

Exploring the Message: Weimar Republic's Ban on *Anders Als Die Andern* Advocacy for Homosexual Relations

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This study dives into the complicated historical and cultural context that resulted in the censoring of Richard Oswald's breakthrough 1919 silent picture, *Anders Als Die Andern*, during the Weimar Republic. Despite its post-World War I rise as a center of cultural creativity, the Republic struggled with economic insecurity, political upheaval, and societal biases. In 1920, the film, a daring investigation of homosexuality, was censored under Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, which criminalized male-to-male relationships.¹ This film not only challenges societal norms and legal restrictions regarding homosexuality but also serves as a significant catalyst for the emergence of queer visibility and activism in interwar Germany. The Weimar Republic experienced a tumultuous period marked by economic instability, political turbulence, and societal prejudices, which shaped the fate of artistic expressions such as this film. The decision to censor *Anders Als Die Andern* under Paragraph 175 of the German penal code reflects the legal framework that criminalized homosexuality in that era. This legal prohibition intersected with prevailing medical and societal attitudes towards homosexuality, contributing to the suppression of the film. By delving into these interconnected influences, the study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play during the Weimar Republic. Moreover, the study's examination of the broader implications for the queer community and the long-term effects on German queer rights underscores the significance of understanding the historical context of censorship and persecution. *Anders Als Die Andern* emerged as a pivotal cinematic work that dared to confront taboo subjects and address queer identity at a time when such discussions were largely suppressed. By weaving together politics, legal frameworks, medical perspectives, and societal standards, the study sheds

¹ James D. Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic: The Case of *Anders Als Die Andern*," *Film History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 181.

light on the challenges faced by Queer individuals in navigating a hostile environment and the resilience demonstrated by filmmakers like Richard Oswald in challenging prevailing norms through their creative endeavors.

Anders Als Die Andern will be examined via the prism of "queer cinema of mourning."² Malakaj claims that by digging into the film's emotions and horrific experiences, audiences are forced to address modern issues of intolerance and violence against the Queer population. A summarization addressing the issue of violence against Queer folks will highlight numerous crucial points in the research, drawing on the insights of Richard Dyer³ and Ervin Malakaj⁴. The plot revolves around Paul Körner, a talented violinist played by Conrad Veidt. Körner discovers a worrying link between a succession of suicides by renowned persons and Germany's Penal Code Paragraph 175, which criminalized homosexuality. As a homosexual, Körner fears for his future in the face of societal rejection and imagines a parade of brilliant men who succumbed to similar pressures. Körner befriends and mentors Kurt Sivers, a young aspiring musician. Their relationship takes a romantic turn, causing Sivers' parents and Körner's own family to encourage him to marry. Despite societal expectations, Körner rejects a wealthy widow's advances at a party. To ease Sivers' parents' concerns, Körner seeks the assistance of a sexologist, who reveals Körner's homosexuality. Despite being blackmailed by a crook named Bollek, Körner manages to get backing for Sivers' musical career. Bollek, on the other hand, continues to seek hush money. Bollek attempts robbery during a concert, which leads to a conflict with Sivers. When Sivers discovers Körner's previous relationships with Bollek, he recognizes the ramifications of their homosexuality

² Ervin Malakaj, *Anders Als Die Andern*, Queer Film Classics. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 26-27, 119.

³ Richard Dyer, "Less and More than Women and Men: Lesbian and Gay Cinema in Weimar Germany" *New German Critique* no. 51 (1990), 31.

⁴ Ervin Malakaj, *Anders Als Die Andern*, Queer Film Classics. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 98-99.

becoming public knowledge and flees. Devastated, Körner thinks about his life in a flashback sequence, exposing earlier problems and conversion therapy attempts. Sivers struggles on the outskirts of town, Körner remembers his experiences with blackmail and the queer nightlife. Körner eventually comes out as gay, which has legal ramifications. Despite the judge's sympathy, Körner is sentenced to prison under Paragraph 175. Körner's life falls because of social rejection. Amid the public scandal, his father suggests that suicide is the best course of action, and he loses his professional contract. Körner takes a lethal pill and imagines himself joining the procession of well-known men in death. Sivers, who is grieving over Körner's passing, shows up at the wake, which causes friction with Körner's parents. The sexologist steps in and gives Sivers advice to continue living and work toward altering the legal situation that resulted in Körner's death. An illustration of striking out from Paragraph 175 marks the end of the movie.⁵

The historiography of the suppression of *Anders Als Die Andern* in relation to Paragraph 175, medical viewpoints, and social norms provides a comprehensive examination of the turbulent terrain of the Weimar Republic. "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic: The Case of Anders Als Die Andern" by James D. Steakley⁶ offers a basic overview of the political environment by highlighting which conservative forces employed censorship techniques, such as the application of Paragraph 175, to silence progressive voices that defied social norms.

"Sexology, Popular Science, and Queer History in Anders Als Die Andern (Different from the Others)" by Ina Linge⁷ sheds light on the film's relationship to Magnus Hirschfeld's discourse on sexology by illustrating the conflict between society resistance and progressive medical

⁵ Richard Oswald, *Anders Als Die Andern* (Filmmuseum München, 1919), 47:23-48:53.

⁶ James D. Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic: The Case of Anders Als Die Andern," *Film History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 189-191.

⁷ Ina Linge, "Sexology, Popular Science and Queer History in Anders Als Die Andern (Different from the Others)" *Gender & History* 30 no. 3 (2018), 5.

viewpoints. *Now you see it: Studies in Lesbian and Gay Film* by Richard Dyer and Julianne Pidduck⁸ places the film in the larger context of queer cinema, highlighting the relationship between societal attitudes and cinematic expression. Kraepelin's Assessment of Hirschfeld's Educational Video, "Different from the Others" A Contribution to the History of Psychiatry in the Weimar Republic"⁹ examines the conflict between psychiatric assessments and Hirschfeld's educational goals, highlighting the disparate perspectives within the medical community. "Less and More than Women and Men: Lesbian and Gay Cinema in Weimar Germany" by Richard Dyer¹⁰ broadens the focus to show a varied landscape of Queer representation while highlighting the varying levels of acceptance and rejection in the Weimar Republic. "Degeneration, Sexual Freedom, and the Politics of the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933" by Richard W. McCormick¹¹ highlights societal concerns about political instability and degeneration while placing the film's suppression within the larger political discourse. Turning to "The Hirschfeld Archives: Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture" by Heike Bauer these sources explore the consequences faced by the Queer community during this time, exposing a culture of violence and discrimination. The suppression of *Anders Als Die Andern* becomes an illustration of the time, when conservative forces and progressive ideas clashed, and the film's destiny became entangled in a convoluted web of politics, medical science, and social norms during a pivotal historical moment.

During the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), male-male interactions were significantly shaped by German penal code paragraph 175 (first implemented in the late 1800s)¹². This law,

⁸ Richard Dyer and Julianne Pidduck, *Now You See It*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 5-7.

⁹ M M Weber and W Burgmair, "Different from the others. Kraepelin's assessment of Hirschfeld's educational film. A contribution to the history of psychiatry of Weimar Republic" Sudhoffs (1997), 1-2.

¹⁰ Richard Dyer, "Less and More than Women and Men: Lesbian and Gay Cinema in Weimar Germany" *New German Critique* no. 51 (1990): 19-20.

¹¹ Richard W. McCormick "From "Caligari" to Dietrich: Sexual, Social, and Cinematic Discourse in Weimar Film", *Signs* 18 no. 3 (1993), 641-642.

¹² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Paragraph 175 and The Nazi Campaign Against Homosexuality" (2021), 1-2.

which made homosexual relations between men illegal, was changed in the early 1900s and became an increasingly harsh instrument of social discrimination and persecution. The stricter application of Paragraph 175 reflected the conservative and discriminating ideology of the Weimar Republic, which was struggling with political unrest and the emergence of radical ideologies. In the early years of the Republic, Berlin became a haven for Queer communities, although sentiments regarding homosexuality in general remained sharply divided, reflecting a contradictory combination of conservative rejection and cultural experimentation. The application of Paragraph 175 coincided with an increasing conservative backlash, which further stigmatized male-to-male interactions even as Queer places expanded. Navigating both wider societal prejudices and progressive cultural areas presented a dual difficulty for Queer people. In addition to making it illegal for men to have consensual sexual encounters with one another, Paragraph 175 also imposed a concealment culture that forced Queer people to live double lives. Relationships were increasingly threatened by the legal system, which went beyond only enforcing the law to include social prejudice and medical pathologizing. It was difficult for Queer people to openly express who they were and build deep relationships because of these things. The film *Anders Als Die Andern*, made during the Weimar Republic, is a painful portrayal of the time's institutional and cultural prejudices. Despite the Weimar Republic's reputation for artistic creativity and openness, economic insecurity, political upheaval, and war reparations formed a challenging backdrop. The film, which explored homosexuality with daring, faced suppression in 1920 under the conservative regulations of Paragraph 175. This repression highlights the chronic homophobia ingrained in the Weimar Republic's sociocultural fabric, where even groundbreaking initiatives to address social issues were suppressed. *Anders Als Die Andern* explores the difficulties of male-to-male interactions in a society that stigmatized and criminalized homosexuality. The political

instability of the Weimar Republic increased the friction between progressive and conservative cultural attitudes, with conservative elements striving to retake control over societal norms. The film's prohibition serves as a vivid reminder of the difficulties that the Queer community has endured as a result of Paragraph 175, demonstrating the broader implications of the legal tool on Queer rights in Germany.

The impact of Paragraph 175 extended beyond legal ramifications and included a medical perspective, intertwining with psychiatric views of the time perpetuating discrimination against queer individuals. This interplay between legal and medical dimensions further shaped the emotional and psychological well-being of those within the Queer community. Psychiatric experts contributed significantly to the conversation about sexuality during the Weimar Republic, with some promoting progressive viewpoints. However, not all psychiatric evaluations agreed with the findings of individuals such as Hirschfeld, demonstrating the variety of medical viewpoints. Emil Kraepelin, a well-known psychiatrist of the time, provided a mental assessment along with the film's release, which may have reflected more conservative views that were common in psychiatric circles. *Anders Als Die Andern* strategically weaves medical perspectives into its narrative, with Paul Körner seeking the help of a sympathetic doctor to cure his homosexuality through hypnosis. This subplot emphasizes societal pressure to conform to prevalent medical views, as well as individuals' desperation to fit into accepted norms. The film examines the role of the medical establishment in reinforcing societal prejudices and the difficulties faced by the Queer community during the Weimar Republic. The film's depiction of male-to-male relationships navigates a society that pathologized such identities and fosters a climate of fear and secrecy while reflecting the medical viewpoints of the era. The film's portrayal of homosexuality as a medical condition reflects larger social norms that marginalize Queer people. The essay presents *Anders Als Die*

Andern as a historical record that captures the hardships that the Queer community endured during the Weimar Republic, highlighting the film's enduring influence on the nexus of medicine and Queer representation. Weber and Burgmair's investigation of Emil Kraepelin's evaluation adds to the discussion of psychiatric attitudes at the time. Kraepelin wielded power in the medical establishment as a respected figure in Weimar Republic psychiatry.¹³ Their review of the film serves as a lens through which we can examine the prevalent conservative attitudes in psychiatric circles. It also raises concerns about the larger societal climate that influenced medical professionals' attitudes toward homosexuality. Furthermore, the article delves into the Weimar Republic's broader socio-political landscape, examining the impact of instructional films like Hirschfeld's on combating prevalent stereotypes.¹⁴ The film is used to challenge cultural prejudice and raise awareness about homosexuality. The article sheds light on the legal and societal constraints faced by the Queer community by examining the bans imposed under Paragraph 175, emphasizing the interconnectedness of medicine, law, and cultural attitudes.

In the investigation of medical perspectives during the Weimar Republic, it is critical to acknowledge that societal standards played a significant role in shaping the prevalent attitudes toward homosexuality. The interaction of medical perspectives and societal norms influenced not only the representation of queer identities but also the larger cultural and legal frameworks that defined and often marginalized the Queer community during the period. The Weimar Republic's societal landscape, defined by its contradictory attitudes toward sexuality, serves as an important backdrop for understanding the challenges faced by queer people and the cinematic representation of their struggles in *Anders Als Die Andern*. While pockets of increasing acceptance emerged in

¹³ M M Weber and W Burgmair, "Different from the others. Kraepelin's assessment of Hirschfeld's educational film. A contribution to the history of psychiatry of Weimar Republic" Sudhoffs (1997), 1.

¹⁴ Magnus Hirschfeld, "Yearbook for Intermediate Sexual Types", (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, 1912), 2-3.

certain urban enclaves, this permissiveness coexisted with deeply ingrained conservative societal standards prevalent throughout the rest of Germany. The legal framework, particularly Paragraph 175, stands out as a stark representation of the conservative undercurrents that persisted despite cultural experimentation in the exploration of societal standards. This legal provision, which criminalized homosexual acts between men, symbolized the ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative forces. The film deftly captures this dichotomy by depicting the struggles of queer people who, despite growing acceptance in some quarters, find themselves navigating a society that criminalizes their identities. *Anders Als Die Andern* develops into a moving story that goes beyond mere representation, serving as a mirror to reflect the conflict between personal desires and societal expectations.

This tension is exacerbated by the Weimar Republic's political instability, marked by economic crises and extremist ideologies. As political tensions rose, conservative elements sought to reestablish control over societal norms, intensifying the difficulties faced by male-to-male relationships. The film's examination of the emotional toll of living in a society that demands conformity to heteronormative standards is complicated by the strict enforcement of Paragraph 175. Male-to-male relationships, depicted in the film not only as romantic bonds but also as acts of resistance, become a source of social and political contention.¹⁵ The film emphasizes how the criminalization of such relationships had profound consequences for queer people's emotional and psychological well-being, forcing them into the shadows and perpetuating a cycle of secrecy. Aside from legal ramifications, the legacy of Paragraph 175 extended into later periods of German history, including the ominous era of Nazi rule. Persecution was stepped up by the Nazi regime, adding another layer of horror to an already discriminatory legal provision. Postwar Germany

¹⁵ Richard Oswald, *Anders Als Die Andern* (Filmmuseum München, 1919), 28:33-30:31.

grappled with the enduring challenges confronting the Queer community, with Paragraph 175 remaining in effect until its full repeal in 1994. The impact of Paragraph 175 went beyond legal consequences, contributing to a pervasive societal stigma that made it difficult for people to openly express their identities. The film's explicit engagement with medical perspectives on homosexuality adds to our understanding of the challenges that the Queer community faced during the Weimar Republic. Psychiatric perspectives are aligned with societal biases, perpetuating discrimination and adding layers of complexity to queer people's struggles. As we reflect on this period in history, it is critical to recognize not only the legal challenges but also the broader societal and psychological dimensions of the Queer community's experiences. *Anders Als Die Andern* is a testament to queer individuals' resilience in the face of societal norms, urging modern audiences to strive for a deeper understanding of the Queer community's ongoing struggles. The film's examination of the interplay of progressive and conservative attitudes, as well as the political turmoil of the Weimar Republic, provides a nuanced lens through which to comprehend the complex societal standards of the time and their long-term impact.

Anders Als Die Andern, as seen through the lens of "queer cinema of mourning,"¹⁶ delves into the emotional landscape of intolerance and violence against the Queer community, as articulated by scholars such as Richard Dyer¹⁷ and Ervin Malakaj¹⁸. The story revolves around Paul Körner, a talented violinist who is dealing with the criminalization of homosexuality under Paragraph 175 of Germany's Penal Code. His story intertwines with societal expectations, medical perspectives, and the film's subsequent suppression, illuminating the Weimar Republic's broader

¹⁶ Ervin Malakaj, *Anders Als Die Andern*, Queer Film Classics. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 26-27, 119.

¹⁷ Richard Dyer, "Less and More than Women and Men: Lesbian and Gay Cinema in Weimar Germany" *New German Critique* no. 51 (1990), 31.

¹⁸ Ervin Malakaj, *Anders Als Die Andern*, Queer Film Classics. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 26-27.

societal issues. The suppression of the film, as documented by James D. Steakley¹⁹ and Ina Linge,²⁰ reveals the political maneuvering and censorship techniques used to silence progressive voices challenging societal norms, most notably in Paragraph 175. *Anders Als Die Andern* becomes a poignant depiction of the clash between conservative forces and progressive ideas at a critical juncture in history. The film depicts male-male interactions shaped by the harsh application of Paragraph 175, set against the societal landscape of the Weimar Republic. The law not only criminalizes homosexual relationships, but it also imposes a culture of concealment, forcing Queer people to live double lives in the face of societal rejection and cultural experimentation. The film's ban in 1920 highlights the chronic homophobia ingrained in the Weimar Republic's sociocultural fabric, revealing the film's enduring influence on Queer rights in Germany. Moving on to the medical side of things, the impact of Paragraph 175 goes beyond legal implications, intertwining with psychiatric views of the time. According to Weber and Burgmair²¹ Emil Kraepelin's assessment reflects the conservative attitudes prevalent in psychiatric circles, highlighting the interplay between legal, medical, and societal dimensions. The film strategically weaves medical perspectives into its narrative, highlighting societal pressure to conform to accepted norms as well as the role of the medical establishment in reinforcing prejudices against the Queer community. Furthermore, societal standards play an important role in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality, as evidenced by the film's depiction of Queer identities in the context of contradictory societal attitudes. The struggles of male-to-male relationships vividly capture the clash between progressive and conservative forces, exacerbated by political insecurity. The film becomes a

¹⁹ James D. Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic: The Case of Anders Als Die Andern," *Film History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 190-191.

²⁰ Ina Linge, "Sexology, Popular Science and Queer History in Anders Als Die Andern (Different from the Others)" *Gender & History* 30 no. 3 (2018), 6.

²¹ M M Weber and W Burgmair, "Different from the others. Kraepelin's assessment of Hirschfeld's educational film. A contribution to the history of psychiatry of Weimar Republic" *Sudhoffs* (1997), 19-20.

mirror that reflects the conflict between personal desires and societal expectations, which is exacerbated by the strict application of Paragraph 175. As the legacy of Paragraph 175 extends into the Nazi era and postwar Germany, the film's examination of medical perspectives adds depth to our understanding of the Queer community's challenges. Discrimination is perpetuated by psychiatric perspectives that are aligned with societal biases, contributing to a pervasive societal stigma that outlasts legal consequences. *Anders Als Die Andern*, is a testament to the resilience of Queer people, urging modern audiences to understand the complex societal standards of the time and their long-term impact on the Queer community's ongoing struggles.

In closing, studying *Anders Als Die Andern* within the historical and cultural context of the Weimar Republic provides a deep understanding of the interconnected influences of politics, medical perspectives, and societal norms that led to the film's censorship. The film stands out confronting the taboo subject of homosexuality during a time of economic insecurity, political upheaval, and societal biases. *Anders Als Die Andern* is notable for being one of the earliest films to examine queer identity, depicting the difficulties that the Queer community faced in the face of the repressive Paragraph 175. The prohibition of the film becomes a symbol of the conflict between conservative forces and progressive ideas, vividly illustrating the struggles of male-to-male relationships in a society that stigmatized and criminalized homosexuality. The film's examination through the lens of "queer cinema of mourning" deepens the narrative by exposing the emotional landscape of intolerance and violence against the Queer community. Scholars such as Richard Dyer and Ervin Malakaj provide insightful commentary, emphasizing the film's enduring relevance in addressing modern issues of discrimination and violence against the Queer community. *Anders Als Die Andern* historiography, as presented by various scholars, adds layers of understanding, encompassing the political environment, medical viewpoints, and societal

standards of the Weimar Republic. The film becomes a historical record, capturing the hardships endured by the Queer community and highlighting the enduring impact of Paragraph 175 on legal, medical, and cultural dimensions. The film becomes a mirror reflecting the conflict between personal desires and societal expectations as it delves into the complex societal standards of the time. The legacy of Paragraph 175 goes beyond legal ramifications, contributing to a pervasive societal stigma that spans generations. *Anders Als Die Andern* is a testament to the queer community's resilience, urging modern audiences to empathize with and understand the community's ongoing struggles. The film's unraveling of the intricate web of politics, medical science, and societal norms serves as a powerful reminder of the challenges overcome and the progress yet to be made in the fight for Queer rights.