

# History, Disrupted: The aesthetic gentrification of queer and trans cinema

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*This essay connects Sarah Schulman's discussion of aesthetic gentrification in *The Gentrification of the Mind* with the concept of disruptive innovation to analyse patterns in recent mainstream film exploring LGBTQ histories. Since the Great Recession, LGBTQ cinema in the Global North has become structured by disruptive narrative strategies that reroute the transformative power of queer and transgender histories upward and away from the most at-risk LGBTQ populations. Films such as *Dallas Buyers Club*, *Stonewall*, and *The Danish Girl* purport to represent 'actual' moments in LGBTQ history, but instead appropriate aesthetic space from communities with little to no cultural representation - HIV positive, working-class, and of colour, queer and trans populations - instead offering that space to symbolic gentrifiers. Cultural erasure of AIDS activism and of trans people's important roles in LGBTQ histories and politics are among the most deleterious shared outcomes of this new wave of cinema. This essay contends that historical disruption and resulting aesthetic gentrification of queer and trans cinema in the Global North has potentially global implications for the future of LGBTQ representation.*

Gentrification is a process that hides the apparatus of domination from the dominant themselves. Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*.

Why does a film like Roland Emmerich's *Stonewall* (2015) exist? The event *Stonewall* purports to represent – the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion that is commonly recognised as launching the US LGBTQ rights movement – has been well-explored to the exclusion of many other important LGBTQ histories. When the trailer for *Stonewall* was released during summer of 2015, a torrent of rebuke from critics and social media users poured across the internet, lambasting the film for its erroneous 'historical' depictions. *Stonewall* drew fire particularly for how it supplanted the critical role lesbians and queer/trans people of colour played in starting the riot, instead centring on a fictional white, gay male lead. In an interview with Buzzfeed's Shannon Keating, Emmerich defended his decision to alter LGBTQ history in ways that disrupt its true political legacy, mostly for the comfort of straight viewers:

'You have to understand one thing: I didn't make this movie only for gay people, I made it also for straight people,' he said. 'I kind of found out, in the testing process, that actually, for straight people, [Danny] is a very easy in. Danny's very straight-acting. He gets mistreated because of that. [Straight audiences] can feel for him.' ( ... ) 'As a director you have to put yourself in your movies, and I'm white and gay,' he said (2015).

*Stonewall* literally erases the vibrancy of lived queer and trans histories through a well-intentioned but oblivious occupation. The film went on to become a box office flop, perhaps partially due to the backlash against its politics, but also because the film is a poorly-made, garish caricature of the 'based on a true story' biopic genre to which mainstream LGBTQ film emerging from the Global North is currently reduced. If we choose to take *Stonewall* seriously, however, we can see that the film itself is no outlier: its representational strategies are actually quite typical of most contemporary big-budget films purporting to represent queer and transgender lives. What can be learned from the production of such a terrible 'gay' film by a gay director? This essay treats *Stonewall* as the most obvious example of an emergent pattern in mainstream representations of LGBTQ history: *disruptive innovation* in the portrayal of past LGBTQ lives and the resulting *aesthetic gentrification* of queer and trans cinematic worlds.

In *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*, Sarah Schulman (2012) provides an essential explication of how economic and policy pressures on the social organisation of urban space can subsequently alter the aesthetic forms of a culture. Schulman's book performs a number of astonishing leaps across epidemiology, urban planning, economics, social policy, and the publishing and theatre worlds to explain why LGBTQ culture and politics became so homogenised after AIDS. She locates this shift – from radical, community-based queer arts to bourgeois, gentrified

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expressions of 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2004: 50) – in the effects of mass death and trauma experienced during the AIDS crisis. As radical queer and transgender activists, artists, novelists, and playwrights died of AIDS, a newer and less politicised generation of creators and consumers emerged to replace them. These newcomers occupied urban and artistic spaces as if no oppositional creative cultures had preceded them. This unconscious substitution of 'complexity, difference, and dynamic, dialogic action' with 'sameness,' 'homogenisation,' and 'the institutionalisation of culture' (Schulman 2012: 14) is at the heart of how Schulman defines the aesthetics of gentrification. In chapter four, 'The gentrification of creation,' she describes a literal 'dynamics of death and replacement' (2012: 23) by recalling a scene in avant-garde playwright Penny Arcade's play *Invitation to the End of the World*:

In the scene, Penny imagines the mother of Rita Redd, a drag artist who died of AIDS, standing on a street corner in the East Village stopping passersby and asking if they'd ever heard of her son. 'He did shows,' she insists. 'He put on lots of shows.' She can't understand why none of the recent yuppie arrivals know who he was. She doesn't realise that his audience has also died (2012: 84).

Schulman's elegiac account of the true consequences of the AIDS era provides a compelling set of answers for why, in 2016, LGBTQ-themed films that earn wide release are generally so divorced from actual queer and trans experience. Cinema is yet another reflection of the gentrifying processes Schulman points out in her discussions of contemporary theatre and fiction: the radical filmmakers who surfaced during the 'New Queer Cinema' (Rich 2013) era of the 1990s and who – along with AIDS activist groups Queer Nation and ACT-UP – protested the treatment of LGBTQ people in mainstream film, have been largely displaced by a small number of executives, producers, and directors (mostly white and male), who create LGBTQ films for mainstream audiences.<sup>1</sup> Schulman notes, 'Since the mirror of gentrification is representation in popular culture, increasingly only the gentrified get their stories told in mass ways. They look in the mirror and think it's a window' (2012: 28). LGBTQ film roles are written for straight and cisgender (i.e. non-transgender) actors who might win awards, while queer and transgender actors struggle to get work. With the exception of a few independent or long-anticipated gems – notably *Tangerine* (2015) and *Carol* (2015) – recent LGBTQ representation in the cinema of the Global North remains dismally infrequent, wooden, and inaccurate. Perhaps most perniciously, a new wave of films purporting to represent crucial moments in LGBTQ history has begun to whitewash and depoliticise queer and trans cultural legacies. In the 'symbolic neighborhoods'

(Cohen and Hanlon 2006: 33) of our communities, queer and trans people ourselves have become almost entirely absent, gentrified out of our own history by those who benefit from representing us – *to themselves*. The result is a set of films sold as windows into the LGBTQ past while they function largely as mirrors reflecting the 'gentrified minds' of their own producers, gay and straight alike.

In what follows, I argue that adding an analysis of *disruptive innovation* (DI) to Schulman's brilliant critique can help to explain why gentrification's effects have persisted and intensified well into our purported period of 'recovery' from the global crises of both AIDS and the Great Recession. That markets in the Global North currently conceptualise disruption as the most desirable form of creativity is important in recognising how economic and social patterns of gentrification impel corresponding aesthetic effects. Analyses of disruptive innovation as both an economic and aesthetic form are thus key to assessing mainstream LGBTQ representation in the post-crash era. I therefore interject at a critical moment in Schulman's account – her prediction of the 'end' of gentrification (2012: 18) – to note how disruptive innovation drives gentrification aesthetically. I then examine three recent and highly debated LGBTQ-themed films produced in the Global North – *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), *Stonewall* (2015), and *The Danish Girl* (2015) – to analyse how each engages in disruptive innovation practices that replicate Schulman's 'dynamics of death and replacement' (2012: 23).

### ***Disruptive innovation: gentrification's engine***

What is disruptive innovation? DI theory has gained increased recognition along with the tech market's explosion in both the US and Europe, but is still generally overlooked in critical discussions of gentrification. DI was originated by Harvard Business School professor Clay Christensen in his landmark 1997 book *The Innovator's Dilemma* and refined by Christensen in the later work *The Innovator's Solution* (2003), written with Michael E. Raynor. In these two works, Christensen develops DI as a theory for why certain businesses (mostly in the computing revolution) were being displaced by newer companies offering what were then understood as 'inferior' products. DI is Christensen's theory for how certain innovation strategies can disrupt the relationship between products and markets by offering lower performance that is more convenient, portable, or cheaper (1997: xv). Disruption theory asserts that consumers are often willing to tolerate a downgrade in product quality (e.g. streaming video or music over high-resolution hard media) in exchange for a more flexible delivery system, and that such downgrades are often effective in penetrating previously disinterested markets. The immense profitability of disruption as practised during the tech boom has elevated DI theory to

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a central position as one of the 'most widely celebrated and cited ideas in modern business' (Lepore 2014: 1).

In *The Innovator's Solution*, Christensen and Raynor lay out a framework for creating DI strategies to break into established markets, offering a set of 'litmus tests' for disruptive design. They ask:

- Is there a large population of people who historically have not had the money, equipment, or skill to do this thing for themselves, and as a result have gone without it altogether or have needed to pay someone with more expertise to do it for them?
- To use the product or service, do customers need to go to an inconvenient, centralised location? ( ... )
- Are there customers at the low end of the market who would be happy to purchase a product with less (but good enough) performance if they could get it at a lower price?
- Can we create a business model that enables us to earn attractive profits at the discount prices required to win the business of these overserved customers at the low end? ( ... )
- Is the innovation disruptive to *all* of the significant incumbent firms in the industry? (2003: 49-50).

These recommendations for disruptive market capture map onto the processes gentrifying LGBTQ film aesthetics in ways that are difficult to ignore. Yes, queer and trans audiences have traditionally not had access to means of mass self-representation and have relied on others to create images of us in popular culture. Yes, in order to access any sort of cultural representation, queer and trans people have historically needed to live in large, urban environments and have access to centralised spaces such as gay bars, public museums, LGBTQ film festivals, and LGBTQ bookstores. Yes, there are large numbers of working- and middle-class LGBTQ people who will go to see LGBTQ-themed films with 'less (but good enough) performance' (Christensen and Raynor 2003: 50) for under ten dollars. Yes, the Hollywood model of writing LGBTQ-themed films with the specific goal of generating Oscar nominations for straight and cisgender actors has resulted in a profitable 'discount' product that has captured the business of these consumers. And yes, just as Schulman describes in the publishing and theatre worlds, these disruptions into LGBTQ cultural representation have effectively locked most queer and transgender writers, directors, and actors out of a business that largely transfers LGBTQ wealth upward into the hands of white, creative elites. DI also penetrates into the content and aesthetics of LGBTQ cinema itself, providing us with low fidelity products that are marketed

as more 'universal,' 'inspiring,' and 'relatable' than films created by and for LGBTQ people.

Disruptive innovation strategies are so widely celebrated in the Global North – a recent US handbook describes DI as 'the greatest theory of business growth and value creation, ever' (Paetz 2014: 3) – that DI's conceptualisation of 'creative' displacement has become a central practice in both consumer and cultural production, as well as in urban life. Below, I discuss the gentrifying effects of disruptive innovation on the 'symbolic neighborhoods' (Cohen and Hanlon 2006: 33) of queer and trans cinematic worlds. Each of the films I discuss contains a set of disruptive innovation strategies that hollow out and occupy queer, trans, and of colour histories, turning their aesthetics toward the reproduction of dominant culture. Much like the rapidly gentrifying landscapes of New York City, Seattle, and San Francisco, these films are populated by white, bourgeois, straight, and cisgender bodies that then come to colonise the aesthetic space of the LGBTQ cinematic archive as its representational subjects. As in Schulman's account, there is little to no acknowledgement of whom or what these bodies have displaced. Queer and trans viewers of these films are left to imagine our histories *through* the disruptive innovations they offer us – a market strategy that produces upward distribution of LGBTQ resources from the very desire to see ourselves represented that these inferior products withhold.

***Dallas Buyer's Club: 'You croak, you croak. It's not our problem, it's yours'.***

*Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) is the first major U.S. film since *Philadelphia* (1993) to address the AIDS crisis. While *Philadelphia* told a fictional story about a gay man played by a straight actor (Tom Hanks), *Dallas* tells the 'actual story' of a straight man, played by a straight actor (Matthew McConaughey). That twenty years separate these films should alert us to the very thin archive of AIDS narratives in US feature films: there is as yet no 'actual story' of LGBTQ people's experiences of the AIDS crisis in US narrative cinema. In *Dallas*, those untold histories are supplanted by a different narrative – a gentrifying effect perfectly mirroring Schulman's 'dynamics of death and replacement' (2012: 23). I begin here with *Dallas* precisely because it represents a return to aesthetic considerations of the AIDS crisis in a new, gentrified form that circulates around the topic of disruption innovation. *Dallas Buyers Club* is a disruptive innovation that is topically *about* disruptive innovation itself. The film is, quite un-coincidentally, a story not about AIDS activists (we do not have a major film about those lives, and may never) or even about actual queer and/or transgender experiences of AIDS. *Dallas* is a story about disruptive innovation, entrepreneurialism, and the upwardly mobile 'success' story of a straight, white man's capitalist response to contracting HIV/AIDS.

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*Dallas Buyers Club* was marketed as the 'actual story' of Ron Woodruff, a straight man with AIDS who formed a Texas-based for-profit buyer's club in order to illegally import unapproved drugs into the US during the AIDS crisis. While Woodruff was a real person, Rayon, a transgender woman who acts as Woodruff's business partner in the film, never actually existed. This contrast between who is real and who is fictional establishes the basic aesthetic politics of the film. Woodruff's story is represented as historically important, while Rayon (named after an artificial fibre) is a narrative device who will die before the film ends. Rayon, who is referred to consistently as 'he' throughout the film, represents a double erasure of trans people from the narrative of the AIDS crisis: not only is Rayon 'not real,' but she is also played by a cisgender male actor, Jared Leto, who subsequently made insensitive comments about the role that were characterised as 'dangerous and selfish' by trans actors (Billings 2014: 1). The casting of Leto, and his winning of the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his role in *Dallas*, is an indication of the film's intended audience.

*Dallas Buyers Club* offers us the story of Woodruff's entrepreneurialism, tracing how he used the AIDS crisis for his own personal gain and disruptive profiteering. Woodruff offers his clients not AZT, but a cocktail of other compounds that medical historians and AIDS activists have subsequently argued would have been 'almost useless' (Matthews 2013: 1). The film sells Woodruff's profit-motivated drug smuggling as 'heroic,' but can only do so because the work of AIDS activist groups such as ACT-UP – who were militantly challenging social policy, drug approval and pricing, and the lack of federal AIDS funding – is marginalised in the film. Woodruff is the ultimate disruptive innovator, capitalising on the infection and dying of his own and others' bodies during the epidemic to amass profits from the HIV-positive community by distributing a less than effective product. Woodruff is clear that he forms the buyers' club to make money, *not* to necessarily save lives, reminding clients that can't pay for the drugs, 'I'm not running a goddamn charity!' *Dallas*, which is ostensibly about AIDS, is actually about the *business* of AIDS – proceeding from a gentrified aesthetic in which queer and trans communities and their activist histories are literally removed and replaced with other bodies that engage in profit-making as the only available expression of resistance. The single version of community in this film, the club, is organised through its capitalist activity – 'buying'. Ron and Rayon's relationship is a business partnership, not a practice of solidarity. Yes, Ron eventually turns toward the 'productive' end of extending his life, but the film consistently represents private capitalist innovation as more effective than protest or the public sector.

Thus, while the film is packaged as though we are witnessing a fight between a political insurgence and

the medical industry, *Dallas* actually represents the same clash between an emerging disruptive capitalism and earlier forms of bureaucratic state management that Schulman traces in *The Gentrification of the Mind*. Schulman illustrates how, as AIDS physically removed queer and trans bodies from urban spaces, those spaces were then appropriated by corporate developers and sold to straight gentrifiers (2012: 37-8). The same processes of death and replacement are present in *Dallas*, a narrative that substitutes the histories and bodies of actual queer and trans people with that of a straight, profit-seeking disruptor. The end result is a gentrified narrative that reflects pre-existing dominant representations of AIDS. Nearly all mainstream cultural representations of AIDS during the crisis were also of white, straight people – 'innocent victims' such as Ryan White, Kimberly Bergalis, and the Ray brothers. *Dallas Buyers Club* is therefore not an alternative AIDS history, but simply more of the same: a 'window' into the past that functions instead like a mirror.

### ***Stonewall: A whiter shade of pale***

Roland Emmerich's *Stonewall* is a fitting example of how some bourgeois, white gay cultural producers have adopted a thoroughly gentrified aesthetic practice for representing LGBTQ histories. Emmerich reimagines the events of the Stonewall riot through the eyes of a fictional white, middle-class, Midwestern character, Danny Winters (played by straight actor Jeremy Irvine), who has relocated to New York City from Indiana to attend Columbia University. Danny, who is gay but largely asexualised, falls in – quite unbelievably – with a crowd of poor, queer and trans Village youth who hustle on Christopher Street. One of these characters, Ray (Johnny Beauchamp), appears to be based on the actual historical figures Ray Castro and Sylvia Ray Rivera. Rivera, a Puerto Rican trans woman who was present at Stonewall and who, along with black trans woman Marsha P. Johnson, worked to organise queer and trans youth in the Village, is not directly represented in the film. While Johnson does appear as a character, she is played unconvincingly by a cisgender male actor (Otoja Abit) and given only marginal, short scenes. Rather than centring on the experiences of the disenfranchised queer and trans people of colour who were driven to militant resistance against police violence at Stonewall, Emmerich's film instead places a 'white surrogate' who can 'properly tell the story of "the other"', (Jung 2015: 1) at the focal point of the narrative. The film's tag line, 'Where Pride began,' suggests that it was men like Danny and *not* impoverished queer and trans youth who created gay liberation.

Emmerich's response to criticism of these choices – claiming that they were necessary to make straight audiences comfortable – is a clear articulation of gentrification aesthetics as a strategy for market

capture and the upward distribution of profit as well as representational space. 'Testing' of the film as a product with straight audiences revealed that they preferred Danny as a point of sympathetic identification over bodies that actually represented the inventors of gay liberation politics – queer and trans people of colour. Danny himself is a *disruptive innovation* Emmerich inserts into the narrative to assuage heterosexual and homonormative viewers alike with a feeling of 'safety'. The effects go well beyond simple historical error in their injuriousness: Danny's role in the film is to transfer political imagination upward, away from poor people, trans people, and people of colour and toward middle-class white gay men – who have indeed become the historical beneficiaries of gay liberation as it lost its resistant energy after AIDS. In a series of particularly telling moments, Procol Harum's 'A Whiter

In this moment, Danny becomes the fictionalised agent of a gay liberation politics that was strongly inspired by Black Power and largely invented by queer and trans people of colour. The implication is that, before Danny arrived as a gentrifier, the oppressed queer and trans population of the Village had no political imagination at all, only a juvenile criminality they directed laterally among themselves. Danny's 'gay power' is a paternalistic substitution of white, cissexist supremacy for actual gay liberation politics, an innovation that produces a far inferior product for a much wider (i.e. straight) consumer audience. Toward the close of the film, Danny says to Ray, 'Don't you understand? I can't love you!' The line is an overt description of how gay identity politics have unfolded in the time since AIDS. *Stonewall* rather accurately represents the exclusion of trans people and people of colour from the gay imaginary, but it blames this exclusion as 'unlovable' on those ostracised populations



Figure 1: Danny throws the first brick at the Stonewall Riot.

Shade of Pale' plays on the jukebox whenever Danny dances in the Stonewall, an ironic indicator of Emmerich's gentrification tactics.

*Stonewall*, however, gets worse as its narrative unfolds: Marsha P. Johnson herself is widely credited with starting the Stonewall Rebellion by throwing a shot glass into a mirror (Kasino 2012), but Emmerich reassigns the role of instigator to Danny, thoroughly erasing the crucial part trans women of colour played in the creation of gay liberation. In what is perhaps the most insulting scene I have ever witnessed in an ostensibly 'queer' piece of cinema, Danny grabs a brick out of a black queer youth's hand and throws it through Stonewall's window, screaming 'Gay power!' and initiating the riot.

themselves, rather than on the white, middle-class gentrifiers who have been willing to abandon them in exchange for nominal inclusion in straight culture.

#### **The Danish Girl: 'Such a power in you'.**

Tom Hooper's *The Danish Girl* (2015) is another recent and widely-criticised attempt to represent LGBTQ histories through what might be called a disruptive innovation aesthetic. The film, based on David Ebershoff's 2000 novel of the same name, purports to recount the life of Danish painter Lili Elbe, who was one of the first people to undergo sexual reassignment surgery. Elbe had become well known in European salon circles through the many portraits her wife, Gerda Gottlieb, painted of her – both nude and in women's attire. In 1930, Elbe travelled to Berlin to

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undergo surgery at Magnus Hirschfeld's world-renowned Institute for Sexual Research, after which she was legally recognised as a woman and forcibly divorced from Gottlieb by the Danish state. Though Elbe hoped to remarry and have children, she died in Dresden in 1931 after a failed surgery that would have constructed her womb. A version of her diary, *Man into Woman*, was edited by a third party and published posthumously in 1933 (Meyerowitz 2002: 20, 30). It was this fictionalised diary that became the basis for Ebershoff's novel and, later, Hooper's film.

Hooper's 'based on a true story' biopic about Elbe is thus many times removed from any direct depiction of her life. Unlike the film would have us believe, the 'real' Lili is not historically representable in any simple manner. As Tobias Raun argues, the most reliable source of Lili's historical presence is the paintings of her by Gottlieb, for which she posed voluntarily (2015: 2). The various alternative records of Lili's life and medical history were 'mainly left in the hands of medical and legal experts' who pathologised her (Raun 2015: 1) – a series of disruptions driven by their own interests in her as an object. Therefore, Lili's story has become over time the story of cisgender agents' control over the meaning of her life and her body. Hooper's film cannot help but reproduce this problematic, representing Lili as having been 'created' by Gottlieb as an artistic experiment gone awry. Lili is robbed of any transhistorical agency the film might have granted her character. Instead, it focuses on Gottlieb's artistic process and career over and above Lili's self-creation as a co-participant.

*The Danish Girl* strongly thematises Gottlieb's increasing discomfort with Lili's medical transition and life as a woman, while Lili's subjective experience of transition is represented only through a series of highly recognisable transphobic stereotypes: a clothing fetish, a dysphoric 'mirror scene' (Keegan 2013: 9), misrepresentations of transphobia as homophobia (Bettcher 2007: 47), and eventual death as the price of self-actualisation. It is Gottlieb, and not Elbe, who survives the film. The dynamic by which Lili is supplanted in her own story by Gerda is most evident in a scene after Lili's first surgery, in which they discuss Gerda's 'creation' of Lili: what Gerda paints, Lili claims, she reciprocally becomes. 'Such a power in you,' Lili says admiringly of Gerda, as if her existence is entirely dependent on Gottlieb's talent. In a moment of supremely disruptive innovation, a cisgender idealisation of transgender experience is substituted for the history of an actual trans life. As film critic A. O. Scott points out, *The Danish Girl's* title should arguably be interpreted as referring to Gottlieb, rather than to Elbe (Scott 2015).

*The Danish Girl* therefore represents transgender identity as well as the transgender body as creations of the cisgender imagination. This effect is heightened by the casting of a cisgender male actor Eddie Redmayne to play Lili. The presence of Redmayne in the film reinforces the evacuation of the historical Lili from her own narrative, producing a politically inferior product that is easily consumed by audiences who might assume

that transgender women are actually mentally ill 'men in dresses'. *The Danish Girl* does little to disabuse viewers of the assumptions that transgender people are tragic and that our bodies are medical anomalies. The film instead passively sanctions these attitudes by removing any historical reference to a theory of why Lili exists, even though European sexologists had developed a robust literature about sex and gender variation by the early 20th century (Meyerowitz 2002: 14-16). Representing the diversity of these theories would have explained Lili's feelings and offered the audience a way into identifying her as a specific kind of woman. Instead, *The Danish Girl* erases the existence of any but the most damning and pathologising literature, pushing the audience to view Lili as a doomed sacrifice to history.

The most disruptive quality of *The Danish Girl*, however, is that Lili never encounters a single person like her, even though the actual Lili most certainly would have. The film suggests that there was absolutely no community available to people like Lili during the 1920s-30s, which is patently false. When the real Lili travelled to Berlin in 1930, the city was a global hub for sex and gender minorities: there were so many people traveling to see Hirschfeld that by 1909 German authorities had begun to issue a special form of identification called a 'transvestite pass' (*Transvestitenschien*) to those utilising the institute's services, which included medical treatment as well as social networking and job placement (Beachy 2014: 172-80). The institute treated and politically advocated for high numbers of patients like Lili, estimated minimally at 'dozens' (Beachy 2014: 172) before its destruction by the Third Reich in 1933. To remove any possibility of community or shared identification from Lili is a disruptive innovation that symbolically repeats the Reich's razing of Hirschfeld's institute, allowing *The Danish Girl* to represent Lili Elbe as a lonely 'transgender pioneer' (Scott 2015) when historically she was one of many people who underwent early medical reassignment. Lili was not even the first: that was likely Alan Lucill Hart in 1917 (Meyerowitz 1998: 161). This obfuscation presents cisgender viewers with an easily recognisable and consumable biopic narrative while it simultaneously defrauds transgender viewers of access to a more accurate history. Lili is alone because it serves the film's gentrified structure that she be stranded in her difference – another 'window' into a past that is erased by the very presence of the text.

The gentrified films discussed here are part of a new, post-crash wave of cinema emerging from the Global North that purports to represent 'actual' moments in the LGBTQ past. These films are marketed to global audiences as if they represent official queer and trans histories, but engage in disruptive innovations that appropriate aesthetic capital from communities that already have little to no cultural representation – HIV positive, working-class, of colour, and transgender populations. Cultural erasure of AIDS activism and of trans people's important roles in LGBTQ culture and politics are among the most

deleterious shared outcomes of these texts. Because the Global North is a primary driver of how cinema is written, financed, and produced, the disruption and gentrification of LGBTQ cinematic worlds may contain broad-ranging consequences for the future of film.

For what purpose does a film like *Stonewall* exist, then? Gentrified LGBT films like the ones I discuss here present pressing examples of the need to imagine and demand our own messy and fertile queer and trans histories in their place. Many of us deeply desire a de-gentrified aesthetic informed by our own rich cultures – one capable of illuminating the brilliance of our continued resistance and survival. At the risk of invoking Schulman's yet-unfulfilled prediction that gentrification will 'end,' I propose evidence of a reprieve. The sharp criticism of *Stonewall* and its subsequent failure at the box office is small but heartening evidence that LGBTQ audiences (still) possess communal knowledge of our political histories - perhaps most encouragingly represented by Reina Gossett's response to *Stonewall*, *Happy Birthday Marsha!*, a historically accurate film that restores queer and trans of colour people to their central role in the Stonewall riots. In our collaborative destruction of *Stonewall's* profitability, LGBTQ people demanded that this text not supplant the possibility of a different archive – one replete with complex, sustaining images of ourselves. That desire, which undergirds a century of queer and trans people seeking their images in film, is older than disruption, and will, I predict, outlast it. In an indictment of the damage disruptors have done to the social body, historian Jill Lepore points out that disruption is 'not a law of nature,' but an 'artifact of history' (2006: 47). *Stonewall*, too, is such an artifact – of a time saturated with fear, when mainstream cinema struggles to reflect anything but our obsession with safety, familiarity, and sameness.

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## End Notes

1. In a recent interview describing her decades-long effort to write a successful screenplay for *Carol* (2015), Phyllis Nagy noted, 'People who finance films about lesbians are often straight white men, not always, but often, who in some way require a pat on the back, a nod to their own understanding of what the psychological process is for women who choose to love other women. Many times I had to do a little song and dance about how what is extraordinary about this project is the lack of such logic – and would you ever expect that kind of logic now from a gay male film that you were producing? In some bizarre way we've moved beyond it to a certain extent in films about gay men, and gay men are allowed to be hatched from an egg, just gay. But lesbians require a very particular sort of self-reflection - which nobody I know has actually ever gone through' (Jaffe 2016).