, Nasser also commissions him for managing the "unscrewing" in the various apartments he owns, the very same process he has been previously subjected to. This job could strengthen his resentments towards the Pakistani community, yet on the contrary, he identifies with the businessman's viewpoint. These apartments are, after all, Nasser's possessions, and he has the right to remove illegal tenants.

His engagement in the family business also requires Johnny to spend more time among the Pakistani community, in Nasser's home, a diasporic space. By being thrown into the Black community as the only white Englishman in the house, he has to reflect on his own whiteness, Englishness, and ethnicity. He can recognise that what he believed as a skinhead to be superior and universal, is just one ethnic group in multicultural Britain. As Stuart Hall notes:

> [o]ne of the things which happens in England is the long discussion, which is just beginning, to try to convince the English that they are, after all, just another ethnic group. I mean a very interesting ethnic group, just hovering off the edge of Europe, with

> their own language, their own peculiar customs, their rituals, their myths." (Hall, "The Local" 21)

In addition to recognising that his imagined universal Englishness is just another ethnicity, he must also realise that he is a minority even within that group, as "[t]he conservatives' construction of a racially pure white Britain has marginalized not just immigrants [...] but also the white British poor and working classes" (Mathison 235).

Furthermore, by seeing the family from within, he can perceive of the Pakistani community not as a homogeneous mass, a faceless crowd to hate as it is, but a heterogeneous diaspora community consisting of individuals. He witnesses how hierarchy, oppression and marginalisation work in the community. Not surprisingly, he connects more easily with individuals who also occupy multi-marginal positions within the family, for instance, Tania, Nasser's "rebellious" daughter, who is not only marginalised as an ethnic other in the British context, but also as a gendered other within her own community.

As their character developments run parallel to each other, their utmost manifestation is also represented as a shared experience. At one point, as Salim and Johnny are waiting for Omar in the laundrette, the skinhead gang – Johnny's former friends – start destroying Salim's car. He intervenes, so the thugs proceed by thrashing him instead of his car. For a while Johnny observes the unequal fight from behind the shop window, visibly in conflict with himself: he is definitely in love with Omar, but he hates Salim, who embodies the stereotypes that fuelled his racism. He is a mean, shady businessman, who despises everyone with less money than himself; he is an authoritative, aggressive, but a wealthy enough criminal to avoid legal repercussion. However, Johnny recognises that his feelings towards Salim are based on his personality and not on his racial/ethnic belonging, whereas he is a victim in this situation because of that – overpowered, being clobbered into bloody pulp for his Pakistani origins. Therefore, Johnny steps in, which, in his position is the utmost act of solidarity. He "publicly cresses the racial line to defend [Salim], antagonising his former clan and effectively siding with the South Asian diasporic community" (Carbajal 234).

When Omar arrives, he sees the bloody, tumbling Salim who was able to escape due to Johnny's intervention. When he realises that Johnny is being beaten up, Omar throws himself into the fight without hesitation. After a momentary retreat caused by an approaching police siren, the skinheads attack Johnny with a garbage can, and Omar uses his own body to protect him. At this moment, he understands what Johnny earlier meant by saying: "[t]here ain't nothing I can say to make it up to you. There's only things I can do, to show you that I am with

you." (Frears 56:13) Dominance, authority, hierarchy are discarded here, it is only responsibility and care for each other that drives both of them.

This episode is a culmination of both young men's changing attitudes. They fully realise themselves in the other's position and the other in their own position. The former victim, Omar, recognises the similarities between how he used to be kicked around at school for racial difference and how Johnny is being punished now. Johnny, the former bully, is now being beaten up, both for his attachment with the Pakistani community, and most probably for his sexuality at the same time.[64] He realises the importance of his intersecting hybrid positions with Omar and is able to extrapolate that to Salim as well. As Swamy points out: "it implies not only understanding the value of hybridity in the abstract, but actually implementing this comprehension concretely in his own life" (Swamy 156).

The hierarchy that stood between them dissolves into understanding each other's positions, and comprehending the larger scale situation they are situated in: the Thatcher era's institutionalised racism, the plight of the working class, the logic behind hetero-patriarchy and homophobia. This is the point when Johnny understands Mr. Ali's previous words to him: "we all must [have knowledge] now, if we're to see clearly what is being done and to whom in this country" (Frears 1:12:43). They both understand that the marginalising logic works the same way for both, therefore their already multi-marginal identity positions have their personal and private intersection, where the interracial queer couple finds equality and solidarity. As Kirk puts it, "[i]n *My Beautiful Laundrette* Kureishi seems to suggest that identity, whether for the white working-class Johnny, or the struggling black entrepreneur Omar, is the product of a particular history and a particular culture which they share, but from different ends of the spectrum" (Kirk 366).

Although the process of realising the other's multi-marginal position and the gradual development of solidarity are not as central in *Young Soul Rebels* as in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, since the film is embedded in the underground soul scene, which provides a consciously solidary context; there are still relevant scenes that reflect on the gradual and steady deconstruction of certain stereotypes about monolithic identities, and on the recognition of nuanced and hybrid identity positions in terms of race, class and sexuality, which lead to strengthened bonds of solidarity.

[64] One of the thugs shouts: "Kill the bum" (Frears 1:31:51) which might be a reference to Johnny's sexuality, especially since the film uses this allusion earlier, when Mr. Ali calls Johnny the "bum-liability friend" of Omar (32:14).

In terms of realising class difference, it is not Caz and Billibud, but Chris and his girlfriend, Tracy, whose situation is exemplary in the film. Tracy has managed to secure a position for herself at the radio station where Chris aspires to get employment as a DJ, and her pretty clothes, impeccable make up, and white English friend reflect on her stable social and financial status. When Chris is taken to the police (innocently) as a murder suspect, after he cannot reach Caz, it is Tracy whom he calls for help. Although she is uncomfortable in the situation and is afraid of getting involved in the case, she still helps him, because she understands the systemic racism of the police, and she realises that Chris only ended up in the police station as a result of his race.[65]

The most emphatic encounter depicting the reflection on the other's multi-marginal position takes place between Caz and Billibud, right before they have sex at Billibud's place. First, Billibud puts on his own style of music, punk, but Caz turns it off after a short while. Then Billibud's changes the style to reggae, which implies his stereotypes about Black British culture, and is refused by Caz's meaningful glance and question: "how about silence?" (Julien 1:28:33). In the end, the two young men start having sex without background music, finding their common musical language in silence; however, soul music is cut into the background as extradiegetic music, emphasising the uniting sentiment within the subculture that reflects on the couple's unity.

3.2. "Meeting poor gypsies"[66] – Help and hierarchy in A Village Romance *and* Soldiers – Story From Ferentari

The Eastern European films represent characters in similarly multi-marginal positions in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, space, class and financial background, however, the progress of their relationships is different in terms of recognising the other's multi-marginality and embeddedness in the oppressive logic lurking in the background. Instead of a gradual development of equality and solidarity as a result of recognition, *A Village Romance* and *Soldiers – Story From Ferentari* depict characters who are stuck in constant arguments, disagreements and conserving hierarchy. Instead of mutual efforts for one shared goal, the films represent unilateral attempts of help – one partner trying to help the other emerge from their multi-marginal positions –, which maintains hierarchy and power relations in their interpersonal

[65] Criticism of how the police handle the case of the murder that frames the story is a recurrent theme in the film.
[66] Mladenović 35:16

dynamics. Furthermore, I argue that one of the key factors that contributes to power-struggles in the relationships is the characters' relationship to the marginal spaces they inhabit.

In *A Village Romance* Mari Bán's utmost goal is to extricate her partner, Mari Kalányos, from her family and marriage as the Romani woman suffers from domestic abuse. Leaving behind the toxic domestic environment might seem a common goal that could join the two women in an equal, shared battle, however, the film remains indecisive whether both women truly desire that goal, as Mari Kalányos is quite hesitant about leaving behind her brutal husband and violent home. She definitely realises that Mari Bán is a kinder, gentler, more caring partner than her husband has ever been, but at the same time she is paralysed by multiple layers of fear, preventing her from moving into Mari Bán's peaceful and comfortable house. She is not only terrified of her husband's patriarchal threats, she also fears the reaction of the village – a combination of racism and homophobia – and she is frightened that the lesbian community would reject her for her ethnicity. As Mari Kalányos exists at the crossroads of multiple marginal positions, she cannot face the idea of being further excluded. As Andrea Pócsik notes, "to be acknowledged by others is a basic need of an individual, just like bread, water or clothing" (Pócsik). Even though the success of their relationship could empower them in their multi-marginal identity positions, various layers of fear blind Kalányos Mari from seeing that possibility.

Although her partner, Mari Bán is an experienced activist and participant in counter-culture, and aware of the entangled marginalising logics in the background, she still lacks an understanding of Mari Kalányos's position. Towards the end of the film, during an argument about their living together, she cries out: "live with the village then" (Bódis 43:33). This dense sentence reflects on marginalising strategies affecting the rural space: the power of the hetero-patriarchal discourse, the segregational strategies of the village forcing Mari Kalányos to conform while expelling her from the community, and the inferiority complex of the village itself. However, it also bespeaks of Mari Bán's failed understanding of Mari Kalányos's situation. She expects the inexperienced Romani woman to have the same grasp on the mechanisms and self-reflection of the extent of their internalisations. What she seriously fails to realise is that Mari Kalányos's fears are very real in her situation. Although she has got most probably used to ethnic segregation and racism in the village community, she cannot handle the additional homophobia. Furthermore, her leaving behind her family for a lesbian relationship would entail total segregation from the Romani community, who are represented as highly hetero-patriarchal and homophobic. In addition, she is rightfully afraid of her husband's threats that he would sue her for the children. In other words, Mari Kalányos's decision to live with

Mari Bán would mean burning all the bridges that meant at least some sense of belonging in her multi-marginal position.

In *Soldiers* the premise of unilateral help is the financial difference between the two men, and Adi's attempts of helping Alberto are all related to money. Although himself a relatively poor PhD researcher, struggling to maintain his cheap rent in Ferentari, he is still significantly wealthier than Alberto, who has not had any independent, legal income for long. On the one hand, Adi helps him directly (although with growing reluctance), either by giving him money or buying what he needs. It starts with smaller amounts, such as inviting him for a beer at their first encounter, and continues with packets of cigarettes, bottles of wine and eating out. The amounts spent on Alberto significantly grow when he moves into the apartment rented by Adi. It is the scholar who covers the cost of the apartment and pays for everyday living costs as well.[67] Apart from direct financial help, Adi tries to support Alberto's financial situation indirectly, by helping him find a job. As the Romani man has lost both his ID card and birth certificate, his job-seeking attempts are preceded by a long struggle with authorities for papers. When Adi accompanies Alberto to the police station, he acts like a guardian, a representative, a lawyer even, which reflects how hierarchy is maintained through the one-sided urge to help the other.

In both cases the attitude of one partner helping the other, instead of working towards equality and solidarity, is problematic, because it allows hierarchy and power relations to continue within the relationships. Even though in both films, the main characters are subjected to multiple marginalising strategies and find themselves at the crossroads of various minority positions, one of them sticks to one aspect of their position in which they are more privileged than their partners, and impose their own standards on the other.

In *A Village Romance* what is most suggestive of power plays taking place in the background is Mari Kalányos's resort to violence as the pressure from Mari Bán– to persuade her to move in with her – increases. Although the film does not portray it directly, Mari Bán talks more frequently about loud arguments – verbal violence – and even occasional blows from Mari Kalányos. As the Romani woman spent half her life in an abusive marriage, she responds to inequality, pressure and oppression the same way even if the manifestation of power

[67]The significance of Alberto's demanding attitude about financial issues will be analysed in relation to trust in the next subchapter.

hierarchy is not physical abuse as in her marriage, but more subtle forms of power struggle, such as emotional blackmail.

In *Soldiers* "[t]he relationship between the two partners is imbalanced in terms of power" (Dima) as well. Adi is similar to Mari Bán in terms of helping Alberto and removing him from the poverty-stricken environment. However, Alberto is not reluctant to accept his financial help (as opposed to Mari Kalányos, who worries the common presumption that she only seeks Mari Bán's partnership for financial benefits), what is more, he reacts in a manipulating way, demanding more and more money from his partner by utilising traditional gender roles with a queer twist. Alberto often behaves in a hyper-masculine way, he is possessive and jealous, but on other occasions he becomes really tender and yearning for intimacy, cuddling and caring. He expects Adi to be the "breadwinner" in their relationship and to cover all their finances, however, at the same time, he gradually wants to take over authority over handling money and making financial decisions. In short, they re-shuffle the traditional, stereotypical gender roles of a heterosexual marriage, but it does not mean that power play is eradicated from their relationship. Furthermore, his manipulation can be interpreted as a counter-reaction to the power relations implied by Adi's unilateral help. He might sense that such an attitude puts him into an inferior position, and reacts by his own manipulative power plays to retain some of his agency.

A key factor in hurdling the realisation of the other's multi-marginality, the development of equality and solidarity is the characters' relationship to the marginal spaces they inhabit, as neither of the non-Romani partners come from the same marginal space as their Romani partners. They move into the Inner-Somogy village and Ferentari from more central spaces, which prevents them from perceiving and embracing the complexity of the peripheral spaces and multi-marginality of their original inhabitants.

Prior to the story of *A Village Romance* Mari Bán moved to the village as a member of a small lesbian group, who dreamed of building a small colony, a safe haven away from the city. Their perception of the segregated village is well captured by the documentary and shared by Mari Bán as well, which is based on the contrasting ideas within urban public discourse about the countryside as discussed in the previous chapter, where one approach considers rural spaces as underdeveloped and backward, while the other regards it as a safe, natural, peaceful haven. Visual representations reassert this dichotomy. Bódis uses only binaries to talk about the village: it is depicted only in stereotypical images and venues, the local tavern, the stream, the dirt road, the plough-land all line up with one of the two approaches. Furthermore, the two

central spaces in the documentary embody the opposing attitudes. Mari Bán's house represents the idealised view of the countryside, awaiting the lesbian lovers as an idealised bubble among the decrepit houses. Its back gate leads to nature, as a symbolic gateway to peace and quiet, or at least a gateway to these imaginations. Mari Kalányos's home, which she calls a shack, provides a sharp contrast, and its tumbling walls, barren and unorganised, dusty yard become the spatial representations of poverty, lagging behind and being stuck in the past.

Such images cannot construct the village as a living space and cannot offer a complex representation. Therefore, the documentary and especially Mari Bán fail to recognise the multi-marginal status of the village and its inhabitants. They treat the village as an empty space, which can arbitrarily be filled with inhabitants, discourses and ideologies, and fall into the same trap that resulted in the failure of the first lesbian colony. They forget that public discourse might often be quite representative of rural life, it is too binary and not comprehensive enough to encompass the intersecting segregational strategies at work in the village, the hybridity of its dwellers, in short, its multi-marginal reality.

In *Soldiers* Adi seems to embody a more distant, objective point of view: he wants to read the space around him instead of solely inscribing his own dreams and presumptions. However, as an anthropologist, his gaze is inevitably tinted with the inherent hierarchical approach of scholarly disciplines. His attitude is well-reflected in the scene representing the first meeting between Alberto and him. The sequence opens with images of local men in a pub, talking about gambling and debts, slowly escalating into violence. It is only after Alberto calls on Adi when we realise that the researcher has been there throughout, silently observing from the background. More than that, it also becomes clear that the encounter between the locals was shot from Adi's perspective, the camera's point of view embodying his scientific gaze. His research topic, *manele*, is closely connected to the complexities of Ferentari. *Manele* calls on to desires of poverty-stricken people, yet, Adi seems to miss out on several nuances of the inner hierarchies, attitudes, and social structures of Ferentari life. For instance, Alberto invites him to his uncle's party, where, after having had a bit too much to drink, Adi approaches the main table without any further invitation, which is considered as rude behaviour. After the party Alberto retorts him: "What were you thinking, coming to Borcan's table?" (Mladenović 39:50)

Another telling example of how he fails to understand certain aspects of Ferentari life, and its multi-marginal inhabitants' attitudes is when a German colleague of his arrives for a short research trip to study systemic segregation and structural racism, and Adi acts as an interpreter while some local Romani men are being interviewed. The researcher talks in detail

about her field, but Adi translates the long explanation as: "she wants to meet poor gypsies" (Mladenović 35:16). The Romani men get offended: on the one hand, they feel that the German researcher wants to benefit from their poverty; on the other hand, they are too proud to accept being called poor. From Adi's perspective, it is rational not to translate all the sociological jargon, however stripping its complexities into "poor gypsies" is clearly an offensive oversimplification. He does not even assume that the Romani men would be able to grasp the concepts even if he did translate them into everyday language. Furthermore, this incident also hints at his sense of superiority. He might be an expert on *manele* music and the social dynamics in relation to it, however, other social situations, the nuances of hierarchy within the space, the pride that certain characters take in their positions, the intersections and complexities of the space fall outside of his grasp. Just as Mari Bán in *A Village Romance*, he cannot see, understand or embrace Ferentari as his own, thus, remains an outsider and retains a sense of superiority as well.

4. Building together

Recognising the other person's multi-marginal position and therefore eliminating hierarchy from the relationships is a prerequisite of trust to develop, as "the process demands *mutual commitment* and can only be put to the test by both sides becoming involved in it" (Luhmann 42, emphasis in the original). The films construct narratives in which a mutual experience of trust can help blurring boundaries, such as ethnic, class-related, spatial, financial and educational differences, whereas the lack of trust seems to solidify the segregation of different strata of society, without finding queer intersections. As Luhmann puts it: "[w]here there is trust there are increased possibilities for experience and action, there is an increase in the complexity of the social system and also in the number of possibilities which can be reconciled with its structure (8)."

We must not forget that trust is an often taken for granted, yet extremely complex concept, and surveying its delicacies is not within the scope of this dissertation. For the analysis of the four couples' relationships from the perspective of trust, I use Jan Philipp Reemstma's concepts, who – building on Niklas Luhmann – differentiates between social and interpersonal trust; nevertheless, acknowledges the interplay of the two: "social trust also constitutes the framework for individual trust, the former providing the standards by which we assess the latter" (Reemtsma 21-22). David Good also recognises these aspects of trust and argues that

> [i]n the analysis of trust we are inevitably drawn to the complex two-way interrelationships between it, the economic and political fabric of society, and the

> individuals who constitute that society. On the one hand, we may be concerned with its role in the creation of that fabric and its psychological impacts on the individual, and on the other hand we may be concerned with how that fabric and the properties of those individuals can serve to maintain trust and any associated cooperative behaviours. (31)

I argue that the British films represent the success of trusting interpersonal relationships in a consciously intersectional atmosphere – the Black British movement – however, this fantasy of an inclusive, fluid, queer socio-cultural understanding should not be read as proof for the realisation of social trust. As opposed to that, the Eastern European films – partly as a result of their genre (documentary and semi-biographical docu-fiction) – approach the multi-marginal situations differently. They represent failing relationships in order to express social criticism: these films emphasise the lack of social trust by portraying the impossibility of interpersonal trust.

4.1. "Home of the extra-terrestrial brothers" – Utopian multi-marginal spaces in My Beautiful Laundrette *and* Young Soul Rebels[68]

A central means used by the films to depict the realisation of trust between characters is the spaces they create and inhabit together, especially the laundrette and the backroom of the garage used as a base for Chris and Caz's underground radio station. These spaces result from efforts and solidarity shared by individuals, and therefore are outside the logic of hierarchy, authority and marginalising processes of mainstream society. They act as fluid spaces of difference. As Alex Beaumont puts it when analysing the laundrette: "through their common endeavour they can create in the laundrette a space that [...] can accommodate the full plurality of the film's identities without establishing any as hegemonic" (53).

Three major characteristics of these spaces allow them to embrace such plurality, fluidity and queerness: inclusivity, ownership and the notion of home. First, both the laundrette and the garage are inclusive, in-between, half-open, but still safe spaces where the couples can embrace the hybridity that resides within and around their relationships. As Carbajal puts it in connection with *My Beautiful Laundrette*: "the film creates a queer space between the public and the private, between loving intimacy and social surveillance, whose visual representation micropolitically disorganises mainstream expectations, forging a new form of trust" (228). Although the laundrette is ultimately Johnny and Omar's space, it is open to others in multi-marginal, hybrid positions as well. For instance, right before the opening, we can see Omar's uncle, Nasser and his English lady dancing in the newly refurbished laundrette, while Johnny

[68](Julien 00:43)

and Omar are having sex in the backroom (Fig. 40.). Even though they are a heterosexual couple, their relationship is no more legitimate than the young men's as Nasser is a *nouveau riche*, married Pakistani immigrant, while his mistress is an English, single woman, who financially relies on Nasser's wealth.

The space of the radio station, *Soul Patrol*, is similar to the laundrette. As a physical space, the small room in the car mechanic's garage is a space on the threshold of the public and private, visibility and hiding, professional and personal. As a place of business, it is inevitably open to everyone, nevertheless, how they use this half-segregated space within the garage, makes it private at the same time. Furthermore, although the space is a hidden one – that is necessary for an illegal radio broadcast –, the broadcast itself serves as a symbolic space for visibility: the visibility of soul, a musical space for inclusivity, hybridity and intersectionality.

Fig. 40. Two "illegitimate" couples. (Julian 00:57:52)

Another queer aspect of these spaces is the issue of ownership. Instead of clear-cut possession of spaces, the backroom of the garage does not belong to any of those who use it for their multi-marginal, queer purposes. Most probably they are allowed to use it as a favour from the owner of garage, who manages the car mechanic business. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, ownership is more complex. The laundrette originally belongs to Nasser, who puts Omar in charge as manager of the place. However, Omar claims the laundrette as his own, so they agree on a basic rent, which would give Omar a certain sense of ownership of the place. In terms of hierarchy, this is tangible for a while in his relationship with Johnny: he is the employer, and Johnny is the employee. However, in the end, after eliminating the hierarchy and authority from their relationship, the space is reinterpreted as well – the rent is, after all, paid from the profit which is the result of their shared efforts in the laundrette.

The third aspect is the notion of the home. Since "dominant notions of home have naturalized privileged sexual categories at the expense of others" (Gariola 38), the couples would be doomed to fail if they attempted to build their spaces on the basis of the traditional notion of home, from which, as gay couples, they are inevitably excluded. However, in both films, the queer couples, instead of maintaining boundaries attached to the concept of home – such as inside and outside, private and public, familiar and stranger, us and them –destabilise such boundaries. As Rahul Gariola explains in connection with *My Beautiful Laundrette*: "[t]he laundrette, [...] is a home away from home." (45) Indeed, in the fluid, in-between space of the laundrette who could decide where is in and out, who belongs and who does not, who is us and who is them. The laundrette becomes the queer home of innumerably marginalised and hybrid identities, who previously did not have a space they could honestly call home.[69]

The space of the garage can also serve as a home to couples, who previously were not represented as having a home of their own: we never see Caz's original home, Chris lives with his incomplete family among constant tensions, Billibud's only space of his own is an untidy, narrow room. Moreover, the radio station broadcasted from here provides a sense of belonging, a feeling of being home in the music to innumerable listeners with their own multi-marginal positions. In the very first lines of the film *Soul Patrol* is introduced as "home of the extra-terrestrial brothers" (Julien 00:43). This phrase condenses the thick layers of hybridity within the radio broadcast itself. The radio station is introduced as a home to all symbolic brothers (and sisters and siblings) who fall outside the normative regimes of 1970s Britain.

The final moments of trust that serve as manifestations of what Carbajal calls "multicultural trust" (235) are closely linked to these spaces in the climactic endings of the films. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* after the incident with Salim, Johnny wants to leave Omar, the laundrette and the whole situation. However, as he is standing hesitantly at the door, Omar gently embraces him from behind, which is probably the most tender, loving caress in the whole film. More importantly, Omar is not blocking Johnny's way, he is not restricting him: he communicates his feelings and desires through touch, but does not limit or restrain Johnny in any way. In this moment, hierarchy is completely done away with between the two men "leading to a cathartic moment of assembled intimacy" (235) as in the next scene we can see them standing above the washbasin, washing each other playfully. It is not any sort of inequality

[69] Nasser's abundant family home, with its strictly structured, hierarchical, gendered spaces provides an exemplary contrast with the fluid, inclusive, equal attitudes towards space and home in the laundrette.

they want to wash away, as hierarchy is already down the drain. They simply enjoy the fluidity of the space they created together, and the security of trust in each other's company.

In *Young Soul Rebels* the final scene with five radically different people dancing together in unison is an excellent example of how this hybrid, marginal, intersectional space becomes a comfortable container of various identity positions and trusting interpersonal relations (Fig. 41.). In the last scene, we can see the newly formed group of a white, middle-class heterosexual woman (Tracy's friend), a black, middle class, heterosexual woman (Tracy), a white, middle-class gay man (Billibud), a black, working-class heterosexual man (Chris) and a black, working-class gay man (Caz) selecting and polishing the records, which are Caz and Chris's most valuable property.[70] What is more, in quite a music video-esque manner, the five of them start dancing together to soul music, trusting each other's moves, bodies, sexualities, classes and races. Similarly to *My Beautiful Laundrette*, difference is not erased, but hierarchy and prejudices are. There is no lead dancer in this choreography, all of them move together, to the same music, doing the same moves without losing themselves in an undistinguishable mass.

Fig. 41. Dancing together. (Julian 01:40:43)

It is clear that the British multi-marginal couples are represented as succeeding in their efforts of building new, fluid, queer spaces as the dynamics of their relationships are based on trust. However, researchers seem to be divided whether to read this success as positive examples of multicultural trust on a social level, or to maintain a more distant, critical perspective about

[70]Parallel to the development of their relationship, the film also tackles how Caz's friend, Chris, gets involved with a young Black woman, Tracy, working at Metro station, and how her white friend also becomes part of the group. The scene takes place after the outbreak of violence at the counter-cultural concert organised in opposition of the Silver Jubilee, where Caz and Chris would have performed their set.

the dreamlike happy endings. Many approach the films through focusing on their socio-cultural environment, which is described by Hall as follows:

> [i]n this 'post-colonial' moment, these transverse, transnational, transcultural movements, which were always inscribed in the history of 'colonisation', but carefully overwritten by more binary forms of narrativisation, have, of course, emerged in new forms to disrupt the settled relations of domination and resistance inscribed in other ways of living and telling these stories. They reposition and dis-place 'difference' without, in the Hegelian sense, 'overcoming' it." ("When" 251)

By reading *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Young Soul Rebels* as expressions of the successful fights and inclusiveness of the Black British movement, several critics (see for instance Ranashina, Weber, Kirk, Swamy, Gariola, Beaumont and Carbajal) seem to suggest that the films are proofs of a fluid, hybrid, queer social recognition and multicultural trust. However, others argue that historically accuracy is less important while analysing these works than what they achieve as films. For instance, Carbajal contends in connection with *My Beautiful Laundrette* that "the most pressing question when interpreting it should not involve historical accuracy (i.e. whether Muslims routinely slept with skinheads in the 1980s), but, rather, an appreciation of the film's 'queering' of hermetic socio-political positions, and the effect that such bizarre arrangement of human intimacy has on the audience's collective consciousness" (222). In a similar manner, Rees-Roberts expresses that *Young Soul Rebels* is "a radical re-working rather than fond recollection of one moment music fused with politics in the antiracist activism set against the Queen's Jubilee celebrations of 1977" (279). Others also call attention to the utopian, "too-good-to-be-true" qualities of the happy endings, and refrain from taking the films as "faithful" representations of the times they take place in (or are produced in). Nick Rees-Roberts for instance calls *Young Soul Rebels* "a radical soul utopia composed of gay interracial sexuality between a masculine soul boy (Caz) and a middle-class white punk (Billibudd)" (279). Also, Alan Sinfield points out that "the film ends in utopian style, with a sexual liaison between Caz (black male) and Billibudd (white male), another between Chris (black male) and Tracy (black female), a main-man comradeship between Caz and Chris, a special friendship between Tracy and Jill (white female), and everybody learning to funk" (*On Sexuality* 179). He characterises *My Beautiful Laundrette* in a similar manner: "a miraculously egalitarian, racially blind gay relationship is presented as a magical opportunity for the overthrow of (merely) cultural misunderstanding. The boys in *My Beautiful Laundrette* inhabit a world in which "Asian" and "skinhead" are the most antipathetic terms, but between the two of them race is unremarkable." (162).

In my view, the films do succeed in representing a form of multicultural trust, as they construct narratives where trust is achieved on an interpersonal level – hence the fantastic happy endings. However, it would be naive to read these (inter)personal tales as *mise en abyme*s of British society as a whole, which is well-reflected by reviews expressing doubt about the authenticity of these representations and spaces. While the socio-cultural contexts of the films might be filled with multi-marginal intersections, the recognition of the others' multimarginal position, building equality, solidarity and trust do (did) not occur. Although the films themselves might fantasise about setting a general example for a fluid, queer, multiculturally trustworthy society, there are signs in both stories that their happy endings are only viable on an interpersonal level, but not on a social one.

In both films, the queer, fluid, inclusive spaces of multi-marginal trust are exposed to violent attempts of destroying them. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, it is Johnny's ex-friend thugs who try to destroy the laundrette, but they only manage to smash its windows. Significantly, just as Omar and Johnny, and the space of the laundrette itself, they are also in multiple marginalised positions – working class, fascist, impoverished thugs – but they cannot realise and reflect on the structural logic behind their precarious existence. Therefore, they desperately cling to those aspects of their identity they consider as privileged or superior: white Englishness and heterosexuality. As the laundrette defies the superiority or exclusivity of both, they resort to violent attacks in order to destroy the new, transgressive space. In *Young Soul Rebels* it is the killer of TJ who tries to destroy the garage space and the radio station itself by pulling all the tapes to threads in an attempt to retrieve evidence that could prove his crime. It is hinted that he himself occupies marginalised positions: he has strong homosexual desire towards black men (the only scenes in the film where a black male body is stereotypically eroticised are shot from his perspective), but he cannot come to terms with his gay desires. As a result, he channels his homoerotic desires into violence – hence the murder at the beginning of the film, and the vicious ransacking of the garage.

Therefore, the films might create a fantasy-like narrative, in which their interracial, multi-marginal couples are given a happy, trusting ending, however, they also hint at the impossibility of the same multicultural trust to occur on a social level. This constitutes a discrepancy within the films: although Reemtsma, Luhmann and Good argue that interpersonal and social trust are closely connected to each other; however, instead of recognising this interplay of social and interpersonal trust, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Young Soul Rebels* construct utopias in which interpersonal trust can overwrite the lack of social trust.

4.2. If you can trust me, will you live with me?"[71] *– Spaces of hierarchy in* A Village Romance *and* Soldiers – Story From Ferentari

Where the British films depict the success of interpersonal trust within multi-marginal queer couples and fantasise about the same social trust, the Eastern European films seem to acknowledge the interconnectedness of social and interpersonal levels of trust and display the failures of relationships to express social criticism: in these stories, it is impossible to build multicultural trust on an interpersonal level when it does not exist on a social one. As David Crowe puts it: "here lies the barrier to a solution of the differences that confront Gypsies and non-Gypsies [...]: suspicion and mistrust" (149). By clinging on to subtle forms of hierarchies (be those ethnic, spatial, educational), the characters cannot recognise the shared quality of their hybrid, marginalised positions, and therefore the affective process leading through bonds of solidarity to trust is arrested and taken over by power plays and manipulation.

Neither women in *A Village Romance* can trust the other, and their suspicions connected to both general prejudices and emotional insecurities, reflect on how the interpersonal (emotional) issues interact with unresolved social problems. Mari Kalányos cannot believe that Mari Bán loves her, which is partly an interpersonal problem, but also has a wider angle as Mari Kalányos has lived her life tortured by domestic abuse, without getting love, care or help from anyone be that her private circle or the authorities. She is also afraid that Mari's urban, educated, activist friends who, she fears, would not accept her, which reflects on the remaining social hierarchy connected to spatial and intellectual differences on a social scale. Emotionally, she realises that Mari Bán treats her in a completely different way than she has ever been treated, yet her attempts to completely remove Mari Kalányos from her Romani community resemble the integrational attitudes of Hungarian political discourse, and can explain her fears regarding her ethnic status.[72]

The relationship between Alberto and Adi in *Soldiers* is also an exemplary reflection of the interplay between social prejudices and personal distrust. Since "decisions about whether or not one should trust another person depend on that person's reputation" (Good 38), Alberto has a considerable disadvantage as an ex-convict, Romani man. Even though he seems to prove from time to time that he is trustworthy, and drawn by honest emotions and desire towards Adi, trust cannot develop between the two of them. A major sign of this is that he goes against his whole community to be in a relationship with the scholar: he breaks all the vows he took in

[71]Mladenović (1:49:32)
[72]See Bárány, Chapter 9, 325-353.

front of his family about gay practices after he was released from prison, he loses his cousin, Borcan's support, he cannot even go around Ferentari without having to fear for his safety. The ending of the film verifies that he really lost everything he had because of their relationship: we see him occupy a bed in a shelter for homeless people. However, his financial dependence – and often abuse – on Adi poisons their relationship. He gradually takes control over Adi's finances, at times resorting to manipulation, threats and violence, which strengthens the prejudiced image of the parasitical, thieving Gypsy, and aggravates distrust and distance between the two men. It is not just Adi who cannot trust Alberto: the film does not let us, viewers trust him either. Even if we learn by the end of the film that he ended up miserable after Adi left him – significantly, at night, escaping while Alberto was asleep – *Soldiers* never answers the question whether Alberto really loved Adi, or just wanted to get money out of this relationship (or both).

Although the remaining hierarchy within the couples and the resulting inequality and lack of interpersonal trust – apart from the social pressure – makes the couples' struggle more difficult (if not impossible), they do fight for their relationships and for creating their own spaces, their homes. The problem is that these attempts – parallel to the unilateral efforts of help – are often one-sided, instead of being a joined, mutual endeavour. In both *A Village Romance* and *Soldiers*, it is the non-Romani main characters' home (Mari Bán's house and Adi's rented flat) that could serve as a physical base for carving out a queer, fluid, in-between space for the multi-marginal couples. However, as opposed to the British examples, in terms of inclusivity, ownership and the reinterpretation of home these spaces are not suitable foundations for queering.

The physical space that would serve as a home for the two women in *A Village Romance* is Mari Bán's pretty, comfortable house, which spectacularly stands out of its surroundings. With spacious rooms and a blooming garden, it is an idealised bubble within the village. Although it would mean a tremendous development in Mari Kalányos's quality of life, she is reluctant to move in. First, the fact that this house is Mari Bán's property strengthens the underlying hierarchy between the two women. Mari often expresses her concerns about how their living together would affect her already low reputation –she does not want anyone to think that she is in this relationship for financial benefits. She can clearly sense the concealed superiority in Mari Bán's position and ownership of the house. Furthermore, this house already exists and belongs to only one of them, which means that the shared experience of creating a space, a home for their own is missing: this is a situation of one person trying to incorporate another into her own, already existing – even though queer –space. Furthermore, incorporation

in this case is always already segregation: Mari Kalányos would be cut off from her community. As a result, their (or rather, Mari Bán's) attempts to create a physical space for themselves result in failure: although Mari Kalányos temporarily moves in a couple of times during the course of the film, she always ends up going "home."

In *Soldiers* it is Adi's rented flat in Ferentari that could serve as a home for the two men, and, as opposed to Mari Kalányos in *A Village Romance*, Alberto has no problem moving into the flat. At the beginning, we can see some truly intimate moments shared by the lovers in different parts of the flat (Fig. 42.). First, we can see them embracing each other on the couch, we can see them sharing "family" meals at the table, and their showers also create the sense of a queer home. However, as Adi's mistrust towards Alberto and his underlying financial reasons for being in the relationship deepen, the intimacy of the space also deteriorates. As Alberto takes over control in the flat, in the end, Adi sees no other way out but escape.

Fig. 42. Early intimacy. (Mladenović 00:28:32)

When the attempts of creating or carving out a space which both partners can call their own are shared efforts, they are successful. In *Soldiers* Adi and Alberto successfully create a shared space which is a space neither of them owns or controls. When they spend an afternoon together in a park, the small patch of grass they share is a space truly carved out by both of them. In *A Village Romance*, the women's desire to share their thoughts, pains and love inspires them to create their own discursive space: a shared language that can bridge the miscommunication between the two of them (and the lack of communication within the village). This aspiration is exemplified by a love letter written by Kalányos Mari in Romani language to Bán Mari. She understands only parts of the letter, as her Romani vocabulary is that of a

beginner at best. However, it is quite symbolic which parts of the letter she understands: she is proudly stating that she already knows the phrase "I love you." With the problematic parts she turns to Mari Kalányos's daughter – who delivered the letter – and the little girl willingly translates the unknown phrase: "you are pretty." The letter is the condensation of the possibilities in the two women's relationship to create a shared counter-language, a discursive space which would be appropriate to share their feelings, and which could be occupied equally. Learning this language is not a one-sided attempt but mutual: Mari Bán has to learn the Romani language, while Mari Kalányos has to figure out how to use the Romani language to communicate lesbian desire and love. Therefore, the Romani love letter becomes a radically new form a communication, and a shared discursive space for the two women.

5. Failures and victories?

In this chapter I compared two British and two Eastern European films featuring interracial/interethnic relationships through the concepts of intersectionality, solidarity and trust. I have pointed out that the basic situations are similar in both the Eastern European and British examples: the characters are constructed and represented as occupying a multi-marginal, hybrid identity position, at the intersections of sexual, racial/ethnic, financial, cultural, spatial and class-related difference. I analysed how the films represent the development of these relationships, where recognising the other's multi-marginal position is depicted as key to a successful relationship.

The British narratives show their couples embracing each other's multi-marginal positions, and therefore can go against the underlying logic of marginalising strategies in mainstream society. As a result, a sense of solidarity can develop within the relationships, which leads to the eradication of hierarchy and to interpersonal trust. Therefore, they succeed in creating new, fluid, hybrid queer spaces – queer homes – where they can have their "happily-ever-after" moments at the end of the films. I also pointed out how these utopian, fairy-tale endings raised doubts in scholars and critics, and argued that the two British films depict narratives of successful interpersonal trust, which are often (mis)read as tales of social multicultural trust, even though the films indicate its lack by representing violent attacks on the queer spaces.

In the Eastern European films, the recognition of the characters' being mutually affected by the same marginalising techniques is missing, which leads to – instead of solidarity – unilateral attempts of one character trying to help and save the other. As a result, hierarchy is

maintained within the relationships, and solidarity, equality and, therefore, trust cannot be achieved. Thus, the attempts of creating new, queer spaces for themselves also fail and both Eastern European interethnic couples break up by the end of the films. However, as opposed to British films, the Eastern European narratives – partly due to their genres as documentary and semi-autobiographical docu-drama – approach the issues of multi-marginal couples from another perspective: they acknowledge the lack of social trust, and depict its effects on the personal levels of trust through the multi-marginal couples. Neither *A Village Romance* nor *Soldiers* should be approached as gloomy, Eastern European misery-narratives, but as conscious social, cultural and political criticism about the marginalising, segregational logic that is at work in all forms of marginal positions be that sexual, ethnic, spatial or otherwise, and as reflections on the dynamics of interpersonal and social trust in multi-marginal positions. From this perspective, we cannot say that happiness is unconditionally granted in the West while misery is inevitably in the East, the films simply approach their socio-cultural contexts differently.

Towards a Conclusion

Proud and Out?
Learning in the Atmosphere of Plurality

This dissertation set out to explore the possibilities of creating an analytical framework which allows for the parallel reading of British and Eastern European cinemas without reformulating and re-inscribing the inherited dichotomizing and hierarchical patterns of the East-West binary that imagines a developed, rich, liberal, happy Western and a backwards, poor, conservative and miserable Eastern Europe. Instead of the inevitable hierarchical comparative approach I called for an *imparative* analysis, which, without disregarding existing fantasies about the East and the West looks for ways to read *beside* these borders, circumventing the traps of reproducing binaries. At the centre of my readings stands the issue of representing queerness, as it in itself provides an intersection of normative systems, value judgements, marginalising and othering strategies; and therefore exposes perceptions and productions of self and O/other, (self-)colonising mechanisms, cultural imaginaries and identity formations not as fossilised constants, but fluid, variable and "queerable" processes.

The novelty of the dissertation is founded on its complex theoretical background and methodology: psychology, cultural studies, spatial theory and cultural geography provided the basis for my readings. Although psychological models of coming out often focus on the individual's journey through identity development, already in her early model Cass states that the congruency or incongruency prompting or halting the coming out process is highly dependent on the individual's environment (219) – family, community, society – therefore I applied an intersectional perspective on identity in the analyses of the dissertation, employing methods and theories of cultural studies. Also, since coming out in itself is a spatial metaphor, I engaged the results and ideas of spatial studies when reading the individual constructions of queer narratives. Furthermore, as my case studies are strongly impacted, even bound, by temporal and spatial specificities in terms of their cultural locatedness, I leaned on works and insights of social/cultural geography. Such a complex and nuanced theoretical embeddedness allowed for a revised comparative approach – imparative analysis – in the parallel readings of Eastern European and British examples, and showing that it is possible to discuss these two different tempo-localities outside of the judgemental and hierarchical paradigm of the East-West binary.

Choosing Francis Lee's *God's Own Country*, which binds the two sides of Europe into one fairy tale like love story, as the middle ground and starting point for the analyses allowed

for building a theoretical foundation of my arguments at the intersection of queer, post-colonial and post-socialist theories on the one hand, and identifying spatial formations that served as igniting points for the individual chapters on the other. Space is not only a central issue on a thematic level in the dissertation – closets and coming outs; public and private spaces of sex; the countryside; and homes of interethnic, queer couples – but it is reflected in the structure of the dissertation as well: the chapters correspond with the spatial features of the coming out process as an opening up of space, follow a broadening pattern.

The first chapter, "In and/or Out": Spatial Metaphors of the Closet and Coming Out" focused on spatial metaphors of the closet and coming out as queer individuals go through queer identity development and fight against their closets and for their own safe spaces. I highlighted a similar trajectory in the representations of the closet and coming out in both areas: the first examples of queer stories on the screen from the 1970s and 1980s were produced by activist enthusiasm and therefore focused on extraqueer, public acts of coming out that served as a deeds of resistance and revolt at the same time; the 1990s brought about films that took up the responsibility of educating the public about queer existence and ended up with generalised characters and narratives; while films in the 2000s turned towards individual, unique stories of closets and coming outs.

"From Fucking to Making Love" shifted the dissertation's focus to the next structural space of the coming out process, and analysed the affective spaces and practices of queer sexuality; which, inevitably, belong to the interpersonal sphere in Dyer's model of the coming out. In this chapter I argued that no sexual practice or space can be seen as unquestionably shameful or enjoyable, and view the relations of affect, space and sexual practices as a circular matrix, in which all three elements mutually constitute and influence one another. The analysed films depict a fluid and changing – changeable – relationship between space, affect and sex in relation to self-acceptance, mutuality of desire and pleasure, and consent; therefore the street is not necessarily a space for shameful fucks and the bedroom is not always a space for pleasurable love making.

The focus of third chapter, "Obsolete Fathers and Queer Sons," was the effect of queer presence on a large-scale spatial structure, the countryside. I argued that in both cultural areas the rural presence of queerness highlights a crisis of existing masculine structures and calls for the formation, production of a queered concept of masculinity. Eastern European films represent the countryside as a container of traditional, conservative notions of masculinity and gender politics, however, at the same time, dysfunctional father figures highlight the critical

state and unsustainability of such concepts. In the British context, it is working-class masculinity that is represented as in crisis as a result of Thatcher's industrial restructuring, and is offered a chance of queering – and survival – through the motif of dancing. Although queer presence provides a more adaptable concept of masculinity, queering country-men is unsuccessful in both areas.

Chapter four, "Minorities in Love," revolved around the last stage in Cass's model of homosexual coming out, synthesis, where queerness is embedded in the identity as one aspect, in balance with other notions of the self (235); and focused on the intersection of sexual and ethnic otherness. The chapter inspected the entanglements of different marginalising strategies when they impinge upon the same individual, couple and community; and scrutinised the interplay between sexual and racial/ethnic othering by reading two British and two Eastern European films featuring interethnic queer couples, whose personal and interpersonal positions reflect on an entangled logic of various marginalising strategies. In both contexts the characters are constructed and represented as occupying a multi-marginal, hybrid identity position, at the intersections of sexual, racial/ethnic, financial, cultural, spatial and class-related difference.

Bearing in mind the analogy between the structure of the dissertation and the spatial interpretation of the gradual process of coming out, as a way towards a conclusion, I will address the state of being proud and out, regarded by many as the culmination of queer identity development. Open, public displays of queer identities, feelings, desires and attachments are cornerstones not only in individual coming out processes, but also in LGBTQ history, in which the Pride march plays a central role:

> [i]n response to the marginalization of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and other sexual minorities most cities in the West hold gay pride festivals and parades. Recognizing the anniversary of the Stonewall riots, gay pride parades and festivals transform streets into queer sites of celebration and protest. Drag queens, dykes on bikes, leather bears, buff boys, marching girls, gay parents with their kids, gay and lesbian school children, and many more "queer" bodies *queer* city streets. (Johnston and Longhurst 85, emphasis in the original)

Queering the city through the march – as Johnston and Longhurst put it – is actually a highly complex process with a variety of meanings and effects in the wake of marching queer bodies. First of all, "a pride parade usually has the purpose of secular display" (Johnston, *Queering* 23), in which the sheer amount of queer presence on the street accentuates the visibility of queerness. This is, in itself, a queering potential, however, "Pride marches also achieve much more than just visibility" (Enguix 16). On the one hand, Pride parades inevitably involve a separation of marchers and spectators, which not only makes the binary division between participants and

spectators visible and accentuated (Johnston, "Borderline" 77), but also emphasises "'us' and 'them' discourses" (Johnston, *Queering* 27). On the other hand, however, Pride marches also foreground that heterosexual and heteronormative identity production is only one way of sexual identity development and gendered practices; and "[m]arching groups highlight the mobility of gendered and sexualised embodiment and upset heteronormative understandings of what it means to be male, female, and queer" (Johnston, *Queering* 7), moreover, "exaggerate the process by which bodies and places become gendered and sexualised" (35).

Furthermore, Begonya Enguix adds that pride marches – in achieving more than visibility – "also challenge the production of everyday spaces as heterosexual" (16). As "the act of walking [...] is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrians [...]; a spatial acting-out of the place" (de Certeau 97-8, emphasis in the original), marching queer bodies *re*appropriate the public space of the city, and apart from highlighting its usual heterosexual production mechanisms, produce it – if only temporarily – as queer: "pride parades [...] actively produce queer streets. Parades can be seen as deconstructive spatial tactics [because they] upset unarticulated norms (Johnston, "Borderline" 77).

Although Gheorghe and Johnny never get the chance to march in a Pride parade in *God's Own Country*, the open, public display of emotion and their affectionate relationship is crucial in the culmination of the film. They not only kiss openly in public when they reconcile and decide to resume their relationship, but also share a bus journey back to their new, shared home, snuggling up to each other and sleeping while resting their head on the other's shoulder. These small acts of publicly exhibiting queer attachments serve as manifestations of Johnny's self-acceptance and his development into a mature queer individual.

The two films that focus on the significance of the pride march, Matthew Warchus' *Pride* (2014) in the British and Srđan Dragojević's *The Parade* (2011) in the Eastern European context, emphasise the weight of recognising the Other as other and at the same time realising the shared experience of marginalising processes. Both films depict two very different attempts of marching: the first ones in both cases are represented as a hopeless struggle, an unsuccessful fight for visibility, spatial reconfiguration and pride, while the second ones – through building solidarity with non-queer, but similarly marginalised groups – achieve the goal of pride marches: reclaiming the public space of the city street by walking proud and out.

Apart from depicting an attempt of queering traditional working-class masculinity, *Pride* takes an awareness-raising look back on the plight of queer individuals and communities

under the Thatcherite regime against systemic homophobia and for the recognition of their own spaces. It offers a comprehensive representation of individual and communal development, depicts the process of coming to terms with one's homosexuality on different levels, commemorates both the HIV/AIDS crisis and the pride and perseverance of striking miners. All these themes are in a close relation to spatial narratives, especially to the reinterpretation, reappropriation and resignification of spaces, and the narrative frame of the film is constituted by the 1984 and 1985 London Gay Pride Marches, which took place in the "hyper-homophobic context of new right government" (Bell and Binnie 36).

Hyper-homophobia is even more apparent in Srđan Dragojević's *The Parade* as it narrates the first attempts of organising Gay Pride Parades in Serbia in the 2000s, in the aftermath of the bloody "civil wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, economic sanctions and poverty, political oppression and cultural isolation" (Kronja 17). Ivana Kronja also adds that

> regime controlled media spread a strong "violence culture," using authoritarian political propaganda and hate speech, equating war violence with patriotism, presenting war veterans with criminal records as heroes and respectable citizens, and promoting turbo-folk music and popular culture along with its kitsch macho-pornographic contents as a desirable cultural model for young generations. Since the beginning of war, media and public space had been flooded with pictures of violence. Violence as a way of life found its expression throughout the cultural domain, from popular music and culture, music videos and tabloid press, to the theatre and cinema (20)

In such a context, homophobia presents a common ground for hate: the film opens with a list of derogatory terms used by different nationalities, such as "chetnik", "ustasha", "balija" or "shiptar"[73] and explains who use these terms. However, the list ends with one pejorative phrase, used by everyone: "peder," which has the same derogatory tone and connotations as the English "faggot." In other words, homophobia is above national(ist) conflicts, and queers are hated everywhere, regardless of national identity[74]. Therefore, after the civil wars ended, but frustrations and tensions remain, the queer community is used as a substitute enemy: as Alexandar Pavlović and Linda Todd explain, "Serb nationalists have used Belgrade Pride as

[73] As explained in the film, chetnik is a derogatory term denoting a Serbian person, used by Croats, Bosniaks and Kosovo Albanians; ustasha is a pejorative word for Croatians, used by Serbs, Bosniaks and Kosovo Albanians; balija means a Bosniak and it is used by Croats, Serbs and Kosovo Albanians; while shiptar is a term for Kosovo Albanians, used by Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks.

[74]Similar notions are expressed in *Go West*, set during the civil war, in which Kenan points out that "there's a war going on in my country. The Serbs, who are of Orthodox religion, hate Muslims. The Muslims of faith don't like the Serbs. The Croats also live there, they're Catholic, sometimes the like the Muslims, mostly they don't. [...] But this will stop one day. They will lay down the guns and forget about the massacres. But they will continue to hate homosexuals as before (Imamovic01:33).

their new battlefield for the preservation of Serb purity and for inciting opposition to the influx of Westernization, which is seen as corrupting the Serbian nation and national identity" (247).

In both films the two represented marches offer radically different experiences for the viewers and the characters as well. The 1984 march in *Pride* is characterised by fear, struggle, and aggression. The colours are dimmed, dominated by grey, brown and white with occasional red patches, and the shaking camera cannot provide the viewer with a comprehensive vision of space. The sense of an inscrutable space is strengthened by the route of the march, as it leads through narrow streets encompassed by brick walls and high buildings. These are not the well-known, symbolic spaces of London, these are the streets of marginalised, avoided districts. The marchers are observed and sometimes physically but more often verbally threatened by hostile, homophobic bystanders and policemen are lining up in the background as a reminder of the homophobia and oppressive power of the state (Fig. 43.). The scene intensifies the threatening atmosphere with the decision to use no extra-diegetic music, the viewer and the characters are submerged into the sharp noises, shouting, slogan-chanting. Although according to Lynda Johnston gay pride parades have a double goal of celebrating queerness and at the same time protesting for equality (*Queering* 1), it is just the political protest that characterises this scene. The heteronormative, homophobic presence of bystanders and the suffocating streets resist queering and the march cannot be called a celebration of queerness as the marchers struggle their way through.

The idea of the Pride march in *The Parade* is also embedded in fear and violence. The first images of Serbian Pride attempts we see in the film are archival scenes of violent queer bashing, screened during a press conference and commented on by Mirko, one of the organizers of the 2009 Pride parade, saying that "we hope that these images belong to the past" (Dragojević 05:25). However, the film emphasises that these images do not actually belong to the past, as the press conference about the organisation of the 2009 Pride is invaded by neo-Nazi thugs, who smash the cameras and beat up the people attending the event, chanting their motto, "kill, slaughter, so faggots don't exist" (06:29). Apart from public homophobia, the film also highlights strong systemic homophobia: when the organisers ask for permission to organise the event, and at the same time, require protection from the police, the chief of police's answers, "you know, if we give you, faggots and lesbians, human rights, soon enough everyone will be asking for them" (16:23).

Fig. 43. Homophobic bystander in London. (Warchus 00:05:47)

The 2009 Pride march is an amplified version of how the 1984 London Pride march is depicted in *Pride*. The handful of queer people – accompanied by their few defenders – gather in a narrow, confined corner of Belgrade; a space that looks like a shady back alley, and proves to be a trap. They know that they should expect heavy and violent opposition, therefore the gathering is characterised by anxiety, fear and baseball bats, along with rainbow balloons and flags – the latter of which are soon transformed into weapons of self-protection. If I characterised the opposing bystanders in *Pride* as "hostile" with their "burn in hell" signs and homophobic screams, what the characters of *The Parade* have to face is a mortal enemy: a crowd of violent, aggressive, anti-queer neo-Nazis, arriving in masses, chanting the already heard line advocating the slaughter of all queers (Fig. 44.). When the two groups collide, it is neither political protest nor celebration of queer pride: it is a bloody, deadly fight for life. The space closes in on the queer group, the camera is shaky, the space is incomprehensible, the view is blocked either by walls or violent thugs and their bats. The outcome of the fight is also bloody and tragic: by the time the police forces arrive – with a meaningful lateness signifying the official homophobia of the system – the thugs get hold of Mirko and throw him down a subway, into his death.

The fact that the queer community dared to go on the street, however, is already a result of building solidarity and deconstruction of stereotypes. The basic conflict of the film occurs between Limun, a war-hero/criminal, who, after his ambiguous role in the civil war, works in a judo centre as coach and as security guard for criminals, politicians or famous prostitutes as he often recalls; and Radmilo, a gay veterinarian, who happens to save Limun's dog, on gun point, shot by one of his enemies. When it turns out that his partner, Mirko, is not only the organiser of the Belgrade Pride Parade, but also the wedding planner chosen by Limun's fiancée, Biserka,

Limun acts violently, and attacks Mirko in his office. For Biserka, this is the final straw in the long list of her fiancé's violent behaviour. For Mirko, it is also the final irritation that stretches his perseverance beyond the limit: he decides to emigrate to Canada. As a result of the fear of losing their partners, Limun and Radmilo are forced to unite: Limun and his company of men with similarly ambiguous histories will protect the Pride Parade. However, Limun's companions all refuse the job, so the two men embark on a journey through the ex-Yugoslav states to collect Limun's former enemies/friends from the civil war. Meanwhile, the rest of the organisers of Pride stay with Biserka in Limun's house, to be protected from further attacks.

Fig. 44. Against a mortal enemy. (Dragojević 01:36:38)

At first, the film applies stereotypes in the representation of both groups. Gay men are depicted as effeminate and weak, having a pink car with a "Hello Kitty" figure on its keychain, who drink with their pinkie finger held away from the glass. Limun's group is also represented through stereotypes of macho masculinity: they all have a history of violence, they are well-versed in both martial arts and street fighting, do not show their emotions – except towards dogs – and think about women as their property. During their shared time together however, they slowly get to know each other and the stereotypical figures become well-defined characters. Although Pavlović and Todd claim that "it is Limun's point of view that orients the narrative perspective" (249) and as a result it is the queer community that is heterosexualised – normalised – during the course of the film, I believe that at the same time the macho group is queered as well. It is true that the queer characters are taught certain traits considered to be "straight", such as how to hold a glass while drinking or how to fight, and as a result of the process Limun states that "you are normal... like we are" (Dragojević 1:26:26).

However, if we look at this statement from another perspective it can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the shared features between the two groups, since the time they spend

together does not leave straight masculine stereotypes unaffected either. The men learn how to handle conflicts without violence, they are taught basic aesthetics and are "cured" from their obsession with kitsch, and encouraged to treat women with less objectifying attitudes. Furthermore, certain aspects of their macho masculinity are exposed as having queer connotations: through Radmilo's queer gaze, the homosocial bonding rituals of these super-masculine men turn out to have a homoerotic potential and the figures and sculptures of muscular male bodies are transformed into objects of queer desire. The moment when the two seemingly strictly separated ways of life, worldviews and identity formations collide is provided by the story of *Ben-Hur* (Fig. 45.). It turns out that it is a cult film for both groups; Limun and his company believe that it is the utmost representation of camaraderie, friendship and male bonding; while the queer group admires the film for its queer connotations and its subtle representation of gay love.

As a result of their collaboration and Mirko's sacrifice the march one year later is represented as a totally different event. Instead of a handful of terrified queer people facing a mass of violent thugs in a back alley, the film depicts a proudly marching queer crowd; this time not forced back into a back alley, but actively reclaiming the main, open streets of Belgrade. They are shown from a perspective above the buildings, which not only allows for the representation of the whole queer group marching as one, but emphasises the publicity of queer display. Instead of baseball bats and broken flags used as weapons, during this Pride the march is actually decorated with rainbows and balloons.

Although with its visual techniques the film emphasises the celebratory tone of this Pride march and provides a highly idealised picture, it does not hide the high price paid for it: Radmilo is carrying Mirko's ashes, as a constant reminder that "[p]arading bodies cannot undo the historicity of the ways in which heterosexism produces a place for the production of the other" (Johnston, *Queering* 50). The painful history cannot – and should not – be forgotten, however, this successful march could also serve as a hope for a better future. Furthermore, it is also emphasised by the closing frames of *The Parade* that solidarity of different groups is not enough in a society governed by systemic and violent homophobia: what makes the real difference between the two Pride parades is the presence of police. Although the representation of the second march does not include the depiction of counter-protesters and policemen, the closing captions remind the viewer of the reality behind the colourful celebration: "5600 policemen were securing the first "successful" gay parade: 6000 hooligans and neo-Nazis didn't manage to break the parade. 207 people were injured. In four hour fights the center of town was

demolished. On Belgrade streets people are still beaten because they're different." (Dragojević 1:45:20)

Fig. 45. Watching *Ben-Hur* together. (Dragojević 01:20:25)

What leads to the success of the second Pride march in *Pride* is also solidarity – the strong connection between miners and the queer community. During the year that separates the two Pride marches of the film, the interactions between the urban gay community and the miners lead to a bond strengthened by the mutual recognition of the shared experiences of being marginalised, even if on different grounds. At the core of this bonding is the mutual steps of discovering, inhabiting and especially reinterpreting each other's spaces. These acts fuel not only individual and communal development but also solidarity which makes it possible for the 1985 Pride march to re-appropriate and queer London.

When the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) group first encounters the spatial realities of the mining community it is through a map: they gain only abstract, sterile knowledge about the community they want to support, but they have no first-hand, personal experience or information about them. When they first meet their representative, Dai, it is in a neutral space which seems to be a diner or a bar. However, later they take the miner to a gay club where Dai delivers a successful speech of gratitude for the donations of the queer community. He certainly seems "outlandish" in his formal clothes, the microphone is uncomfortably low for his tall figure, and the host's reluctance to let him on stage indicates that the presence of politics is not usual in this bar and/or its community. Still, Dai, with his open manners, non-offensive humour, and honest gratitude, manages to win over the first sceptical crowd and the night becomes a real success for him and for LGSM. In other words, he used a queer space differently than its original purpose – having fun –, however he did it without intrusion or offense: he acted in the sense of openness, recognition and mutual understanding.

The next spatial collision is the support group's visit to Dulais Valley, the mining community's village. Their flamboyant presence in the grey concrete building of the miner's "leisure centre" is just as outlandish as Dai was in the gay club. However, the gay group's appearance brings out the sentiment of "instability of borders [that] causes anxiety and a threat to order" (Longhurst 123) which Longhurst identifies as the impact of queer presence in a heteronormative space. It is quite telling that several miners fear that the gays will not respect their heterosexuality. As a mirror to the London scene, Mark, the appointed leader of LGSM is expected to give a speech in front of the even more sceptical (rather hostile) community, however, their anxiety infects him, his nervousness – which is caused at this time by his prejudices – turns into frustration and an urge of trying to fit in, and results in failure. He cannot reinterpret the space and manages to insult the strongly heteronormative community by implying that according to statistics some miners must be gay as well. After his speech there is absolutely no mixing between the two groups, and after a sharp cut we can see the members of LGSM in sleeping bags in their host's room.

It is the next night when it becomes possible for the gay community to reinterpret the miners' centre and it is made possible not by Mark, but an older and less political member of the group, Jonathan. At this point, a certain amount of opening up has already happened, and some women from the village dance together with Jonathan, and one of them mentions: "This is a first, this. Men on the dance floor" (40:20). After this Jonathan asks the DJ for a disco song – which in itself is already a reinterpretation of the time and space – and begins his own, personal, dancing pride march through the ballroom. Not only is he a man dancing on this feminised dance floor, but he also conquers the chairs and tables and uses them in a completely new way (although dancing on tables is certainly not his invention, in this space it is him who introduces it). As "gay pride parades [are] deconstructive spatial tactics [which] upset unarticulated norms" (Johnston, "Borderline" 77), his dance can be interpreted as a form of pride parade, with which he reinterprets the gender-separatist room. It is after this night that we can see miners and gays walking home together, in one group – the first example of a shared walk.

The developing gay-and-miner community reaches the next level of group dynamics when LGSM visits the village again during the following winter. By this time a certain comradeship has already formed, however it is Mark's successful and empowering speech that binds the two marginalised groups together. In his talk he assures the mining community about the continuing and intensifying support of LGSM and promises the following:

> When we get back to London, and you have my word on this, we are going to do... we're going to do something so spectacular. It'll be so incredible, so effective that the national coal board, I promise you this, will come crawling on their hands and knees, in full drag, to beg you for forgiveness. (Warchus 54:39)

In this short address he brings together queer politics, the miners' strike, and their common enemy: Thatcher's politics. As such, he creates a common discursive space for their own, where their agendas, aims and struggles are not hierarchical but side by side, complementing, supporting each other. The atmosphere of this joined discursive space is enhanced by the lyrics and choreography of the song that follows Mark's speech. The verses of the song, John Denver's "Bread and Roses," start with the phrase "as we go/come marching, marching" and emphasise efforts that are committed in the support of someone else. In the scene one woman starts singing, then she is joined by the other women in the room and finally the miner men start singing as well.

This sense of belonging and solidarity makes it possible for them to organise the "Pits and Perverts Benefit Ball" in London, a fund-raising night of concerts and partying. The atmosphere which is created by Mark's speech and the following song culminates here and the night is the final step before the march together. Their joint efforts induce a night of celebration, affection and belonging. As Dai puts it in his speech: "by coming together, all of us, by pledging our solidarity, our friendship, we've made history" (1:15:20). Furthermore, the "pits and perverts" community manages to transform an ordinary London-based ballroom into a space of two marginalised but proud communities. They get rid of the heteronormative connotations filling the ballroom, which is usually the place of straight events, and reinterpret it from their queer, marginalised, demonised positions. This is their first Pride Parade together where "social meanings are challenged, destabilized, subverted" (Enguix 19). They do not only dispute the biased opinions of society but they rewrite their own narratives about each other and themselves. The result is the ability to reclaim, own and queer their due space of visibility and transfer it to the central streets of London during the 1985 march.

Although the 1985 march is separated by certain narrative events and some time from this night, the solidarity which leads to it is founded and sealed there. The line, "shut up and march" is uttered just at the beginning of the march: at this point there is no need for words or speeches. Their joint bodies – in the sense of corporeality and bodies as groups – their mutual presence hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, are able to reclaim, reinterpret, and queer London's streets and their position in the country's politics.

The 1985 march is just the opposite of the opening sequence. Instead of fear and struggle, the prominent sentiments are pride, belonging and celebration. The dimmed greys and browns are replaced by a cornucopia of shining rainbows. The space opens up, the march starts from the open green patch of a park and leads through broad, clean and recognisable streets of London. In the very last scene of the film the marchers are crossing the Westminster Bridge with the Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in the background (Fig. 46.). The trembling images of the first march are superseded by stable totals or close-ups in slow-motion which make it possible for the viewer not just to recognise the place but also to dwell on the spatial influence of the marching crowd, furthermore to identify with the characters. Instead of homophobic bystanders we have open demonstration of affection, cuddling, kissing by smiling, cheering people. The three policemen who are visible for a moment in the marching scene are not just standing in the shadows as reminders of threat but are walking next to crowd. The celebratory atmosphere is enhanced by the tunes of a cover of Pete Seeger's "Solidarity Forever." The sexual politics and protest function of the pride march do not vanish, since banners, flags and cardboards with the words "Screw You Thatcher" are still present, but a festive celebration gets its due space and time, and the march achieves the queering of London. As the marchers cross the bridge with the Parliament in the background, they reclaim their space in the sexual politics of the country as well. They create their own proud, visible space within London, and – as the viewer is informed by captions – in the Parliament as well: only one year after the miners' strike and the march, the Labour Party included the cause of homosexual people in their agenda.

Fig. 46. Queering London. (Warchus 01:52:37)

In the end both films emphasise that the key elements of queer success are awareness, reflection and recognition. Through the examination and reflection on cultural imaginations and

stereotypes it becomes possible to recognise attitudes and mentalities that construct and put into discourse cultural ideologies, representations and identities. Socio-cultural, geopolitical, ideological attitudes, power structures and marginalising practices – be those cultural, sexual, ethnic, religious, or spatial othering processes – open up for disentanglement. Such awareness provides a ground for recognising otherness – both in the self and the other – without constructing hierarchies and making value judgements. In short, queering is intimately connected to learning in the atmosphere of plurality.

Afterword

The majority of this dissertation was written in 2020; a year that turned the world upside down, caused frustration, anxiety, fear, and brought on a weird reality. In terms of LGBTQ+ events, Pride marches and festivals were inevitably cancelled as the traditional Pride month, June, saw ever higher peaks of the raging new corona virus. However, as the Mayor of London emphasises, the experiences of belonging, coming together and solidarity offered by Pride festivals are even more essential now:

> The events of this year – from the coronavirus pandemic to global protests against racial injustice – have reminded us all how much we need one another, and the solidarity that Pride offers is more important than ever. That's why I'm so pleased that we are able to join together online in support and celebration at this difficult time, and show the world that although we are apart, we are still together." (Sadiq Khan, prideinlondon.org)

In order to provide the community with the sense of being together at a time when physical distancing is key, organisers of Pride marches and LGTBQ+ festivals searched for alternative, mostly online ways of celebration. One of the biggest results was the Global Pride, which was a twenty-four-hour continuous online event consisting of streaming talks, performances, concerts from all over the world. In London, organisers of the London Pride launched the #YouMeUsWe hashtag, created a digital community hub and asked the community to make an act of allyship through donation, helping each other and individual acts of celebration. They also constructed a virtual Parade, which attempted to reconstruct the effect of marching queer bodies on public places, and broadcasted names and images of the groups who would have marched along landmarks of London, such as the Piccadilly Circus or the BT Tower.[75]

As Eastern Europe at that time seemed to be hit less hard by COVID-19, organisers of Pride Parades first chose postponing their events. In Budapest organisers postponed the Parade and opted for alternative, small-scale events (such as an online opening party, community walks, film screenings and educational presentations) instead of the march as a result of the still present viral threat. The Bucharest Pride has also been postponed. Organisers of the Zagreb Pride also chose to wait, on the one hand due to safety measures taken against COVID-19, and also because they feel that the restrictions in the shadow of which they could have organised the march too clearly resembled homophobic limitations – like no kissing, no hugging, no holding hands and being hidden by masks – LGBTQ+ communities were subjected to all around

[75]For further details please visit prideinlondon.org.

the year.[76] As the autumn brought no relief in the global pandemic situation, there was no chance to organise the marches and festivals in 2020.

If only the Pride marches had been cancelled, 2020 would have still been a tolerable year from a queer perspective in various countries of Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, however, certain events of 2020 made the arguments of this dissertation all too relevant, especially in Hungary, where the government used the turbulent period to launch homophobic slander and introduce illiberal regulations. Already in the spring the infamous paragraph 33 was passed which introduced the so called "sex at birth" category, now an obligatory, permanent and unchangeable item in every birth certificate. Later in the autumn, a scandal was started by right-wing, conservative politicians around a fairy tale book, titled *A Fairy Tale for Everyone* (*Meseország mindenkié)*, a collection of inclusive and intersectional interpretations and adaptations of classic fairy tales, representing Roma, orphaned, poor, non-binary, non-heterosexual characters. Former member of the Parliament and now a figurehead of the far-right party Our Home Movement (Mi Hazánk Mozgalom) Dóra Dúró reacted to the publication of the volume by publicly tearing it apart in a shredder. The Prime Minister, instead of condemning the act, gave an openly homophobic statement, saying that they will not tolerate anything queer that would affect children, reviving the obsolete and highly homophobic attitude of blurring the line between homosexuality and paedophilia. It is hard not to connect these events with regulations passed later in the autumn, which made it extremely difficult for unmarried homosexual couples (since gay marriage does not exist in Hungary) to adopt children.

The Hungarian government had the chance to rethink their attitude and policies towards non-heterosexual people, when one of the founding members of Hungary's governing party and MEP József Szájer was detained by police in Brussels trying to escape from an event violating the safety regulations of the city, later identified as a gay sex party. Instead of facing the incongruency and hypocrisy around the anti-LGBTQ regulations and official homophobic discourse, Szájer first resigned silently and, when the queer involvement of the scandal surfaced, his party unanimously distanced from him.

I cannot, at present, predict how this turbulent period will affect the situation of LGBTQ+ communities all around the world, but the situation is worrisome. Positive outcomes, such as solidarity, allyship and community building are also possible, but negative ones, like

[76]For further details please visit zagreb-pride.net.

the loss of hard-earned visibility, anxiety-fuelled hatred and scapegoating are likely scenarios as well. What is certain, however, is that the virus has shown us that borders – be those physical or mental – are just cultural constructions, easily transgressed and deconstructed; and we also need to step over those limiting boundaries. Especially now, it is extremely imperative to be imp*a*rative, to learn from, about, and with each other.

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