



**QUEER CINEMA AS A FIFTH CINEMA  
IN SOUTH AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA**

**Ricardo Peach**

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## **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Barend Willem Stapelberg,  
Elisabeth Jacoba Maria Stapelberg (née Gouws), Hans Jacob Peach and  
Gertruida Susanna Peach (née Pietersen)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

.....	1
Setting the Scene: The Birth of Film, the Boer War and Anti-Queer Sentiments in South Africa and Australia .....	3
Literature Review and Methodology.....	8
North-South and South-South Dialogues .....	12
Sydney and Capetown.....	18
Queer Rights in the Region .....	19
Chapter Summaries.....	20

### 1. QUEER THEORIES AND QUEER CINEMATIC CULTURES

.....	26
Queer's Epistemology and Etymological Origins.....	28
Strands of Queer Theories.....	30
Queer Theories' Local Inflections and Impact on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia .....	36
South African Queer Theories .....	37
Australian Queer Theories.....	41
Queer Cinematic Cultures in Australia and South Africa.....	43
Towards a Heterognosis.....	46
Queer Strategies for Cinematic Cultures.....	48
Visibility/Coming Out .....	50
Documentation .....	56
Positive/Negative Images .....	61
Mobilisation .....	65
Access.....	66
Self-critique/Self Recognition .....	69
Diversification.....	72
Pleasure.....	76
Interventions .....	78
Queering .....	81
Conclusion.....	87

## 2. SKEEF: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN QUEER CINEMATIC CULTURES

.....	88
<i>Sarie Marais: Queering Early South African Cinema</i> .....	90
Cross-Dressing with Al Debbo and Frik Burgers .....	93
Ernst Thorpe .....	97
Apartheid.....	103
Parallel Queer Histories.....	107
Forrest Town and the Club Scenes .....	111
Emerging Queer Film in the 1970s.....	113
Army Movies .....	114
Queer South African Films in the 1980s .....	117
Queers, Politics and Video Evenings in the 1980s .....	118
Braamfontein Weekend Theatre.....	124
International Queer Cinematic Influences .....	127
Emerging Gay and Lesbian/Queer Film Festivals .....	130
The Problem with Racism and the Delmas Treason Trials.....	131
The First Local Queer Films .....	135
Towards the New South Africa .....	143
The First <i>Out in Africa</i> Gay and Lesbian Film Festival .....	145
Political Outcomes: The National Gay and Lesbian Coalition .....	152
Township Showings.....	153
<i>Skeef Cinema Entja: New Queer South African Cinema</i> .....	155
African Lesbian Images .....	162
Towards the Future: South African Queer Cinematic Support.....	164
Conclusion.....	165



### 3. THE WOLF IS AFTER YOUR BASKET! A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN QUEER CINEMATIC CULTURES

.....	167
Natural Born Milkers: Queering Early Australian Cinema .....	170
Silent Crossings: <i>Sunshine Sally</i> and <i>Jewelled Nights</i> .....	172
Queering the Talkies .....	178
Trimmed with Feathers: War and the Emergence of Queer Sub- Cultures .....	183
From the Movements: The 1970s and the Birth of Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures.....	187
Film and Activism .....	189
Queer Australian Films in the 1970s .....	191
Ubu and Independent Film.....	198
The Sydney Film-makers Co-Operative .....	200
The Women's Movement, Film and Consciousness Raising.....	203
The Gay Film Fund, 1976-1980 .....	207
The Beginning of Gay and Lesbian/Queer Film Festivals .....	211
The First Gay Film Festival .....	211
<i>The Word is Out</i> .....	214
A Decade of Grief: Queer Australian Cinema in the 1980s .....	217
Queer Film Festivals, Pride and Mardi Gras .....	218
Gay Male Law Reform and Annual Queer Film Festivals .....	220
Queer Australian Film in the 1980s .....	223
HIV/AIDS .....	224
Coming Out .....	225
Feminist Filmmaking and Women's Films.....	227
Experimental Aesthetics and Ideology .....	230
A Pink List? .....	233
Burning Down the Celluloid Closet: Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures from the 1990s Onward .....	235
The Emergence of Queer Screen .....	238
Queer Australian Features .....	243
Double Trouble: Queer Australian Cinematic Diversity .....	246
Towards the Future: New Mardi Gras .....	252
Conclusion .....	253

#### 4. INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY CONTEXTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUEER CINEMATIC CULTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA

.....	255
The Impact of Censorship and Local Film Industries on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia .....	257
Censorship of Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia .....	257
Early Cinematic Censorship in South Africa .....	258
Early Cinematic Censorship in Australia.....	260
Easing of Censorship in Australia.....	262
Increasing Censorship in South Africa.....	263
Censorship Liberalisation in South Africa? .....	265
Post-Apartheid South Africa .....	268
Return to the Vowshers Land .....	269
Local Film Industries and their Effect on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia .....	275
Subsidising Cinematic Cultures .....	275
Film Subsidies in South Africa .....	276
Film Subsidies in Australia .....	278
Emerging South African Funding Problems .....	279
Emerging Australian Queer Films in the 1970s and 1980s .....	281
Queer Film Funding in the 1980s in Australia .....	284
South African Queer Films Emerging in the late 1980s .....	287
Queer Australian Films from the 1990s Onwards .....	290
Queer South African Films from the 1990s Onwards .....	293
Future Funding Opportunities .....	297
Comparative Cinematic Analysis.....	299
Activism and Consciousness Raising through Queer Film and Video .....	299
Australia .....	300
South Africa.....	302
Queer Cinematic Hybridity through Euro-American Transfers and Mimicry .....	305

Australia .....	306
South Africa.....	308
Queer Cinematic Cross-Cultural Exchanges between South Africa and Australia.....	310
Queer Race Privilege .....	315
Revolutionary Films and Film Festivals.....	320
Conclusion.....	324
 <b>5. QUEER CINEMA AS A FIFTH CINEMA</b>	
.....	<b>326</b>
From First to Fifth Cinema.....	328
First Cinema.....	331
Second Cinema.....	333
Third Cinema.....	335
Fourth Cinema.....	339
Fifth Cinema: Contesting Internal Colonisation.....	342
Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia as a Fifth Cinema.....	347
 <b>6. CONCLUSION</b>	
.....	351
 <b>LIST OF IMAGES.....</b>	<b>360</b>
 <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>365</b>

# Synopsis

Australia had the world's first gay film festival at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in June 1976, part of a larger commemoration of the Stonewall Riots in New York City of 1969. In 1994, South Africa became the first country in the world to prohibit discrimination in its constitution on the basis of sexual orientation, whilst allowing for positive discrimination to benefit persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination. South Africa and Australia, both ex-British colonies, are used in this analysis to explore the way local Queer Cinematic Cultures have negotiated and continue to negotiate dominant social forces in post-colonial settings.

It is rare to have analyses of Queer Cinematic Cultures and even rarer to have texts dealing with cultures outside those of Euro-America. This study offers a unique window into the formations of Queer Cinematic Cultures of two nations of the 'South'. It reveals important new information on how sexual minorities from nations outside the Euro-American sphere have dealt with and continue to deal with longstanding Queer cinematic oppressions.

A pro-active relationship between Queer representation in film and social-political action is considered by academics such as Dennis Altman to be essential for significant social and judicial change. The existence of Queer and other independent films in Sydney from the 1960s onward, impacted directly on sexuality, race and gender activism. In South Africa, the first major Queer film festival, *The Out In Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1994, was instrumental in developing and maintaining a post-Apartheid Queer public sphere which fostered further legal change.

Given the significant histories of activism through Queer Cinematic Cultures in both Australia and South Africa, I propose in this thesis the existence of a new genus of cinema, which I term Fifth Cinema. Fifth Cinema includes Feminist Cinema, Queer Cinema and Immigrant/Multicultural Cinema and deals with the oppressions which cultures engage with within their own cultural boundaries. It can be informed by First Cinema (classical, Hollywood), Second Cinema (Art House or dual national cinemas), Third and Fourth Cinema (cinemas dealing with the decolonisation of Third World and Fourth World people), but it develops its unique characteristics by countering internal cultural colonisation. Fifth Cinema functions as a heterognosis, where multi-dimensional representations around sexuality, race and gender are used to assist in broader cultural liberation.

# Introduction

## Y'Know

'Do you know that  
in your sleep,'  
I said to him one morning  
over breakfast  
a month to the day after  
he had returned  
(a month in which the war began  
a month of iron fists and curfews  
a month in which the jasmine I planted  
bloomed and winter passed one night  
to summer), 'I watched  
your body ripple  
when you breathe?'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reid, Graham 'Y'Know?' in Krouse, Mathew (ed.), *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay writing from South Africa*, Gay Men's Press, Johannesburg, 1993, p18



As Graham Reid's poem suggests, despite the wars, despite the curfews, despite the iron fists, most of us still yearn for the ordinary joys and experiences of life; to watch, so to speak, the world around us ripple when we breath. This thesis is part of such a ripple, striving to connect, to love and to pass through elements that have sometimes resisted the coming of warmer seasons.

I start this thesis in the spirit of this impending warmth, by observing first, from a global perspective, how Queer people<sup>2</sup> have developed theories and Queer Cinematic Cultures<sup>3</sup> that have sustained and assisted them in their struggle for freedom and liberation. In particular, I use Samantha Searle's topography of Queer cinematic strategies to form the outline on which the observations of this thesis is mapped.<sup>4</sup> Strategies she identifies include visibility; documentation; positive/negative images; mobilisation; access; self-critique/self-recognition; diversification; and pleasure. I add two more strategies I term intervention and Queering.

Within the framework of this expanded topography, I focus on the unique aspects of my own research, which involves specific histories of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia. Few analyses of Queer Cinematic Cultures exist in general,

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<sup>2</sup> Queer signifies lesbians, gays, bisexuals, straight Queers, transgenders, intersex and other individuals who challenge heterosexist ideas of sexuality and gender by virtue of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation and practices. Given the re-historicising nature of this thesis and in order to include those individuals who were active participants in the movements, but left out as a result of limiting terms such as gay and lesbian, Queer is also used on occasion as a descriptor for these diverse groupings of people from the past (see Chapter 1).

<sup>3</sup> Queer Cinematic Culture means all the cinematic institutions and communities involved in representation, production, distribution and reception of Queer film. Queer film is film that signals itself as a Queer product, openly includes Queer audiences in its mode of address and/or contains Queer characters, including films exploring cross-dressing and gender ambivalence. Queer film also includes those films which the Queer communities have re-appropriated and films that can be Queered through re-interpretation (see Chapter 1). No distinction between celluloid, video or new media is made in this definition. I use proper nouns as it is the key concept around which this thesis is based.

<sup>4</sup>Searle, Samantha, *Queer-ing the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*, The Moving Image, No 5, Australian Teachers of Media, St Kilda, 1997

and fewer still outside that of Euro-America. This comparative analysis across the southern hemisphere reveals that Australia had the world's first Queer film festival in June 1976, titled *Festival of Gay Films* and South Africa embraced the first constitution in the world to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in 1994. The histories of these Queer cinemas mapped in this thesis reveal two significant, activist global firsts; ones which were achieved despite enormous oppression and which may have never come to light if the focus remained on Euro-America.

Although the histories of Queer cinema in South Africa and Australia have often been presented as tales of remarkable struggle, they are also markers of enormous triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. It is tales such as these that can assist in the difficult struggle for freedom many Queer people around the globe still face today.

Finally, as a result of the research gathered, I suggest a new cinematic category to frame the discoveries made in this thesis. I term this new category 'Fifth Cinema'. Fifth Cinema aims to counter social domination and discrimination of people from within their society of origin or the society they live in by choice. This research is at the beginning of discussions around this new Fifth Cinema genus.

### **Setting the Scene: The Birth of Film, the Boer War and Anti-Queer Sentiments in South Africa and Australia**

To set the scene for a comparative analysis between the Queer Cinematic Cultures of South Africa and Australia, I start at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the birth of cinema and the emergence in both nations of tremendous socio-political change. Both countries' national identities and film's global coming of age were intimately connected to the then unfolding Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) and the British Imperial agenda. Anti-Queer sentiments, in the wake of the anxiety created by this conflict, were quick to follow.

Film was present prior to the Boer War in South Africa<sup>5</sup> and Australia,<sup>6</sup> with the first projected kinetoscope film in Sydney in 1896 in fact purchased from a Johannesburg kinetoscope show.<sup>7</sup> However, this 'Greatest Scientific Marvel of the Age'<sup>8</sup> was considered only a minor form of entertainment prior to the war.<sup>9</sup>

In South Africa the war saw unprecedented media coverage and an increase in the popularity of film, which for the first time in history, was present to document battles, in the form of film newsreels.<sup>10</sup> Thelma Gutsche comments that the sudden availability of Boer War films 'combined to make something entirely new of "animated photographs" and to elevate them to an honorable place in the entertainment world.'<sup>11</sup> At the outbreak of war, the position of the moving image, on the contrary, had been desperate.<sup>12</sup>

In Australia, the Boer War also impacted significantly on the emergence of the local film industry and was considered to be the first major stimulus to the proliferation of cinema in Australia. Chris Long and Clive Sowry comment that with the Boer War's outbreak on 11 October 1899, Australia was involved in its first conflict to be recorded on film and suggest that 'film was suddenly regarded with unprecedented seriousness as a window onto the unfamiliar battlefields of South Africa, where loved ones were

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<sup>5</sup>Gutsche, Thelma *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895 - 1940*, Howard Timmins, Capetown, 1972, p 8. Film appeared first in South Africa early in 1895, when salesmen in Johannesburg began selling Edison Kinetoscopes.

<sup>6</sup> Long, Chris 'Sorry. Wrong Centenary' in Berryman, Ken (ed.), *Screening the Past: Aspects of Early Australian Film*, National Film and Sound Archives of Australia, 1995, p 11. The first kinetoscope viewing, as opposed to projection in Australia was in Sydney and attracted an estimated 25000 patrons in its first month in December 1894.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p 12

<sup>8</sup>Gutsche, *op. cit.*, p 9

<sup>9</sup>Hodsdon, Barrett *The Dawn of Cinema 1894 - 1915*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, p 26

<sup>10</sup>Gutsche, *op. cit.*, p 42

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p 48

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*



risking their lives.<sup>13</sup> The number of picture shows, as a consequence, rapidly multiplied.

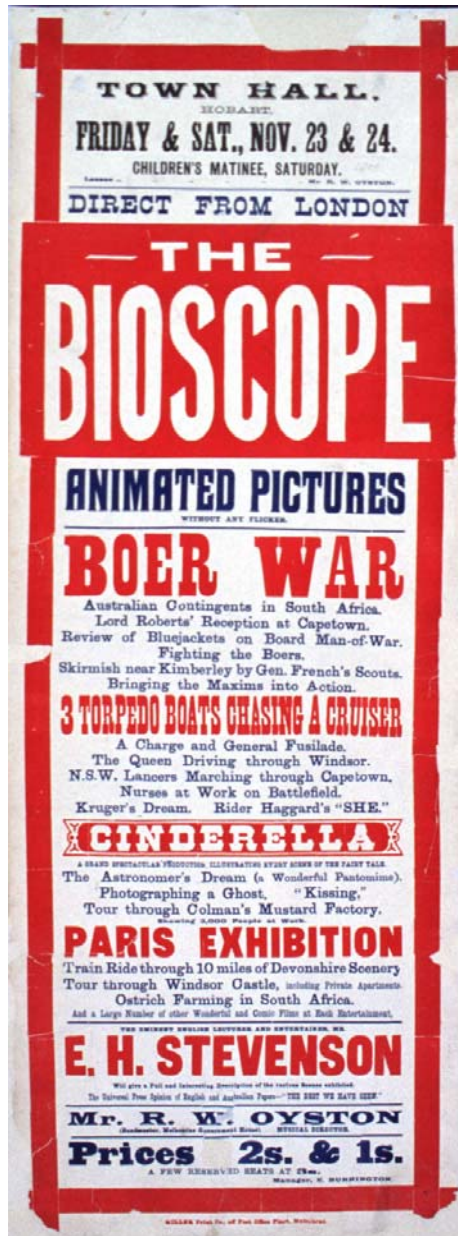


Figure 1

<sup>13</sup>Long, Chris and Sowry, Clive 'Australia's First Films: Facts and Fables, Part Nine: Colonial Cinema's Conclusion', *Cinema Papers*, August 1994, No 100, pp 61,-62

Australian nationalism was also affected by the Boer War, with Australian Federation activists in 1901 using as a backdrop the 'victories' of Australia's Boer War involvement to foster national cohesion. In fact, Boer War film exhibitors contributed to Australia's South African fighting fund by screening their films for the patriotic crowds at concerts and benefit rallies.<sup>14</sup>

The bitter treatment by the British and Australians of the Afrikaners and Africans in the concentration camps also saw significant changes in nationalist ideals in South Africa. David Myers, commenting on the lack of Australians' awareness around the Boer War in relation to one of the only Australian films to deal with its involvement in South Africa during this period, *Breaker Morant*, (Beresford, 1980) suggests:

*It is interesting that Australia, at the time of the Boer War, had just succeeded in winning Federation as a nation and a measure of independence from England. So too were the Boers trying to establish themselves as a nation and defend their land against the English invaders. But no attempt is made in this film to establish common causes between Australians and Boers...It is therefore regrettable that the patriotic Boer nationalists were not given a braver image.<sup>15</sup>*

The re-alignment of national identities, the deaths of so many South Africans of all races and the British Empires' forceful acquisition of land recorded on film for the first time in history, shifted the social landscapes of South Africa forever.

The form these two new, nationalist identities took were both flawed structures, with neither South Africa nor Australia becoming broadly inclusive. Discrimination on the basis of gender, race and sexuality in relation to the new Australian Federation and similar manifestations in South Africa, can be observed through the introduction in this period of various laws and regulations solidifying inequalities.

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p 63

<sup>15</sup>Myers, David *Bleeding Battlers from Ironbark: Australian Myths in Fiction and Film 1890s- 1980s*, University of Central Queensland Publications, Rockhampton, 1992, p 44

In the aftermath of these shifts, Australia for example, saw, the implementation of the White Australia policy, a series of discriminatory immigration laws in place from 1901 until the late sixties<sup>16</sup> and new Criminal Codes in states such as Queensland (1899) and Western Australia (1901),<sup>17</sup> which changed convictions around same-sex relations.<sup>18</sup> By 1913 the terms for convictions in Western Australia increased from three years to 'imprisonment with hard labour for 14 years with or without whipping', a slightly better outcome at least than at the time of colonisation when the penalty was death.<sup>19</sup>

In South Africa according to Roman Dutch common law, only male/female sex acts which were directed at procreation were permitted and offences severely punished,<sup>20</sup> with both the Dutch and the British imposing the death penalty for sodomy as late as 1871.<sup>21</sup> In 1905, in the aftermath of the Boer War and related to the shortage of post war labour, anxiety around homosexuality again surfaced as an issue.<sup>22</sup> A commission was called to examine 'unnatural vice' rumoured by disgruntled whites to be practiced by imported Chinese labourers and Africans. Several Chinese labourers were sent home in addition to the enquiry recommending that screens be

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<sup>16</sup>Kane, John 'Racialism and Democracy: The Legacy of White Australia' in Stokes, Geoffrey (ed.), *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p 119

<sup>17</sup>Bevin-Mizzi, Jill. *Raping Matilda: Sexual Assault in Late-Nineteenth-Century Australia*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Scholar's Office, University of Western Australia, Perth, 1994, p 250. Section 181 and 184 of the Criminal Code Act of WA provided for imprisonment for three years with or without whipping for consensual same-sex acts and was based on the new Queensland Criminal Code Act of 1899.

<sup>18</sup>Western Australian *Criminal Code Act, 1901*. 'Gross indecency' included sodomy. Part of the act read: Chapter XXII-- Offences Against Morality

184. Any male person who, whether in public or in private, commits any act of gross indecency with another male person, or procures another male person to commit any act of gross indecency with him, or attempts to procure the commission of any such act by any male person, whether in public or private, is guilty of a misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment with hard labour for three years, with or without whipping.

<sup>19</sup>Acts of Parliament of Western Australia, *Third Session of the Eighth Parliament*, 26 June 1913 to 10 January, 1914, p 180

<sup>20</sup>Cameron, Edwin "'Unapprehended felons': Gays and lesbians and the law in South Africa", in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 91

<sup>21</sup>Epprecht, Marc "'Unnatural Vice" in South Africa: The 1907 Commission of Enquiry', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol 34, No 1, 2001, p 122

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p 125

removed between beds to take away privacy and stop sex from happening between Africans.<sup>23</sup>

As far as the burgeoning film industry was concerned, neither South African nor Australian early cinema dealt in any way openly with Queer people's lives. Queer sexuality, its representation in film and national identity it seems, were mutually exclusive projects in both post-war nations and Queer people easy targets, whether through social exclusion or anti-Queer laws. The social stigma of Queer people's existence, reflected as an absence on the screen, forms an interesting backdrop to the eventual emergence in both countries of major Queer Cinematic Cultures.

### **Literature Review and Methodology**

Having contextualised the early links between South Africa and Australia and set the scene for a comparative analysis, it is important to outline the information gathering processes and the methodological approaches I took to uncover and theorise the subsequent emergence of Queer Cinematic Cultures in both countries.

At the core of this research lies the various primary and secondary sources that have been gathered to map often scattered information on South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures. For the South African component, primary documents such as Queer newsletters, ephemera, newspapers and magazines (*Link/Skakel*, *Exit* and *Esteem*), legal documents, interviews, e-mail correspondences and films were used to create narratives around its Queer Cinematic Cultures. As very little written information exists on Queer South African film, much of the research was based on primary sources.

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 125 –126. The impetus for this inquiry, Epprecht believes, was disgruntled whites who wanted foreign labourers to leave the country to relieve the competition for work. The South African government, they argued, would not bring in Chinese women to stem the practice of sodomy, as this would have seen them settle and demand political rights.

In South Africa, where Afrikaans and English have also shared the national platform for many years, significant amounts of data were contained in Afrikaans. Where possible, quotes are kept in the language of origin as part of a strategy to reclaim and give equal footing to indigenous languages. Although Afrikaans was recently associated with white Afrikaners and the Apartheid regime, it has a much longer history. Its origins are from the mixed race descendants in South Africa and many different racial groups still speak Afrikaans.<sup>24</sup> Creating a platform for this language is an important endeavor in keeping cultural difference alive. The translations in the footnotes are my own.

In Australia, language was not an obvious issue when researching Queer Cinematic Cultures. English is the *lingua franca* of government archives, records and newspapers. Texts on Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures were also more prevalent than that available in South Africa, yet also in less traditional sources. Information was gathered mostly from the various Queer newspapers such as *The Star*, *The Sydney Star Observer*, newsletters such as *Camp Inc*, magazines such as *Campaign*, ephemera from various libraries and institutions, interviews and mainstream cinematic texts such as *Filmnews*.

In addition to these disparate sources, I use several key texts, including Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory*;<sup>25</sup> Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*;<sup>26</sup> Richard Dyer's *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*;<sup>27</sup> Alexander Doty's

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<sup>24</sup> Dalby, Andrew *Dictionary of Languages*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 1998, pp 4-5. Dalby suggest that although Afrikaans has been associated with racial exclusion because of the Afrikaners and their instigation of Apartheid, Afrikaans as a language is much more complex. A variety of Dutch, it also contains words from Portuguese, Malay, Bantu and Khoisan languages. The first book in Afrikaans was an Islamic religious text in Arabic script that appeared in 1856. It served originally as an argot spoken within the sub-cultures of the separate mixed race and ethnic communities.

<sup>25</sup> Jagose, Annamarie *Queer Theory*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996

<sup>26</sup> Russo, Vito *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Harper and Row, New York, 1987

<sup>27</sup> Dyer, Richard *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, Routledge, London, 1990

*Making Thing Perfectly Queer*;<sup>28</sup> Samantha Searle's *Queering the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*;<sup>29</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis' *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deteritorialization and Hybridity*;<sup>30</sup> and lastly, Martin Botha<sup>31</sup> and Deb Verhoeven's<sup>32</sup> descriptive writing on South African and Australian Queer cinemas respectively.

Jagose's *Queer Theory* initiates a history on the epistemology and etymological origin of the term Queer and its use in Queer Theory. Although the term Queer is linked to same-sex relationships as early as the 1910s, the contemporary meaning points to more specific cultural formations of the late 1980s and 1990s. Linking it to Queer cinema in this thesis, it is used as a retrospective and transhistoricising descriptor to include people who have been traditionally left out as a result of the signifying limitations of the terms homosexual, gay and lesbian.

Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* was one of the first books to be published on homosexuality in cinema. Although Russo examines a broad range of international, historical texts, he has a particular focus on films made in Hollywood. Given the dominance of American texts in South Africa and Australia, Russo's thoughts on censorship, in particular the Hays Code and the emergence of 'negative' Queer images, are used to put the American films' impact on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia into perspective.

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<sup>28</sup> Doty, Alexander *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1993

<sup>29</sup>Searle, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Papastergiadis, Nicholas *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deteritorialization and Hybridity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p 194.

<sup>31</sup> Botha, Martin 'Homosexuality and South African Cinema', *Kinema*, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, Spring 2003

<sup>32</sup> Verhoeven, Deb 'The sexual terrain of the Australian feature film: Putting the Out:back into the Ocker' in Jackson, Claire and Tapp, Peter (eds.), *The Bent Lens: A world guide to gay and lesbian film*, Australian Catalogue Company, Melbourne, 1997

Dyer's *Now You See It* appeared soon after, and deals specifically with gay and lesbian films *made by* gay men and lesbians. It gives a broad view on the emergence of Queer films internationally, starting off in Weimar Germany with the first gay text, *Anders Als Die Anderen* (*Different from the Others*, 1919). In particular, Dyer's thoughts on film as part of the activist and consciousness-raising activities of gays and lesbians have informed the way that South African and Australian Queer film activist histories have been analysed in this thesis.

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Doty suggests the act of reading something Queer 'into' mass cultural texts touched on by Russo and Dyer, can sometimes be a debilitating and homophobic practice. He argues for the liberation of Queerness from the 'closet of connotation' into a space where it can be read 'in' the text. As theories on multiple viewing positions suggests, a Queer reading or 'Queering' would describe and foreground the Queer content already in all texts, rather than revealing a hidden or connotative subtext.

Searle's topology of Queer cinematic strategies in *Queering the Screen*, builds on the work of people such as Doty and forms the basic structure for the theoretical framework of this thesis. Her analysis assists in mapping the political impact of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia and in particular, her understanding of Queer people's difficulty in getting access to the means of production, systems of distribution and various institutions that constitute a screen culture, offers an important analytical position outside the usual textual analyses. Searle's measures of Queer political effectivity in relation to Queer cinematic strategies such as visibility; documentation; positive/negative images; mobilisation; access; self-critique/self-recognition; diversification; and pleasure is expanded in Chapter 1 and an institutional approach, inspired by her research methodology, developed in Chapter 4.

Lastly Botha and Verhoeven's articles on Queer Cinematic histories in South Africa and Australia are used to support the historical timelines developed. They are rare,

published texts dealing exclusively with Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia and form useful bookends to a more extensive cinematic analysis.

In combination with other primary and secondary sources dealing more generally with Queer Theory; film theory; film history; cultural studies; anthropology; legal studies; post-colonial studies; and political theory, these texts allow a new historical narrative to come to life – a narrative that examines the specific Queer Cinematic Cultures of both South Africa and Australia.

### **North-South and South-South Dialogues**

*The interaction between... cultures proceed with the illusion of transferable forms and transparent knowledge, but leads increasingly into resistant, opaque and dissolute exchanges.*<sup>33</sup>

Nikos Papastergiadis

The research for this thesis reveals that Queer Cinematic Cultures of the 'South', such as South Africa and Australia, are hybrid forms of global Queer Cinematic Cultures influenced predominantly by Euro-American Queer products from the 'North'. They have been affected not only through the number of Queer films screened from the 'North', but also from the Queer activist histories, film festivals and theories that emerged in and traveled from the 'North'.

Papastergiadis suggests that notions of the 'South' or 'North', however, are not imbedded in geography, but rather that the idea of the 'South' is more connected to specific cultural histories that have been developed by post-colonial societies and their 'struggles to reconcile indigenous, diasporic and settler social claims'. The 'North' is

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<sup>33</sup> Papastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration*, op. cit., p 194.



also more defined by the 'South's' 'deference towards and defiance of metropolitan dominance' than a geographical location. Places such as Canada with similar colonial histories for example, may also be considered part of the 'South'.<sup>34</sup>

To understand some of these cultural transfers, Papastergiadis unpacks the five stages of cultural influence developed by Yuri Lotman, one of the first thinkers to extend complex theories of hybridity into the semiotics of culture.<sup>35</sup> The stages observed by Lotman take place when exchanges occur between what he termed a 'foreign text' and a 'host'. The five stages are:

1. The foreign text's arrival, with the foreign text initially seen as superior;
2. A transformation which then occurs at both ends, where the foreign text and the receiving culture begin to restructure each other;
3. A reception which consequently leads to a form of transcendence, where the foreign text is deprecated;
4. The receiver, once assimilation and internalisation of the imported text occurs, becoming the producer of a new, original text; and lastly
5. The receiver becoming a transmitter.

Papastergiadis also cites Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha as writers whose thoughts on hybridity have been used by post-colonial theorists advocating hybrid identities.<sup>36</sup> He suggests that for Hall, cultural identity is always hybrid, with precise forms of hybridity determined by specific historical formations and cultural 'repertoires of enunciation'.

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<sup>34</sup> Papastergiadis, Nikos 'South-South-South', *Intersections: South African art from the BHP Collection*, BHP Billiton SA Limited, Marshalltown, South Africa, 2002, p 15

<sup>35</sup> Papastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration*, *op. cit.*, p 183. Papastergiadis suggest that: 'Hybridity is both the process by which the discourse of colonial authority attempts to translate the identity of the Other within a singular category, but then fails and produces something else.'

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p 188

Bhabha's work, he suggests, focuses on the psychic processes of identification and the cultural practices of performance to highlight hybridization as intrinsic to radical transformation.<sup>37</sup> In Bhabha's terms, it is the actual failure of translation and the incommensurability of certain transcultural concepts that brings newness, or a 'third space', into the world.<sup>38</sup>

Spivak dissents from the last two concepts by drawing sharp distinctions between the diasporic communities of the First World and the subaltern in the Third World, suggesting an imposition of ideas of hybridity into the Third World is an 'alibi for global exploitation'.<sup>39</sup>

Papastergiadis comments on these divergent positions suggesting that 'by charting how Hall, Bhabha and Spivak variously define hybridity, we can break with the naïve assumption that hybridity is itself a stable concept or that one perspective is interchangeable with one another'.<sup>40</sup>

The hybrid Queer Cinematic Cultures of South Africa and Australia, functioning in the various complex manners observed by Lotman, Hall, Bhabha and Spivak, have absorbed global Queer Cinematic Cultures predominantly from the 'North'. In the process, however, they have also developed powerful presences and complex Queer Cinematic Cultures of their own. As Bhabha suggests, appropriation takes place not on its own, but alongside an active visualisation of power.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p 189

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p 194. As Papastergiadis suggests of Bhabha's theories: 'It is in this tension that a 'third space' emerges which can affect forms of political change that can go beyond antagonistic binarisms between the rulers and the ruled.'

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p 189

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Bhabha, Homi 'Of Mimicry and Man', *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p 86

In recent years, a trickle of South-South dialogues between Australian and South African hybrid Queer Cinematic Cultures have begun to forge links between countries that usually only see each other only through the eyes of Europe or America. As curator and artist Kendell Greers comments on a contemporary South Africa:

*Today South African artists must face the same problems that Australian or South American artists face: the question of creating a logic in a post-colonial culture that continues to look towards Europe or the USA for legitimization... South African artists should, in theory, be forging links and learning from their contemporaries in the same hemisphere, rather than constantly looking for an escape north. The truth remains that it is still infinitely easier and cheaper to travel south-north than south-south.*<sup>42</sup>

South African-Australian cultural critic John Matteer comments that logically it should be possible to assume that the cultural lives of South Africa and Australia should share some common ground, as both countries had large British colonies with brutal colonial pasts and strong economic and cultural links to the Empire. However, he suggests, the divergences after the Boer War saw significant differences develop between the countries, in particular around racial exclusion. Matteer argues:

*The parallel is less convincing when looking at the countries' post-war histories. In British South Africa, only a small percentage of the population was of British extraction and the structure of the political system was shaped ... stemming from the Anglo-Boer war. Post-war South Africa did not forge a strong alliance with the United States, unlike post-war Australia, which was very much a part of the Western world. The founders of apartheid were influenced by aspects of Germany's National Socialism, and with the coming of the Nationalist Party in the 1940s, South Africa began its long decades of political and cultural isolation.*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Greers, Kendell *Intersections: South African Art from the BHP Collection*, BHP Billiton SA Limited, Marshalltown, South Africa, 2002, p 7. Although Greers, unlike Papastergiadis, still links the notion of south with the southern hemisphere, he does expose some of the economic and cultural barriers that still inhibit cultural exchange.

<sup>43</sup> Mateer, John 'Intersections: South African art from the BHP Collection', *Art Monthly*, June 2003, No 160, p 4. Mateer suggests that 'in the time before jet travel and the Suez Canal, merchant ships on their

In a post-Apartheid world, however, and considering the large number of South Africans who have migrated and continue to migrate to Australia, this continued lack of connectivity is somewhat puzzling.<sup>44</sup> In 2002/2003 alone, the number of South Africans arriving in Australia was a significant 5% of the total permanent addition figures for that year, higher than Vietnam (3%), Philippines (3%), Malaysia (3%) and Indonesia (4%). Only the migration figures from the United Kingdom (14%), New Zealand (10%) and the People's Republic of China's (8%) were higher.<sup>45</sup>

The absence also of Queer Cinematic co-productions between the two countries, when considering Australia's strong Queer Cinematic Culture and the number of co-productions South Africa has had with Canada, the USA and the UK [*A Moffie Called Simon* (1986, John Greyson, Canada), *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*, (1998, Greta Schiller, UK/USA/SA) and *Proteus* (2003, John Greyson and Jack Lewis, Canada)], is surprising considering the two countries are such close neighbours and share so many recent colonial and multicultural similarities.

Perhaps, as Papastergiadis suggests, the inability of Australia still to look 'sideways' towards its southern neighbors may have deeper roots than Australians want to acknowledge. He comments:

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way from Europe to Australia stopped in South Africa, and Fremantle was only second to Capetown as the British sailors favourite place to "jump ship".

<sup>44</sup> *Documented Migration, 2002/Statistics South Africa*, Statistics South Africa, Pretoria, 2003, pp iv. 19. 14.5% of all South Africans who left South Africa in 2002 went to Australia, the second highest country of relocation after the UK. In contrast, only 53 Australians, of a total of 6545 immigrants to South Africa moved to that country (.008%). *Populations Flow: Immigration Aspects*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, March 2004, Belconnen, 2004, p 7

<sup>45</sup> *Populations Flow: Immigration Aspects*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, March 2004, Belconnen, 2004, p 7

*This ignorance is...not as innocent as it seems. The aversion or aloofness that we have in facing our neighbors is symptomatic of a deeper ambivalence. The illusion of independence that hangs in our [Australian] post-colonial imagination has created new specters of incompleteness and belatedness. Perhaps we... distance ourselves from a rival like South Africa because we dare not recognize an equally brutal racial mentality.<sup>46</sup>*

Australia's strong support for the expulsion of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth in 2002, which South Africa is keen to see lifted, may also be influencing South Africa's ambivalent position towards Australia.<sup>47</sup> The discomfort at present towards each other appears to be coming from both sides.

This thesis in part is an attempt to ignite further South-South dialogues and comparatives to better understand the similarities, challenges and differences we share with our neighbours from the south. Significant benefits can be gained from engaging directly with each other rather than through the traditional Euro-American centers.

For instance, the screening in Australia of the first gay film festival in the world<sup>48</sup> and in South Africa the instigation of the first national constitution in the world protecting people on the basis of sexual orientation, reveals particularly strong Queer cultural activities and global 'firsts'.<sup>49</sup> Without such comparisons, potentially instrumental strategies available for minorities to counter global Queer oppression and develop liberatory cultural products of their own, may never have come to light.

As part of a global community we cannot afford to ignore important developments in countries outside the range of the Euro-American radars or forget to acknowledge very different avenues of success, if we are truly interested in making the world a

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<sup>46</sup> Papastergiadis, 'South-South-South', *op. cit.*, p 15

<sup>47</sup> 'Commonwealth panel deadlocked on Zimbabwe's suspension', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 2003, [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au) Accessed 13 March 2004

<sup>48</sup> Smith, Martin 'Aussie Gay Pics', *Campaign*, Issue 10, June 1976, p 33. The event was titled *A Festival of Gay Films*.

<sup>49</sup> Equality Clause Section 8, *South African Constitution*

fairer place for Queer and non-Queer people alike. An analysis of how these cultures not only survived but thrived, can assist in establishing Queer Cinematic Cultures aimed at supporting liberation in countries still experience debilitating oppression.

### *Sydney and Capetown*

In this thesis, Sydney and Capetown in particular are used as 'South-South' loci for the analysis of Queer Cinematic Cultures, as they have been the origin of comparable Queer Cinematic Cultures, similar in size and intent. Although differing slightly in their focus and economic capacity, with the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival a national endeavour and the Queer film festivals in Sydney mostly metropolitan phenomena, Queer cinema activists in both these cities have been at the forefront of much of the Queer Cinematic Cultural development in their respective regions.

The existence of the Queer film festivals in Sydney and Capetown, when put in a global context is highly significant. As mentioned previously, Sydney had the world's first gay film festival in 1976 with Queer film events continuing annually to date. South African Queer people were also protected by the world's first constitution supporting Queer rights and cultural expression. This makes Australia and South Africa critical litmus tests for relatively unhampered Queer Cinematic expressions, a rare freedom globally.

Sydney hosts one of the largest Queer Film Festivals in the world and the biggest global Queer event, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, which supports numerous cultural satellite activities.<sup>50</sup> Queer Screen, the organisation that runs the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festival, has also been at the forefront of and often the instigator of much Australian Queer Cinematic Culture and assisted in

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<sup>50</sup>Carr, Bob, Premier of New South Wales in his message of support in the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival Guide*, 1998, p 9

the Queer film festivals of Perth in Western Australia, Adelaide in South Australia and Brisbane in Queensland.<sup>51</sup>

The national *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival based in Capetown also organises and controls one entire festival nationally including cities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Durban. It acts as a base from which the events for the other cities are organised and continues to be a key component of a national, Queer South African identity.

### *Queer Rights in the Region*

South Africa and Australia are also uniquely positioned within their own regions where Queer human rights are concerned. South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa where Queer rights are protected. Australia, along with a few other places such as Thailand, French Polynesia and New Caledonia, is also one of only a handful of relatively tolerant Queer countries in the Asia-Pacific region, with Sydney having the most visible Queer community.<sup>52</sup> Although in recent years the gains made in Australia in relation to Queer rights seems to be eroding, with both the Federal Liberal and Labour Governments voting in 2004 to exclude same-sex people from marriage, Queer culture has continued to evolve and expand.<sup>53</sup>

Asylum seekers have also attempted to gain refugee status on the grounds of sexual orientation in both these nations of the 'South', making them important players in their regions for the advancement of Queer rights.<sup>54</sup> Their broadly visible and large Queer

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<sup>51</sup>Bolger, Brendan 'Aussie queer films head OS', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday June 11 1998, p 5

<sup>52</sup>Baird, Matthew 'Where are we now?', *Mardi Gras Festival Guide*, 1999, p 17-18

<sup>53</sup>'Ban means "nothing"', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 19 August 2004, p 1. Senators voted 38-7 in favour of banning same-sex marriage on Friday 13 August 2004.

<sup>54</sup>Mill, David 'Landmark Ruling', *Sydney Star Observer*, Issue 692, 11 December 2003. In Australia a gay couple from Bangladesh applied for asylum in 2003. The High Court, in a landmark case, thought to be the first of its kind in the world, ruled that the Immigration Department, which had previously refused their application, had to reconsider their refugee status. *Electronic Mail & Guardian* publication, November 8, 1999. In South Africa a Ugandan Doctor and two Pakistani men applied for asylum in 1999. Both cases were still pending at the time of writing of this thesis.

cultures, including cinematic cultures, have and continue to be part of regional and global struggles for Queer rights and representation.

### **Chapter Summaries**

In Chapter 1, I take my cue from the Introductory Chapter and analyse the term Queer and the emergence of Queer Theory in South Africa and Australia from a 'North' to 'South' perspective. I suggest the concept of Queer, originating in America, has been recruited into theoretical form by lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, intersex and other associated people for various social, political and cultural agendas since the late 1980s. Through an epistemological analysis of the word Queer and a brief history of the emergence of Queer Theory, I posit that there are several strands of Queer Theories all affecting, albeit on unequal terms, Queer Cinematic Cultures.

These Queer Theories do not work in isolation from one other and cannot be neatly separated. They exist, often as contradictory, sometimes mutually exclusive, but cross-linked vectors in a space-time continuum. In addition to Annamarie Jagose, the writings of David Halperin, Rob Cover and Layli Phillips are used briefly to offer 'character' profiles of the different Queer Theories. In addition, the differences between Australia and South Africa in their employment of Queer and its theories are examined, to prepare the platform in later chapters for discussing the evolution of these specific Queer Cinematic Cultures of the 'South'.

In an attempt to overcome the limitations of binary oppositions that emerge in this analysis, I suggest Queer Theories can be seen as a *heterognosis*. The concept of a heterognosis, first introduced to me through Brian Doherty's research on the Ubu film group,<sup>55</sup> signifies the co-existence of different knowledges in one space and time. It is proposed as a marker for the synthesis of the various Queer Theories, from academic

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<sup>55</sup>Doherty, Brian *The Ubu Film Scene and the Emergence of Underground Film in Australia 1956-1970: Discourse, Practice, Heterognosis*, Masters of Arts Long Essay, Department of Fine Arts, Powerhouse Research Library, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1996



or dominant Queer Theory to identity based Queer Theory and notions of intersectionality and multi-dimensionality. The asymmetry and unequal power relations of the different Queer Theories and ideologies are noted, but the usefulness of the concept heterogynosis, particularly in relation to Queer Cinematic Cultures, is posited.

By utilising the concept of a heterogynosis, I examine different political, social and historical formations that have affected Queer Cinematic Cultures, building on the work done by Russo, Dyer, Doty and Searle. According to Searle, strategies for representation that have developed around Queer Cinematic Culture include visibility; documentation; positive/negative images; mobilization; access; self-critique/self-recognition; diversification; and pleasure. I add a further two strategies that I believe have evolved from Queer Cinematic Cultural practices: interventions and Queering.

While I analyse a more Euro-American history of these strategies initially, these broad historical strokes herald particularities for Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia discussed in later chapters. The notion of these Queer Cinematic Cultures of the 'South' functioning as a heterogynosis is proposed.

In Chapter 2, I depart from the international sweep of Queer cinematic history, and begin to focus locally on the histories of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa. Queer associating people in South Africa gained solid constitutional (if not always social) backing for the evolution of Queer Cinematic Cultures in 1994 with the enactment of its constitution, a situation then unique in the world. It was also in 1994 that the first lesbian and gay film festival, *Out in Africa*, was organised in Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Capetown. The film-makers Barbara Hammer, Pratibha Parmar, Isaac Julian and Greta Schiller were the official film festival guests and the major film distributor in South Africa, Ster-Kinekor was the official sponsor.

In South Africa, the first major Queer film festival occurred at the same time as post-Apartheid constitutional change (1994) and Queer Cinematic Culture's long term role in liberating a Queer public sphere, therefore may seem less substantial initially than its counterpart in Australia, where strong Queer film cultures existed prior to significant law reform. However, the Queering of early South African films such as *Sarie Marais* (1931, Joseph Albrecht) and *Fratse in die Vloot* (1958, Pierre de Wet); analysis of super 8 films by Ernst Thorpe in the 1960s; the beginning of international Queer films screened in the 1970s; consciousness raising video evenings by organization such as GASA in the 1980s; experimental Queer filmmaking by the Braamfontein Weekend Theatre in the 1980s; the emergence of a Queer sensibility connected to the military in the 1970s and 1980s; multi-dimensional films on race and sexuality such as *Quest for Love* (1987, Helen Nogueira); and the initial Queer video screenings held by Jack Lewis in Capetown in the early 1990s, all link up to create a dispersed but vibrant Queer cinematic history in South Africa.

When the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival opened in 1994, it consequently created an enormous sense of arrival for the Queer communities of South Africa and acted not just as a cinematic space, but a space for community building, access, mobilization and political action. As the organisers wrote in the introduction to that first festival's program, however:

*Gay rights may be in the constitution - but they're not yet in our lives.... What we need to do is get people talking. And how better to do this than through movies? Movies introduce ideas, and spark off new ones... We believe this festival will give gay men, lesbians and bisexuals a chance to build their self-recognition and self-worth.*<sup>56</sup>

In Australia, similar issues in terms of social and political pressures for Queer invisibility existed early on in its Queer cinematic histories. Chapter 3 examines these

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<sup>56</sup>*Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Program, 1994

histories to present specific evolutions of Queer Cinematic Cultures as a result of larger social, political and institutional struggles.

I start the chapter by Queering early Australian films such as *Sunshine Sally* (1922, Lawson Harris and Yvonne Pavis), *Jewelled Nights* (1926, Louise Lovely), *Rangle River* (1936, Clarence Badger), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938, Ken G Hall) and *Forty Thousand Horseman* (1940, Charles Chauvel) to reveal several tomboys and sissy characters and homosocial viewing positions that create remarkable new, Queer cinematic signposts.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that openly Queer films for and/or by Queer people emerged, with productions such as a feature film *The Set* (1970, Frank Britton). The strengthening of this cinematic activism, in Sydney in particular, lead to the screening of *The Word is Out* (1977, Mariposa Film Collective) an American civil rights documentary in 1978, which is in part credited for mobilising activists for the first Gay Mardi Gras march that year.<sup>57</sup> This film had a significant impact on the creation of a socially mobilised, political group of activists around Mardi Gras, which eventually lead to changes in some of the anti-Queer laws of NSW. It is also very fortunate that a local film, Digby Duncan's *Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers*, (1979, One in Seven Collective) recorded Australia's own Queer 'revolution' on film.

Although the *Festival of Gay Films* from 1976 gives Sydney the oldest Queer film festival in the world, it seems that Queer film festivals became consistent annually and increased in prominence and size only after the lifting of the anti-same-sex sexuality laws in 1984. Pre-1984, supportive film industry structures in the 1970s such as the Australian Film Commission (AFC); UBU Film; the Women's Film Fund (WFF); and

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<sup>57</sup>Harris, Gavin *It's a Riot: Sydney's First Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Australian Telegraph Publications, Sydney, 1998 (See Chapter 3)

the Sydney Film-makers Co-operative,<sup>58</sup> whose members included many lesbian, gay and Queer film-makers and patrons, were instrumental in the development and nurturing of these lesbian/gay/Queer films. The link, however, between the removal in the 1980s of various sexuality and gender laws imposed on Queer people and Queer cultural development appears to have been very important for the evolution of Queer Cinematic Culture in Australia.

Chapter 4 provides a comparative analysis between South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures and examines how their institutional, cultural and social realities created very different cinematic models. The lack of contact between them has also meant that any apparent similarities developed in parallel, rather than through significant cross-cultural contact.

What becomes obvious through this research is that Queer difference and representation can be respected after major political change in previously oppressive countries such as South Africa, while at the same time previously more liberal countries such as Australia can fall behind judicially and representationally in terms of social recognition of Queer people. The social, institutional and cultural filters examined and observed are: censorship; film industry structures and funding; activism and consciousness raising; hybridity through transference and mimicry; cross-cultural exchange; Queer race privilege; and concepts such as a 'revolutionary' film and 'revolutionary' film festivals.

In conclusion, based on the data gathered for this thesis, I propose the existence of a new genus of cinema I title Fifth Cinema. Fifth Cinema includes Queer Cinema, Feminist Cinema and Immigrant/Multicultural Cinema and endeavours to assist in a

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<sup>58</sup>A Gay Film Fund was started by Digby Duncan in 1978, to collect money for gay filmmaking. The Filmmakers Cinema, run by the Co-op, was used to raise funds by showing gay films, and the AFC contributed \$10 000 towards the first film called *Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers*, (One in Seven Collective, 1979).

decolonisation of dominating and discriminatory representations that come from within a society of origin or a society lived in by choice.

Fifth Cinema can be informed by First Cinema (classical, Hollywood), Second Cinema (arthouse or dual national cinemas) and Third and Fourth Cinema (cinema dealing with the decolonisation of Third World and Fourth World people), but it develops its unique difference from engaging with the internal struggles of the governing culture, of which it is a part. These observations are at the beginning of what I hope will be ongoing debates around Fifth Cinema.

Although this thesis may only be one of the many new voices emerging around the world in relation to Queer cultural reclamation, in a global social order where support for Queer sexual difference is still in very short supply, I believe every voice is important. It is my hope that the stories in this text are heard and that the notion of a Fifth Cinema can be used in some small way to make our world a better place to live in and love.



# Chapter 1

## Queer Theories and Queer Cinematic Cultures

*Once we start coming together to discuss films, to ask how far they reflect our own lives, experiences and feelings, we have begun to move beyond being passive consumers, to become in fact political. For gay politics are not just demonstrations and protests. It is also understanding how far we are restricted and oppressed by images and perceptions imposed on us by a cultural industry, in this case, the movies.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Altman, Dennis 'Gay Film Festivals - The Importance of Images: Dennis Altman previews the coming Australian film festivals', *Campaign*, No 32, 1978, p 19



I begin this chapter by analysing the epistemology and etymological origins of the word queer and its use in contemporary language as part of Queer Theories and politics.<sup>2</sup> Queer with a capital signifies lesbians, gays, bisexuals, straight Queers, transgenders, intersex and other people who challenge heterosexist ideas of sexuality and gender by virtue of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation and practice. [q]ueer, with no capital, signifies semantic meanings not connected to this historical descriptor.

Where possible, I have changed 'queer' when used by other writers within a similar ideological structure, to a capital Q. As a trans-historicising term, I also take the liberty to include under Queer those individuals who were active participants in the gay and lesbian movements, but left out as a result of the latter's limited powers of signification.

I take Queer and Queer Theories to represent a *heterognosis*, by which I mean the co-existence of different, multi-dimensional, sometimes contradictory knowledges in one space and time. Using Brian Doherty's research, I suggest Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa, Australia and more broadly function as a heterognosis.

Finally, I adopt Samantha Searle's descriptive topology for the analysis of Queer Cinematic Cultures, which include visibility; documentation; positive/negative images; mobilization; access; self-critique/self-recognition; diversification; and pleasure. I add a further two strategies I term interventions; and Queering. These points are further developed in the second half of the chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Queer Theories in the plural, instead of Queer Theory, singular, is used to signify multiple meanings that have attached themselves to Queer Theory.

## Queer's Epistemology and Etymological Origins

The term Queer is not the lovechild only of contemporary language.<sup>3</sup> To understand the present configuration of Queer and Queer Theories and their link to Queer Cinematic Cultures, it is important to first look at the epistemology and etymology of queer. The Australian author of *Queer Theory*, Annamarie Jagose acknowledges the American origins of queer in terms of same-sex sexuality and suggests that:

*...in the various subcultures which constituted the visible and complex gay world of pre-World War II New York the term 'queer' pre-dated 'gay'... 'by the 1910s and 1920s, men who identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status usually called themselves 'queer''*<sup>4</sup>

Gay on the other hand, according to George Chauncey, only became popular during the 1930s and established itself as the term for same-sex relationships during World War II. This is contradicted by Garry Wotherspoon in *City of the Plain*, who suggests gay predates queer by several centuries and was used in its same-sex context since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the epistemological truth, the reinvention and re-appropriation of the terms in

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<sup>3</sup> Although it is a term that points to precise and specific cultural formations of the late 1980s and 1990s, in the context of this thesis, Queer as a descriptor is also used to recontextualise and recategorises films retrospectively in relation to a contemporary analysis. It is useful as an inclusive concept to describe the complex identity formations of individuals and communities of the past. As an elastic term that has been popularly used to describe both identity formation and disidentification, in some instances it signifies a coalition between gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people (GLBTI) and in others a more fluid coalition between GLBTI's and HIV positive people, straight Queers and other Queer politically positioned groups. The complexity of these formations is at the heart of the examination of Queer and Queer Theories and its use as an adjective in Queer Cinematic Culture.

<sup>4</sup> Jagose, Annamarie *Queer Theory*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p 74. Jagose is in part quoting George Chauncey.

<sup>5</sup> Wotherspoon, Garry *City of the Plain: History of a Gay Sub-Culture*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, p 10. Quote by John Boswell.



different eras suggests an engagement with queer in the English language on many levels over a long period of time.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1950s, however, queer turned into a derogatory term mainly used against lesbians, gay men and others who were deemed outside sexual or gender norms. With the onset of lesbian feminism and gay liberation, words such as gay and dyke were employed to counteract the toxicity that had surrounded queer.<sup>7</sup> As late as the 1980s and early 1990s the popular demise of the term queer was noted as positive by the *Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality*, as lesbians and gay men were seen to be enjoying more social privilege than before and not subject to as much derogatory name calling.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the re-appropriation of the term in the 1980s, anxiety that Queer would still be read as 'perversion and illegitimacy' caused some to argue that its adoption was counterproductive and dangerous. The association with such a loaded term, they argued, would cause harm to relationships developed with people who would ordinarily support lesbian and gay rights.<sup>9</sup> However, the force of re-appropriation was far stronger than its derogatory history. Jagose comments on the new use of the term in contemporary times by suggesting:

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<sup>6</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, (6th edition), 1976. In the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, queer is in part ascribed the meanings strange, of questionable character, slang for homosexual, slang for drunk and out of sorts. Its etymological origin is guessed at. Perhaps, it suggests, it comes from the German *queer*, as in oblique or thwart. *Quer* in German signifies crossways, at a right angle to, or diagonally. The only connection perhaps is that queer from this root signifies going across the 'norm'. *Collins German Dictionary*, Collins Publishing, London and Glasgow, 1987

<sup>7</sup> In Australia and South Africa, further particularities evolved with terms such as poofter, moffie, manvrou and lettie to describe gay men and lesbians. Poofter and Moffie means effeminate gay men in Australia and South Africa respectively. Manvroue and Lettie means manwoman and lesbian in Afrikaans.

<sup>8</sup> Jagose, *op. cit.*, p 74

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p 106

*[t]he critical term 'queer' has proved to have a highly elastic sense of history... But it has been the most commonly mobilised, not as a retrospective and transhistoricising descriptor, but as a term that indexes precisely and specifically cultural formations of the late 1980s and 1990s.*<sup>10</sup>

### **Strands of Queer Theories**

Although the term queer's origins are diffuse and sometimes contradictory, Queer identity politics and Queer Theory, on the other hand seem to have a more tangible set of histories. The term Queer Theory was allegedly first used by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990 for the title of a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz.<sup>11</sup> In writing about her objectives she suggested:

*It was my hope that the conference would... problematise some of the discursive constructions and constructed silences in the emergent field of 'gay and lesbian studies'...such as the respective and/or common grounding of current discourses and practices of homo-sexualities in relation to gender and to race, with their attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, and socio-political location*<sup>12</sup>

This re-positioning of lesbian and gay studies and the arguments around inclusion was to have an enormous impact on many theorists and lesbian and gay cultural institutions in America and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> David Halperin, alluding heavily to De Lauretis' ideas of difference and disruption in *Saint=Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* argues for Queer to follow the same path of positionality which the word homosexual had traditionally inhabited, where

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p 75

<sup>11</sup> Halperin, David 'A Response from David Halperin to Dennis Altman', *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 2, July - August 1996, [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au) Halperin was responding to text by Dennis Altman titled 'On Global Queering'. Accessed 6 January 2005

<sup>12</sup> De Lauretis, Teresa 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies: Queer Theory, lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, Vol 3, Brown University, Summer 1991, pp iii - iv

<sup>13</sup> Bristow Joseph and Angela R Wilson, 'Introduction', *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993, pp 1, 11. They suggest that 'now that institutions have, to a limited degree, incorporated our experiences into undergraduate and graduate programmes, we recognise that our work belong to a very broad spectrum of difference.'

Queer like homosexual only gained an identity in relation to a norm or to heterosexuality.<sup>14</sup>

Rob Cover suggests that in addition to the contemporary notion of Queer and its theory coming into being at the conference, there was also another, assumedly coincidental moment of Queer mobilization in America in the late 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the academic debates, a concept of Queer as an identity politics was formed from the emergence of a lesbian and gay organization called Queer Nation. Queer Nation was established in New York as an offshoot of a group called AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP).<sup>16</sup> Cover elaborates:

*[Teresa] De Lauretis states as early as 1989 that there was in fact very little in common between the advents of both Queer Theory and queer organisation (presuming co-incidental parallels in the use of queer), though Queer Theory and queer identity /community/politics have frequently been conceived as related 'wings' of the same social movement.*<sup>17</sup>

Halperin also reflects on the existence of two divergent notions of Queer - one a radical Queer initiated by ACT UP and the other, in his words, a 'less' Queer organisation run by Queer Nation. ACT UP is credited for being truly Queer because it links many other groups such as people suffering from AIDS, sex-

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<sup>14</sup> Halperin, David *Saint=Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1995, p 62. Halperin suggests 'queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It [also] is an identity without and essence. "queer" then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who feels marginalised because of his or her sexual practices.'

<sup>15</sup> Cover, Rob Pamphlet at the 1998 Queer Collaborations Conference in Hobart, Tasmania titled *Queer Theory, Identity and Activism*, p 1

<sup>16</sup> Miller, Neil *Out of the Past; Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to Present*, Vintage Press, New York, 1995, pp 457, 460. ACT UP was formed in New York in March 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Cover, *op. cit.*, p 1. De Lauretis' actual point about the coincidental origins of the use of 'queer' is endnote 2 to the article de Lauretis, 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies: Queer Theory, lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, Vol 3, Brown University, Summer 1991

workers, drug users and straight Queers, whereas Queer Nation is seen as mostly young gays and lesbians without truly radical ideologies.<sup>18</sup>

Annamarie Jagose suggests Queer and Queer Theory in their contemporary forms, are not only the result of lesbian feminist and gay liberation struggles of the 1980s and 1990s, but also a product of the intellectual rethinking of identity, subject and language of these decades. The influence of post-structuralism, HIV/AIDS discourses and theories of performativity and identity are some of the most significant contributions to Queer cultural formation in addition to Lesbian and Gay Theory.<sup>19</sup> The intersectionality of, amongst others, race, sexuality, diasporas and gender through Queer it was argued, would expose how various social experiences transect with one another, with no one aspect privileged.<sup>20</sup> The utilization of Queer in so many contexts, has seen a great proliferation of academic texts and publications and general engagement with the topic.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Halperin, *op. cit.*, p 62

<sup>19</sup> Post-structuralist thinkers, she argues, allowed the developers of Queer Theory to imagine discourse where resistance rather than liberation became one of the keywords, as did inclusion and difference. The concept of a lesbian and gay identity as solid and pre-determined became questionable and brought to the fore the realisation that the existence of other genders, sexual orientations, races, classes and associations complicated the white, middle class concepts taken for granted up until then. Queer eventually also became a term used by HIV/AIDS activists because it was broad enough to embrace many of the issues facing PWAs (people with AIDS) and instrumental in the mobilisation of political interventions and activism. Theories on the performativity of gender and identity brought about the notions of identity as an ongoing negotiation that is not stuck in an essentialist mode of being. Developed by Judith Butler, this was another application of post-structuralism and Queer in the humanities. The dislodging of sex from gender as well as from sexual orientation was a key contribution of performative theory.

<sup>20</sup>Harper, P H, McClintock, A, Esteban Munoz, J and Rosen T 'Queer Transexions of Race, Nation and Gender: An Introduction', *Social Text*, 52/53, Vol 15, Nos 3 and 4, Fall/Winter, 1997, p 1

<sup>21</sup> Dozens of books dealing with issues of sexuality and gender were and still are being published with Queer in the title. Some of these include Warner, Michael *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1993; Searle, Samantha *Queer-ing the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*, The Moving Image, No 5, Australian Teachers of Media, St Kilda, 1997; Gevertz, Martha, Greyson, John and Parmar, Pratibha *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, Routledge, London, 1993; Burston, Paul *What Are You Looking At?: Queer Sex, Style and Cinema*, New York and London, Cassell, 1995; and some cross disciplinary scientific texts such as Le Vay, Simon *Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Layli Phillips, coming from an African-American studies angle, sees the evolution of Queer Theories in relation to 'queer multiple normativities'.<sup>22</sup> In her analysis of metaphors of home and the yearning for structure expressed among many of the queer-of-colour artists whose work she examined, she noticed the markers of a different strand of Queer praxis. She comments:

*All disdain for binarism aside, I see two queer discourses: a prominent discourse of disintegration, deconstruction and dismantling, and a latent discourse of integration, reconstruction and transcendental holism... The first discourse answers to the strictures that are created when social structures enforce selected normativities and limit individual self-expression and choice. It is an intra-cultural queering... The second discourse answers to the anomie and existential homelessness that results when one's desired set of normativities is vanquished or displaced by some other set. It is an inter-cultural queering if you will.*<sup>23</sup>

This division between identity disruptive and identity cohesive trajectories heralds, for Phillips, the difference between writings by white Queer theorists and Queers-of-colour theorists. Through all the rhetoric of being a system engaged with racial and ethnic difference, she suggests Queer Theory as it stands is a predominantly white practice. It is white, not only because most of the practitioners are white and relatively privileged, but because its anti-normal trajectories do not take into account what is 'normal' for people of colour.

Involuntary fractation of community, self and cultures; homelessness; and anomie (conditions of hopelessness) are 'normal' in many communities of colour. White dominant, academic Queer Theory does not register the very different ways of-colour people's positionalities are constructed.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Phillips, Layli 'Race-ing Queer Theory: Beyond Sexual Subversion', Conference paper delivered at *Performing Unnatural Acts: Critically Queering Racial Cultural Studies*, University of California, Berkeley, 5th November, 1999, p 4

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p 13

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p 12. 'Such metaphors [home, community, and family] reflect an experience, personal or historical, in which homelessness...is normal and home is anti-normal. Related to this idea is that involuntary fractation – of selves, communities, and cultures – is normal, while voluntary wholeness – intra – or interpersonal – intra-or intercultural – is anti-normal; anomie – bred of marginality and interstitiality – is normal, community is anti-normal.'

It is ironic that dominant Queer Theories, engaged in a process of disidentification and incorporation of difference, could through this very act be counteracting the process whereby Queer communities-of-colour theorise their own identities and establish their own communities. The disidentificatory process may be essential for white Queers to examine their blind spots, but may be counterproductive for Queer people-of-colour in the throws of very different socio-political realities.

Queer identity politics, seen in this light, has its own set of Queer Theories, not engaged by a monolithic, dominant 'Queer Theory'. Phillips does not deny the validity of dominant Queer Theory, but suggests:

*At present, these two discourses do not share equal time within Queer Theory, and it's probably a by-product of academic discourse generally and its typical participants that the latter discourse remains submerged. Active strategies of inclusion, as well as continued acts of visibility, are probably necessary if the balance of voices and perspectives informing Queer Theory is to be altered.*<sup>25</sup>

Darren Hutchinson, an African American gay lawyer, although not directly utilizing the term Queer Theory, elaborates on the particular differences in experience between white and of-colour Queer people alluded to by Phillips.<sup>26</sup> Hutchinson argues for the development of a scholarship within Lesbian and Gay studies, Critical Race Theory and Anti-Racist discourses, that engages with the idea of 'class and race-privilege' within Queer communities and includes homophobic racism within sexualised racism debates.<sup>27</sup> Queer activists, he suggests, must engage with issues of race.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p 13

<sup>26</sup> Although his case studies come from the perspectives of the law, his analysis of the intersectionalities of race, gender and sexual orientation, which leads him to postulate a theory of multidimensionality is, I argue, at the heart of Queer Theories. The concept of multidimensionality, in this thesis, is part of Queer Theories.

<sup>27</sup> Hutchinson, Darren Lennard 'Ignoring the Sexualisation of Race: Heteronormativity, Critical Race Theory and Anti-Racist Politics', *Buffalo Law Review*, Vol 47, Winter 1999, p 10

Hutchinson argues it is essential that both the Queer communities and the anti-racist lobbyists embrace each others' agendas if both forms of oppression are to be fully addressed.<sup>28</sup> To Hutchinson these relationships are not intersectional<sup>29</sup> as most of the sexualised racist debates involving women of colour have been articulated, but are what he terms *multi-dimensional*. Multi-dimensionality theorises different forms of oppression, not as similar yet distinct, but as connected, indistinguishable and inseparable from each other.<sup>30</sup>

Multi-dimensionality 'posits that individual acts of discrimination and the various institutions of oppression are complex and multi-layered, owing their existence to a host of interlocking sources of advantage and disadvantage.'<sup>31</sup> An example Hutchinson uses to illustrate the idea of this multi-dimensional oppression is the case of an Asian-American man named Loc Minh Truong.<sup>32</sup>

Loc Minh Truong was beaten up by two young men in a gay area in Laguna Beach, California in 1993. Truong's beating was based not only on homophobia but also racial stereotyping to which Asian-American men are subject. Not only was he attacked because he was seen to be gay in a gay area, he was also perceived to be gay simply because he was an Asian male. Although the (mainly white) lesbian and gay rights lobbies saw the attack as a one-dimensional homophobic incidence, and the (mostly heterosexual) Asian American community saw it simply as a race crime, the multi-dimensional reality of his attack was ignored. Loc Minh Truong's attack was

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p 97

<sup>29</sup> Hutchinson's theories of multi-dimensionality stem from theories of intersectionality, but differ from them because he explores the social meanings of sexual identities in addition to issues of race, class and gender. The emergence of intersectionality came at a time, Hutchinson argues, when women of color and specific issues concerning them were almost absent from legal theory, thereby creating a 'false implication that only women of colour experience multi-layered subordination.'

<sup>30</sup> Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p 14

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p 10

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 22-27, 31, 81

a form of sexualised racism and one of the clearest examples of multi-dimensional Queer oppression.

It is important therefore to realise that Queer and non-Queer people can experience forms of oppression that are multi-dimensional and inseparable from each other. This multi-dimensionality, I suggest, is a key concept that can be employed by Queer Theories and Queer Cinematic Cultures in their self-confessed mode of embracing sexuality and race, gender ethnicity, class and other intra-cultural differences.

### **Queer Theories' Local Inflections and Impact on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia**

In both South Africa and Australia, Euro-American films and ideologies have dominated the cultural landscape. Jack Lewis, the Co-Director of the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa comments that 'We all are American essentially'.<sup>33</sup> Deb Verhoeven, similarly writing about Australian Queer film observes that 'the disappointing truth of the situation is that Australian gay men and lesbians are more likely to experience or "recognise" their visual history in the accents and inflections of Hollywood or European Cinema.'<sup>34</sup> The way in which American Queer Theories and their ideologies have been taken up and translated in South Africa and Australia, however, vary.

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<sup>33</sup> Lewis, Jack Interview, Muizenberg, 2 February 1999

<sup>34</sup> Verhoeven, Deb 'The sexual terrain of the Australian feature film: Putting the Out:back into the Ocker', *The Bent Lens: A world guide to gay and lesbian film*, Australian Catalogue Company, Melbourne, 1997, p27



### *South African Queer Theories*

In South Africa, limited writings on Queer, Queer Theory and Queer Cinematic Cultures exist, but much more is written about lesbian and gay identities. Essays contained in Mark Gevisser's *Defiant Desire* (1994), Matthew Krouse's *Invisible Ghetto* (1993) and Gordon Isaac's and Brian McKendrick's *Male Homosexuality in South Africa: Identity formation, Culture and Crisis* (1992) revolve around issues of lesbian and gay sexualities with the inclusion of bisexual, transgender and intersex identities. This does not mean their subject matter is any less Queer in the sense that American and Australian writers imagine Queer, but their identification, particularly in the 1990s, was around concepts such as lesbian and gay.<sup>35</sup>

Mariane de Jong's article in *Die Afrikaan*, reviewing the first lesbian and gay colloquium held in Capetown in 1995, a year after the first ever *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, articulates this general gay and lesbian ideology and its fractures, by postulating on some of the issues involved in the reception of foreign languages into local cultures from words and concepts that are not translatable. She argues:

*Daar is geen geskikte vertaaling vir queer in Afrikaans nie. Die homoseksuele volksmond bied interessante perspektiewe op die probleem van 'n naam. Manlike gays gebruik deesdae weer graag die term 'moffie'. Megan Pillay... bekend vir haar TV optredes, sê reguit dat sy haarself deesdae sommer 'n 'moffie' noem - en Pillay is beslis nie "butch" nie. Die naamspelletjies druk 'n interresante, onlangse verskynsel onder queers uit - die terugeis van daardie terme waarmee die hetero maatskapy met neerhaling na gay mense verwys het. Hiermee daag die 'gemarginaliseerdes' die heteroseksistiese res uit<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> In fact the deployment of same-sex sexualities and transgender practices in the African and Coloured communities are much Queerer in the sense that de Lauretis and Halperin imagine identities, than that subscribed to people in Australia. However, the writing about them mostly refer to lesbian and gay identities.

<sup>36</sup> de Jong, Marianne 'Queer Teorie in Suid Afrika?', *Die Suid Afrikaan*, No 55, December 1995/January 1996, p 14

*There is no appropriate translation for the term queer in Afrikaans. The homosexual community voice offers interesting perspectives on the problem of a name. Male gays these days again call themselves 'moffies' while Megan Pillay, known for her television roles, announced that these days she also calls herself a 'moffie' - and she is definitely not 'butch'. This name play reveals an interesting and recent phenomena amongst queers - the reclamation of those terms which hetero-society have used derogatively against gays. With this, marginalised groups challenge the heterosexists rest.*

Her understanding of the problems of translation reveals the complex nature of sexual difference in South Africa. In South Africa the idea of Queer and Queer Theories is contested by different notions of sexual identities for different population groups within the country, highlighted by terms, amongst others, such as *moffie* and *isitabane* (Afrikaans and Sesotho for hermaphrodite - used to signify a variety of homosexual and gender identities)<sup>37</sup> and in Zulu *skesanas*, *ijongas*, *imbubes* and *pantsulas* (penetrated men, penetrators, both active and passive men and 'heterosexual' queer men),<sup>38</sup> *manvroue* and *letties* (manwomen/butch and lesbians in Afrikaans) and *skeef* (skew in Afrikaans) - concepts that do not necessarily fit into categories of gay and lesbian or Queer.

The term Queer, however, as articulated by de Jong - *oftewell lesbians en gay* - is translated directly as lesbian and gay.<sup>39</sup> De Jong sees Queer Theory as having a double meaning - it is both academic and political. She argues: '*Queer teorie het so 'n dubbele betekenis: dis nie net 'n persoonlike coming out nie, maar dis die openbare inneem van 'n plek binne bestaande sosiale praktyke. Vasu Reddy en andere*

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<sup>37</sup> de Waal, Shaun "Etymological note: On 'Moffie'" in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994. de Waal suggests *moffie* is a slang word that can be translated as male homosexual, transvestite and effeminate man. Its origin most probably comes from the Dutch word *mofrodiet*, which translates as hermaphrodite. The first recording of the word 'mophy' meaning delicate, well-groomed youngster, was recorded in by the lexicographer Eric Partridge in his book *Sea Slang* in 1929.

<sup>38</sup> Maclean, Hugh and Ngcobo, Linda 'Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi (Those who fuck me say I'm tasty): Gay sexuality in Reef townships' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, pp 161, 165 Linda Ngcobo called young male wives *skesanas* and the husbands *ijongas*.

<sup>39</sup> de Jong, *op. cit.*, p13

stel duidelik dat queer teorie *akademies en politiek* is.<sup>40</sup> [Queer Theory has a double meaning. It's not just a personal coming out, but also about taking a public space within already established social practices. Vasu Reddy and others have clearly stated that queer theory is both **academic and political**.]

De Jong's understanding of the term is similar to academics such as Cover, Halperin, Searle and Phillips, as it reflects the multiplicity of definitions and praxis of Queer and Queer Theory, even though the understandings of these multiplicities vary from theorist to theorist.<sup>41</sup> She also questions the very survival of Queer Theory in Africa, because of the different understanding of same-sex sexuality and identity.

Jack Lewis is more interested in the disruption of lesbian and gay identities and the usefulness of Queer Theory as an ideology that can be used to examine culturally specific differences. He believes, however, that like all theology, Queer Theory is contextual and when removed from its cultural context as part of the Western canon, will change. But he is also aware of the power of international concepts and suggests that to the extent that 'we are all American' Queer Theory will hold. Lewis suggests:

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p14

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* In de Jong's case, there is understanding that academic does not always equate to political and this defines the dual trajectories of Queer *Teorie* for her. De Jong sees pragmatic problems with transcribing Queer theory onto an African context. 'Twee probleem areas vir *queer* teorie en politiek in Suid Afrika het duidelik geblyk. Eerstens is daar die sterk homofobie by die meer "ontwikkelde" middelklas swart persoon... 'n Tweede teoretiese en praktiese probleem vir *queer* teorie in Suid Afrika en Afrika, is die feit dat die begrippe "gay" en "lesbies", inderdaad die hele konsep van "homoseksualiteit", in Afrika onbekend is (behalwe, soos gesien by die verstedelike en verwesterde middel klas)... Kan *queer* teorie in Afrika nog *queer* teorie bly?' Translation: 'Two problem areas for Queer Theory and politics became immediately obvious. First, there is strong homophobia in the "developed" middle class black person... A second theoretical and practical problem for Queer theory in South Africa and Africa, is the fact that the understanding of "gay" and "lesbian", indeed the whole concept of "homosexuality", is unknown in Africa (apart from that seen in people from the city, or those who are westernised)... Can queer theory in Africa stay queer theory?'

*Our [South African] experience of poverty, our experience of ethnicity, our experience of race prejudice, our experience of class barriers, our experience of glass ceilings for women etc. are different to those that you will find in a classical north American or European context. So to the extent that this... peculiar blend of Calvinism within an African context, within the context of African independent churches, moving from there to African traditional religion, to the extent that people have different concepts of family, which is a product both of traditional ideology and of the way that traditional ideology has been changed by the colonial migrant labour system, to that extent, Queer theory will have to be adapted or added to or have other complimentary notions, brought into play, to encompass the reality that people are experiencing here.*<sup>42</sup>

Lewis does not believe Queer Theory can be used as is, unproblematically, but that it can be a starting point to examine some very complex issues in terms of social formations and understanding of same-sex relationships and practices in South Africa, using amongst other media, film.<sup>43</sup> He suggests that an understanding of Queer Theory will need to evolve from this milieu. Some of the delineations in terms of race and consequently sexuality may have been enforced by *Apartheid*, but some existed before institutionalised separation.<sup>44</sup>

De Jong also reflects on the relationships between and representation of different racial groups in regard to sexuality by quoting Zachie Achmat:

*Achmat weerspieël... sensitiviteit as hy die taak van queer teorie in Suid Afrika soos volg stel: 'inventing gay and lesbian histories and inventing a movement for equality; the representation and imagining of a queer movement where African, coloured, Indian and white women and men can interrogate inherited identity'... Blanke gays moet help om swart chauvinisme aan te kla, maar hulle moet ook die rassisme in eie geledere aan die kaak stel.*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Lewis, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, Jack and Murphy, Nodi 'Introduction', *Embracing Diversity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Outstanding South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, 1995

<sup>44</sup>Carrim, Yunus *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 6 June 1997, [archive.mg.co.za](http://archive.mg.co.za) Accessed 2 November 2000

<sup>45</sup>de Jong, *op. cit.*, p 14

*Achmat shows sensitivity when he posits the task for queer theory in South Africa as follows: "inventing gay and lesbian histories and inventing a movement for equality; the representation and imagining of a queer movement where African, coloured, Indian and white women and men can interrogate inherited identity... White gays must help to stop black chauvinism, but they must also address the racism in their own ranks.*

Even though the *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* maintained its title securely in the gay and lesbian camp, its contents over the years have certainly reflected the ideologies espoused by Achmat, Lewis and de Jong and pushed Queer South African Film boundaries and identities.

### *Australian Queer Theories*

In a local Australian context, Annamarie Jagose sees the term Queer developing from a series of ideological evolutions, marriages and contestations between American and Australian liberation discourses. Lesbian Feminism, Gay Liberation and CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution) in Sydney are intimately imprinted into Australian Queer texts. Terminologies such as *poof*, *leso* and *lemon* have also been employed in particular Australian ways.<sup>46</sup> Dennis Altman suggests that the Australian concept of multi-culturalism has created the notion of Australian Queer as a 'tribal', quasi-ethnic identity.<sup>47</sup> In the popular press, however, it is also often used in the same manner as de Jong

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<sup>46</sup> Simes, Gary 'The language of homosexuality in Australia' in Aldrich, Robert and Wotherspoon, Garry (eds.), *Gay Perspectives: Essays on Australian Gay Culture*, University of Sydney, 1992, pp 41, 48. 'Of the common nineteenth-century British terms for effeminate homosexuals, there is actual Australian evidence only in the case of *poof*. This lower-class term (sometimes implying prostitution) is first recorded in London in the 1830s... In Australia it first occurs in Stephens and O'Brien's slang dictionary, along with the most significant of the early Australian coinages in the homosexual field, *poof*... Australia has not been nearly as prolific when it comes to words for lesbians. As elsewhere, the word lesbian itself has been shortened and deformed in every imaginable way: les.. lesbo.. leslie.. The US bulldike and dike are occasionally heard... [and] in recent years the derogatory term lemon has been heard in Sydney among the young.'

<sup>47</sup> Altman, Dennis '(Homo)sexual Identities, Queer Theory and Politics' in Stokes, Geoffrey (ed.), *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p 110

- as a synonym for lesbian and gay,<sup>48</sup> or sometimes LGBTI (*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex*).<sup>49</sup>

Queer theorists working in Australia such as David Halperin, Annamarie Jagose, Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan are engaged in a variety of trajectories around Queer. Some such as Halperin and Jagose, focus predominantly on identity disruptive projects—what Layli Phillips would see as dominant Queer Theory. Jackson and Sullivan engage with ‘differing conceptualizations of contemporary queer social and cultural life in Australia (e.g. “gay/lesbian community” vs. “multiple queer subcultures”).’<sup>50</sup>

One of the few academic voices in Australia who argues predominantly for the deployment and maintenance of gay and lesbian political identity is Dennis Altman, famous for his international and Australian manifestos on homosexuality.<sup>51</sup> Altman argues:

*Recently the emergence of 'Queer Theory' has been presented as a challenge to the existing concepts of 'lesbian' and 'gay' identities and the term has unleashed considerable passion, above all in the politically charged confines of inner Sydney... As an aesthetic term 'queer' is very useful; one might characterise films such as Orlando or The Crying Game as 'queer'. As a political term, however it is less so.*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jagose, *op. cit.*, p 97

<sup>49</sup> In recent times in Australia, the term GLBTI has been employed to include Transgender, Intersex and Bisexual people with Gay and Lesbian. "The Stonewall Debates - Gay and lesbian identity politics in 'Queer Street'", *Sydney Star Observer*, June 25, 1993, p 5. In South Africa the inclusion of Bisexual and Transgender in addition to lesbian and gay has also occurred and by 1998, Zachie Achmat would refer to 'Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and our heterosexual counterparts, when discussing the Constitutional Courts ruling that anti-gay laws were unconstitutional. Achmat, Zackie 'Constitutional Court rules gay sex laws unconstitutional', *Exit*, Issue 105, November 1998, p 1

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, Peter and Sullivan, Gerard *Multi-cultural Queer: Australian Narratives*, Harrington Park Press, New York, 1999, p 2

<sup>51</sup> Altman, Dennis *Homosexual oppression and liberation*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1972 and Altman, Dennis *Coming Out in the Seventies: Sexuality, Politics and Culture*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1980

<sup>52</sup> Altman, '(Homo)sexual Identities, Queer Theory and Politics', *op. cit.*, p 110

Altman sees the development of Queer Theory in Australia as a distinct disadvantages in terms of political mobilization and suggests most homosexuals would not feel any particular community with sex-workers, transsexuals or straight fetishists. He concludes that the idea of large numbers of people outside the heterosexual mainstream would come together under the Queer umbrella seemed unlikely.

### *Queer Cinematic Cultures in Australia and South Africa*

In tandem with the popular uptake of Queer theories in Australia, however, previously gay and lesbian identified organisations and community groups began to use Queer in their official name, including a name change in the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* to *The First Sydney International Queer and Video Festival*, run by a new organisation called Queer Screen in 1993. In Melbourne the *Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* also changed into the *Melbourne Queer Film and Video Festival* in 1991.



Figure 2

Queer Screen's first director, Denise Robinson, in the introduction to the festival program wrote that Queer Screen was established 'to affect a change in film culture in Australia through the development and promotion of a dynamic Queer Cinematic Culture.' Robinson also suggested that:

*The queerness of Queer Screen is not the proposal of a new identity: the term 'queer' in this context means any non-normative sexuality including lesbian, gay, transsexual, bi-sexual and transgender. It also includes queers of colour.*<sup>53</sup>

Even though Robinson denies that a new identity tag is created, a contradiction is created by naming and therefore creating demarcations for the different groups. The queerness of Queer Screen here, is a contradictory, incommensurable space, where identity tags fight it out for representational inclusion in a space of 'non-identity'.

Searle articulates this contradiction by suggesting Queer in relation to Cinematic Culture in Australia as a concept that is based both in identity formation and identity critique existing coherently next to each other. For her, the identity-critical project is where diversity and the specific needs of marginalized groups in relation to Queer representation are revealed. In the context of Queer film, she suggests:

*Analysing 'queer screen culture' on the one hand, means to link a number of diverse groups as 'queer', and to focus on the similar political objectives in relation to representation, and access to means of production, systems of distribution, and various institutions that constitute a screen culture. On the other hand, where queer is seen as identity critical, the dissimilar aims of various groups need to be teased out and explored in a context specific way that allows us to move beyond simplistic dismissals of pre-'queer' ideas about identity and community, and the different models of political effectivity that these ideas engender.*<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>International Queer Screen Film and Video Festival Program, 1993

<sup>54</sup>Searle, Samantha, *Queer-ing the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*, The Moving Image, No 5, Australian Teachers of Media, St Kilda, 1997, p 9. Searle suggests: 'what I hope to argue here is that any discussion of cultural politics and sexuality needs to see political effectivity as strategic and variable, bound by geographical and economic factors'.



However, when analysed from Layli Phillips' viewpoint, Searle's identity-critical aspect reflects that of predominantly white Queer communities. Whereas dominant white Queer Cinematic Cultures need to critique their assumed cohesion, by becoming identity-critical to come to terms with difference; the communities-of-colour, according to Phillips at least, engage in more of an identity formation project, because of their history of fracturing and anomie.

The difference between identity disruption and identity formation in this sense also reflects the state of South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures. Whereas in Australia Queer is more popular, in South Africa at present the term gay and lesbian is used more frequently. This difference is not necessarily based on the racial make-up of the two countries, but on the presence of an historically more visible Queer community in Australia needing to complicate its gay and lesbian identities, and a relatively recent, non-racial, visible Queer community in South Africa, which is still in the process of identity formation. Ironically, the actual makeup in the communities of South Africa are often Queerer than that of Australia.



Figure 3

## Towards a Heterognosis

*Attending the forum 'The Politics of Queer: the way ahead or a new conservatism', I found that there is still a lot of confusion about what a queer politics is... We think it will touch identity, methods of political action, alliances, or even our relationship to mainstream society, all in ways that one camp depicts positively and the other negatively. It would appear that there is more than one queer here!*<sup>55</sup>

Queer has been used extensively by many people dealing with sexual, cultural, cinematic and representational issues, not all from the same perspective or with the same understanding of what Queer and Queer Theories mean; neither in Cinematic Culture nor in a broader cultural sphere.<sup>56</sup> To highlight that these theories and uses of Queer are different and to further allude to the different power structures within the various strands of Queer Theory, I suggest the use of the term *heterognosis*.<sup>57</sup>

I became aware of the term heterognosis, which signifies the co-existence of different knowledges in one space and time, through the work of Brian Doherty and his research on the *Ubu* film scene in Sydney.<sup>58</sup> Taking his lead from Foucault's concepts of heterotopias - *spaces* that have multiple meanings that can contest each other - Doherty argued that the *Ubu* film scene could be

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<sup>55</sup>Glass, Jennifer 'Queer: What is in it for bisexuals', *Sydney Star Observer*, Friday 9 July 1993

<sup>56</sup>Bristow and Wilson, *op. cit.*, p 9. Bristow and Wilson also suggest that: 'The contradictory impulses of queer politics – to assert difference within a structure of identifiable sameness – creates a tension which is perhaps its greatest challenge, if not complication. ... [And] the resignification of a once perjorative term can be seen to have problematically emerged from a privileged white point of empowerment... When the debate about queer politics appeared in the British journal, *Gay Times*, it was noticeable that all the contributors were white men. With this point in mind, one has surely to consider the visibility of queer politics with not a little caution.'

<sup>57</sup>Doherty, Brian *The Ubu Film Scene and the Emergence of Underground Film in Australia 1956-1970: Discourse, Practice, Heterognosis*, Masters of Arts Long Essay, Department of Fine Arts, Powerhouse Research Library, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1996

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p 60

characterised as a heterognosis, where various knowledges are brought together to be contested and transformed.<sup>59</sup>He states:

*The [Ubu film] scene is characterised by a range of transformations between orders of knowledge (legitimate/illegitimate, public/private, norm/deviant) made possible by their mixing rather than within an order of knowledge defined by exclusions... The new statements and practices that emerge from such unruly sites are a danger [to the established order] because they contest the rules of exclusion that define established orders of knowledge rather than working within them...I will designate this type of knowledge site a heterognosis by which I mean to extend Michel Foucault's concepts of heterotopias and heterochronies to the domain of knowledges... Foucault uses the example of the cinema as a site that juxtaposes in a single real place several incompatible spaces... [h]owever... this also means that there is the possibility of bringing together incompatible knowledges<sup>60</sup>*

I argue that the space of knowledge that the various concepts of Queer, Queer Theories and their link to Queer Cinematic Culture occupy, however contradictory or incompatible, can be characterised as a heterognosis. In this thesis a heterognosis signifies the synthesis of the various Queers and their theories, from academic Queer to dominant Queer, to identity disruptive or identity constructive Queer and the various Queers attached to Cinematic Cultures and Cinematic communities.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Foucault, Michel 'Of Other Spaces', *Architecture-Movement-Continuity*, October, 1984. (Lecture from March 1967) printed in *Diacritics*, Spring 1986, pp 23, 25. Foucault suggests the idea of heterotopias in relation to that of utopias. Heterotopias were spaces that had a real physical location but alluded to multiple spacial and metaphorical meanings. Utopias represented imaginary states of ideal perfection. 'Utopias are sites with no real place...fundamentally unreal spaces. There are also...real places, places that do exist... which are sometimes like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites...are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted... I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.' Heterotopias were envisioned by Foucault to follow several principles. One of these principles, the third, states '[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible...thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three dimensional space'

<sup>60</sup>Doherty, *op. cit.*, pp 60, 62. The bringing together of incompatible knowledges is a risk that is acknowledged and controlled, Doherty argues, through censorship.

<sup>61</sup>The dissymmetry and unequal power relations for the different Queer theories and representations must be acknowledged as an inherent problem, but the recognition that the concept *heterognosis* is in fact a combination of conflicting sets of knowledges in itself, I hope, point to the dissymmetry more so than the term Queer on its own.

Within a heterognotic space then, Queer and its use as an adjective to the various Cinematic Cultures and film communities, and sometimes as an active verb, can signify multiple positions that are context specific and interchangeable.<sup>62</sup> As Queer is an elastic, multi-dimensional term that has been popularly used to describe both identity formation and disidentification, the concept of a heterognosis allows for the existence in one space and time of different, mutually exclusive, opposing and sometimes incommensurable ideologies and representations around Queer, Queer Theories and Queer Cinematic Cultures. It is within a heterognosis that the terms Queer, Queer Theories and Queer Cinematic Culture are employed in this thesis.

### **Queer Strategies for Cinematic Cultures**

To judge the effectiveness of the cinematic strategies of Queer communities in regard to liberation and self-representation, Samantha Searle suggests they must first be evaluated within the framework of their Queer political objectives. In particular in relation to representation and access to means of production, systems of distribution, and various institutions that constitute a screen culture.<sup>63</sup>

There are several political, historical and social objectives in relation to representation for which Queer Theories and people in Queer grassroots politics have argued. Most have wanted to create an outcome where there would be more visibility, less discrimination, more human rights, more diverse and balanced representations and autonomous, self-organisation for and by Queer people.<sup>64</sup> As Searle suggests, strategies that have evolved and been

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<sup>62</sup> Queer is employed as a verb when the concept of Queering is employed (see later in this chapter)

<sup>63</sup> Searle, *op. cit.*, p 7

<sup>64</sup> The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras which supports Queer Screen and the film festival, has the following Vision: 'Formed out of the struggler for lesbian and gay rights, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a community organisation which works to: increase visibility, develop community pride, achieve equality for lesbians and gay men by producing the best events of lesbian and gay cultural expression and celebration. Commitment: We are committed to human rights and social justice, lesbian and gay coalitionism, reconciliation with indigenous Australians, excellence in innovation, accessibility and accountability,

theorised over the years in Queer Cinematic Cultures in relation to political effectivity include:

1. Visibility - The move by Queer people to ensure acknowledgement of their lives on film, historically absent due to censorship and social discrimination;
2. Documentation - The recording of Queer people's lives to show that Queer people are present in society;
3. Positive/Negative Images - An analysis of the impact of Queer representation, both in its 'negative' and 'positive' forms;
4. Mobilisation - A study of the impact of organised Queer Film Cultures on the formation of identities and politics;
5. Access - Access to exhibition of Queer films which would otherwise never be shown in the mainstream or alternative film festivals;
6. Self-critique/Self recognition - A critical space created by Queer Cinematic Cultures where communities and individuals can be exposed to texts that challenge and critique current Queer cultural practices and offer images in which the audiences can recognise themselves and their lives;
7. Diversification - Strategies developed by Queer Cinematic Cultures to assist in the representation of internal differences within the Queer communities; and
8. Pleasure - The screening of texts for pleasure and renewal to assist Queer people to cope with the various levels of oppression and discrimination they face in their everyday lives.

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enabling individuals and groups in the lesbian and gay communities to discover, express and develop their artistic, cultural, political skills and potential, passionately and unashamedly affirming the pride, joy and dignity of gays and lesbians and their diverse communities, strengthening the lives and rights of gay and lesbian people nationally and internationally', *2000GETHER Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival Guide*, 2000

I would like to add a further two strategies that I believe have been developed from Queer Cinematic Cultural practices in relation to political efficacy. I term them:

9. Interventions - The countering of homophobic images by screening them in Queer-friendly environments and offering critiques to diffuse their impact; and
10. Queering - Theories on reading and viewing positions that suggests Queer content has always been in mass media texts and Queer audiences have never 'read things into' these texts, but simply read them Queerly and hence, differently to the mainstream.

In the analysis of the strategies that follow, I focus primarily on Queer cinemas of the 'North' and the international aspects of their Euro-American origins. I also allude briefly, however, to the hybrid South African and Australian developments of the 'South'. This allows the specific historical and localized development of South Africa and Australia, elaborated on in later chapters, to be positioned in global terms, as they both have played important roles in the evolution of international Queer Cinematic Cultures.

### **1. Visibility/Coming Out**

*What in fact was the... dream that motivated many of the revolutionaries? It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder.*<sup>65</sup>

Michel Foucault

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<sup>65</sup>Foucault, Michel 'The Eye of Power' in Gordon, Colin (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews 1972-1977*, Harvester Press, 1980, p 152. The quote is from an interview/conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot in which Foucault is elaborating on Bentham's Panopticon in relation to Rousseau and the French Revolution.



Figure 4

The strategy of visibility, adopted by various gay, feminist and lesbian liberation ideologies using the ideals of the Enlightenment, appeared very early on in the lesbian and gay movement. It was theorised from the beginning of the coming together of 'homosexuals' from the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century onward that social exclusion, persecution and the misunderstanding around Queer lives was a product partly of general invisibility which generated ignorance and cyclically enforced further invisibility.<sup>66</sup> Rosa von Braunschweig in 1903 would lament:

*How different it would be if parents became enlightened about the nature of homosexuality and learned to recognise that it is imparted by nature... If parents would learn to recognise their children's sexual tendency from behaviour which is contrary to their own sex and if they could then mildly and justly judge this tendency, much misery could be prevented in this world.<sup>67</sup>*

Visibility, in conjunction with education was seen as essential for social change. One of the earliest Queer films, *Anders Als Die Andern* (1919) from Germany, was termed an *Aufklärungsfilm* (enlightenment film) and included the gay

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<sup>66</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, p 13. Miller suggests that the concept of a 'homosexual' as an identity was articulated around 1869, when the first use of the term appeared, coined by Karl Maria Kertbeny, a German-Hungarian who was an advocate for the abolition of Prussian laws against same-sex sex between men.

<sup>67</sup> von Braunschweig, Rosa 'Felicita von Vestvali: Yearbook of Intermediate Sexual Types, Vol 1, 1903' in Faderman, Lillian and Erickson, Brigitte (eds.), *Lesbians in Germany 1890s-1920s*, Naiad Press, US, 1990, p 74

sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld playing the role of a sympathetic doctor to a homosexual man. It was produced in line with the belief that awareness, education and visibility around same-sex sexuality would not only make Queer people aware of their own tenuous legal positions, but enlighten the broader community, allowing them unprejudiced views and a clearer understanding of the issues at stake.<sup>68</sup> This form of visibility is part of what has become known in more recent times as 'coming out'. Richard Dyer comments:

*Coming out was the one strategy unique to lesbian and gay politics. No other group is quite so literally socially invisible. Being lesbian and gay does not show - unlike gender, colour or disability, it is not physiologically apparent; unlike class or ethnicity, it is not something the visible markers of which you have to un-learn if you wish to disguise it... [Coming out]... make[s] visible something that is not merely invisible but also deemed worthy of extermination. It is dangerous, moving, dramatic, the stuff of a good picture.*<sup>69</sup>

Historically, coming out was no small feat for same-sex attracted people. In times of oppressive anti-Queer laws and social attitudes, those who were out risked enormous repercussions.<sup>70</sup> The backlash from German Queer visibility, for example, was extraordinary and during the twelve years of Nazi rule from the 1930s to the 1940s, nearly 50 000 men were convicted of homosexuality, of which the majority ended up in German concentration camps; many did not survive. Women in Nazi Germany were not classified as lesbian or straight, but any woman who was considered a social pariah, politically or otherwise, was also sent to the concentration camps and made to wear a black triangle.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Dyer, *op. cit.*, p 10

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p 249

<sup>70</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, p xix. 'Those who were open about their sexuality [in the US and Western Europe] risked the loss of job and family, social ruin, physical harassment, and sometimes arrest. In most cases, religion, medicine, and the law stigmatized homosexuality, causing historical figures and ordinary people to hide their sexuality and their relationships.'

<sup>71</sup>Fernbach, David 'Introduction' in Heger, Heinz *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, Gay Modern Classic, Worcester, 1986, p 14



Despite the enormous potential costs of visibility, the process of 'coming out' continued to play an important role in Queer politics and Queer Cinematic Cultures. This visibility translates to Queer Cinematic Culture, according to Searle, as both the presence of Queer characters on the screen and the presence of Queer people at film festivals.

In South Africa the emergence in the 1980s and 1990s of Queer organisations and their gradual visibility within the broader community had a powerful effect on the struggle for Queer liberation. Matthew Krouse suggests in 1993 in *Invisible Ghetto*:

*The major advance has been the emergence over the past decade of organised groups of lesbians and gays in South African life, a process which has made this longstanding invisible community more apparent. These groups have encouraged cultural exploration through the production of newsletters, plays and literary readings, and by organising small film festivals and so forth. In this new climate a hitherto forbidden area of our lives is being opened out.*<sup>72</sup>

In South Africa as in Australia, however, there are complex layers of Queer invisibility. First for Queer people in general, secondly for Queer women and transgender people and finally, a triple or quadruple invisibility for Queer people of-colour. Multiple levels of discrimination affect the visibility of different groups differently. Kim Berman in relation to South African lesbians suggests:

*The lack of identifiably lesbian iconography has brought about a precarious set of circumstances causing lesbians to be marginalised within the broader definition of marginalised sexuality... [In addition] Apartheid and the privileges of whites in South Africa has given disproportionate exposure to the presence of the white gay and lesbian community.*<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Krouse, Matthew, 'Introduction', *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay writing from South Africa*, Gay Men's Press, Johannesburg, 1993, p xi

<sup>73</sup>Berman, Kim 'Lesbians in South Africa: Challenging the Invisibility' in Krouse, Matthew (ed.), *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay writing from South Africa*, Gay Men's Press, Johannesburg, 1993, p xvii

Elizabeth Ashburn, in the Australian context, also argues that invisibility has played a major role in the oppression of lesbians and that further racial and social differences in discrimination must be acknowledged. She suggests that:

*The invisibility of lesbians has made it possible for society to construct a world without lesbians... paralleled by the 'world without homos' produced in feature films' ... The work of Australian contemporary lesbian artists are, consequently, not well known and until recently they were virtually absent from the history of Australian art.<sup>74</sup>*

In relation to race and economic differences in the South African context, Nomfundo Lumphondwana suggests: 'The burdens of centuries of colonialism and decades of Apartheid, combined with out-of-sync lesbians and token blacks, has resulted in an ineffective, irrelevant and useless lesbian movement in South Africa.'<sup>75</sup> Mark Gevisser also states: 'while the possibilities [in the 90s] of cross-racial communication are greater, black people remain marginal to the formal white sub-culture and insofar as there is now a township gay subculture, this exists parallel to - rather than integrated with - urban gay life.'<sup>76</sup>

The process of coming out and being visible, whether as an individual or as a participant in a PRIDE parade or a documentary film, differs depending on your specific racial, class and ethnic background. Lumphondwana clarifies these differences:

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<sup>74</sup>Ashburn, Elizabeth 'Fighting Invisibility', *Lesbian Art: An Encounter with Power*, Craftman House, Sydney, 1996, pp13 - 15

<sup>75</sup> Lumphondwana, Nomfundo 'Race Relations in the Lesbian Movement', *Agenda: Empowering Women for gender equity*, No 29, 1996, p 72

<sup>76</sup> Gevisser, Mark 'A different fight for freedom' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 82

*[Take] a sensitive issue like coming out. White lesbians are usually worried about their nuclear family. For black lesbians (specifically Africans), the matter is much more complex: they have to worry about the response to the nuclear family, extended family and the community at large. In an African culture you are a child not only of your mother and father, but of your relatives and your community. In this context, many African lesbians cannot afford to put their individual needs over those of the broader community of which they are an integral part.* <sup>77</sup>

Australian Aboriginal Queer people experience similar problems in relation to family structures, economic independence, communal responsibilities and visibility. Koori artists Mathew Cook and Rea suggest the issues of coming out for Aboriginal people are more complex when their communities are divided over homosexuality. Some believe it's a colonial import, others are supportive of Queer Kooris. However, as Cook says: 'You have to realise that what is going to affect you is going to affect your family'.<sup>78</sup> This is also the case with many migrant and ethnic communities that have strong family structures. <sup>79</sup>

Geography and its relationship to racial, class and ethnic distributions, also affects the visibility of Queer people and the screening of Queer films. Historical separation of different racial groups in South Africa and different screening facilities in the townships compared to the cities, resulted in a greater Queer visibility in the city and white suburbs, where there were more cinemas. Similarly in Sydney, there is a dominance of inner city Queer cinematic visibility, while its western suburbs, containing some of the most multi-cultural council areas in Australia, until recently were fairly bereft of Queer Cinematic Cultures.

Visibility then, is not something that is equally distributed across different Queer communities. Because of the general dominance of European and American Queer films, and the various difficulties in coming out and being

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<sup>77</sup> Lumphondwana, *op. cit.*, p 75

<sup>78</sup> Short, Shane 'Koori Art: lookin' good', *Sydney Star Observer*, 11 February 1994, p 18

<sup>79</sup> Chalmers, Sharon *Edges: Lesbian and Gay Lives in Western Sydney*, Liverpool Regional Museum, Liverpool, 2001

visible for various sub-groups within Queer communities, images of white gay men, followed by white lesbians still dominate in Queer film festivals.<sup>80</sup> In recent years, however, internal cultural differences have become a more visible, if smaller strand, within the broader Queer Cinematic Cultures.<sup>81</sup>

## 2. Documentation

*What people 'see' is not necessarily what actually exists- this is what the theorists of ideology mean when they write that people live an imaginary relationship to their actual conditions of existence. What is shown on films, television and photographs aren't unquestioningly real.*<sup>82</sup>

Keyan Tomaselli

Representation through documentation is not reality. Representation is a conversation about reality and people's experiences of it. In other words, as cultural critic Keyan Tomaselli suggests, what you see is not necessarily what is. Representation is a dialogue or propaganda that is ideologically driven, skewed and censored by its very nature. Tomaselli defines representation in terms of documentaries, as a series of 'inter-related conceived / production / produced

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<sup>80</sup> Helen Grace in a humorous comment on the perceived lack of lesbian films in general, in the 1995 Queer Screen film festival guide suggested: 'I have a serious proposal for the studios. In view of the decline in quality of Hollywood cinema and its increasing costs, why not stop making those stupid action films (I am still in favour of intelligent action films) which cost heaps and make nothing. Instead turn the production towards making lesbian films. You could get at least a hundred lesbian movies for each Sylvester Stallone movie, which would also give you the product for a new lesbian cable channel... You would create unlimited opportunities for struggling young actresses who would all find that they liked it and would no longer need to waste their talents on unattractive producers and the casting couch.' Grace, Helen *POPCORN Mardi Gras Film Festival Guide*, 1995, p 11

<sup>81</sup> Knapper, Karl Bruce 'The Color of Sex', 23rd *Frameline Film Festival* Program Essay, 1999, [www.frameline.org](http://www.frameline.org) Karl Bruce Knapper argues for the emergence of more diverse visibility of issues such as race and sexuality, and for them not to 'rehash tried and true territory, like what it means to be a lesbian and/or gay person of color in a hostile white world, the many ways in which queer people of colour struggle with racism and homophobia [etc].. [I]t would be interesting to see the discourse around race and sexuality taken to levels that don't simply reinforce the concept of whiteness as the primary bane of people of colors existence.' Knapper suggests visibility around inter-racial relationships between non-white Queers, economic and class effects on these relationships, racial fetishism and the impossibility of politically correcting sexual desire should be investigated.

<sup>82</sup>Tomaselli, Keyan *Appropriating Images: The Semiotics of Visual Representation*, Intervention Press, Denmark, 1996, p 47

/ received texts', which portray particular messages, coded within a discourse of realism.<sup>83</sup>

However, to have some imaginary relationship to your histories and present situation, is to have some power over your destiny and the way you imagine your future. By having a sense of where you have come from, a sense of your cultural milieu and a knowledge of what oppressions face you, you can at least formulate strategies to counter these obstacles. Many early gay liberation and lesbian feminist 'affirmation' films, developed by and from these movements, were documentaries, which were seen as the best vehicles for this type of consciousness-raising. As Dyer suggests:

*Documentary offered itself as the form par excellence for affirmation film, partly because it is cheaper and easier to do tolerably than fiction, partly because of its historical relationship with progressive movements... and especially for its supposed special relationship to reality.*<sup>84</sup>

This need to show 'reality' is not surprising, as many images and stories presented to and about Queer people were often distorted and damaging.<sup>85</sup> As Juan and Dawie Nel, in a paper on Queer Pretoria suggests:

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<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, p 46. Tomaselli, through the language of semiotics, suggests for documentaries, which I argue holds true for many non-documentaries as well: 'A documentary... is a system of semantic rules in terms of content ('actuality'), the semiotic rules of structuring and paradigmatic selection. What is not said - the structural absences or concealed text- is part of the message as the absence of alternative- or oppositional paradigms. In other words, structured absences (as indices) are as much part of the plane of content as what is present in the plane of signification (the denotive)... The ideological grid suggests certain interpretations, patterns of behaviour related to specific ways of seeing and making sense. They discursively enframe the encoding of the films and other phenomena and noumena, which are socially, and often academically, constructed'

<sup>84</sup> Dyer, *op. cit.*, p 238

<sup>85</sup> Russo, Vito 'Frightening the Horses: Out of the closets and into the shadows', *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Harper and Row, New York, 1987, p 126

*Self description by gays as well as descriptions by society focus on stories of being unworthy - failing to measure up. In this manner gays are often recruited into negative stories about themselves<sup>86</sup>*

Where Queer people experience alienation and often loneliness as a result of persecution, simply to have images of Queer people in the face of general invisibility, instead of actors, is a radical move in itself.<sup>87</sup> A review of the South African documentary *Ordinary People* in which Queer people featured, lauded the fact that 'these were, as the title implied, ordinary, real people going about their lives and the camera went along as a ... sensitive observer.'<sup>88</sup> An acknowledgement of the everyday presence of multi-racial Queer lives usually excluded from mainstream television and Cinema in South Africa opened the door to more 'positive' self images.

Dyer suggests that lesbian and gay documentary makers at the beginning of the gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements, although believing they were simply filming reality, were actually developing unique forms of representation from and for the movement. Unlike earlier documentaries, such as those of the pioneers Grierson and Vertov, who brought in 'expert' opinions or used Marxist ideology to interpret reality; or *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema whose makers saw themselves as detached from their subjects, lesbian and gay documentary makers refused to bring in 'experts' and were actually from the groups they were filming.<sup>89</sup>

'Experts' on gay and lesbian life in the past were often the very psychiatrists and judiciary who labeled homosexuality an illness and locked people up. In

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<sup>86</sup> Nel, Juan and Nel, Dawie 'This is History: "Out" in Pretoria', presented at the first Southern African Colloquium on Gay and Lesbian Studies, Capetown, 19-21 October 1995, p 3

<sup>87</sup> Thus simply recording the civil rights marches such as the Mardi Gras Parade in Sydney and the Pride Parade in Johannesburg, were liberatory actions. In South Africa, Zachie Achmat's *Gay Life is Best* (1992) and in Australia *Pride and Snide* (1973), Digby Duncan's *Witches, Faggots, Poofers and Dykes* (1979) and Fiona Cunningham Reid's *Feed them to the Cannibals* (1992) were in this genre—the genre of creating a record of an event which in itself acts as a continued form of visibility.

<sup>88</sup> Bruno, Guy 'Ordinary People: Extraordinary Film', *Outright*, Vol 1, Issue 11, October 1994, p 10

<sup>89</sup> Dyer, *op. cit.*, p 236


addition, by being from the communities they were filming, these documentary film makers challenged the object/subject dichotomy of previous documentary filmmaking. As part of their deliberate political and consciousness raising aims, most of these documentaries used a 'talking head' strategy for conveying ideas, whether through interview or direct interaction with the camera.



# WORD IS OUT

*stories of some of our lives*

## The best film yet on gay liberation S.F. EXAMINER



### UNANIMOUS.....

"The movie of this year might just be Word Is Out." — *Ms Magazine*.

"... moments ... that touch so poignantly that gooseflesh forms on my skin and fresh tears come to my eyes in embarrassing profusion ... a sense of completion, a heady sense of pride in my tribe so intelligently portrayed, and the firm conviction that *Word Is Out* should be on everyone's required viewing list — straight and gay alike. — *The Advocate*.

"A film long overdue whose time has come ... One of the year's ten best films!!! — *Editor of B.A.R.*

"speaks ... in a tender, personal voice explaining that guilt is not an inherent quality of being gay, that health and happiness are just as available and valid to their experience as any other." — *Berkeley Barb*.

"It was an amazing human experience: a theatre chock-a-block full of gay and non-gay women and men hooting, laughing, cheering and crying. It was a communal wave of human emotion: anger, joy, compassion and sorrow. More than anything, it was a mass sensation of pride. Pride at being human, pride at being gay, pride at being human and gay" — *Campaign*.

**By Stanley Eberthaus**

"Word Is Out" has to do with gay liberation, and I don't think a better, more intelligent film has been made on a homosexual subject.

The upcoming documentary is entitled "Stories of Some of Our Lives," and consists of interviews with 28 gay men and women. Half are from the Bay Area, and the rest are from other parts of the country from New Mexico to New York.

The heavy local representation only means that the film was made by a San Francisco group headed by Peter Adair. He was joined by his sister, Nancy Adair, and Adair drew Brown, Robert Epstein, Lucy Mame Phelan and Vanessa Selver.

They undertook the project five years ago, when gay liberation was still in its infancy, and started by videotaping 200 interviews. From these, they chose 28 people for scenes shot in 16-mm color, and edited up with 30 hours of film, which they edited down to 2 hours and 15 minutes.

The Mariposa Film Group, as it's called, is now ready with "Word Is Out," which premieres Thursday, 7:30 p.m., at the Castro in a benefit co-sponsored by the Coalition for Human Rights and Save Our Human Rights. A regular run begins Friday at the Gateway Cinema.

Producer Adair, who is 35, began the film with "change people's attitude about a lot of things."

And indeed, it's full of revelations, and a liberty to open eyes, as well as minds, to the issue of gay rights.

What is most remarkable about the work is the relaxed, natural, forthright manner of the interview subjects. They're out of the closet, to be sure, but the film makers draw them out with unexpected aggressiveness and probity. They're asked to delve into matters that only the Kinsey Institute surveyed before now, and a good many of the questions open old wounds, and are painful to answer, even for a liberated gay.

Ela Gilman, a 77-year-old poet from Marin County, begins with touching dignity that she doesn't understand why she's asked how long she's been a lesbian. "I've always been this way," she says.

Then a certain sadness spreads over her face as she remarks, "If there was a problem connected with my being a lesbian, even after I became aware of it, it was the loneliness — the fact that I didn't know anybody like me."

Several women tell of the same problem, although there's quite a range of age and sexual background. A middle-aged professor at S.F. State talks of the long years when she could not be herself and played at being straight. And a young Chinese designer has some of isolation before she met a lover and ending with her in a house without plumbing near Albuquerque.

For some, being gay could be terribly traumatic. A woman who recalls how her parents sent her to a mental hospital for four years in her teens.

The film makers' intention was to give women a wide variety of experience. Among the men are a black poet from Brooklyn, a New York corporate executive and a San Francisco street queen. And there's a Buddhist monk who came out as an up-front gay because "I feel a responsibility to other word people to be a representative, intelligent word person."

The interviews are presented as skillfully intercut segments, and there's a poignant music by a male group called Burma Vaya and folk singer Trish Nguyen.

## SPECIAL LATE SHOWS

BOYS IN THE BAND (R) Fri 7 July and Sat 8 July 11.00 p.m.

A VERY NATURAL THING (R) Fri 14 July and Sat 15 July 11.00 p.m.

STRICTLY LIMITED SEASON JULY 6 TO 16

# MAYFAIR THEATRE

CASTLEREAGH ST

Figure 5

Documentaries such as *The Word is Out* (1978) from the Mariposa Film Collective, was typical of this new style. Camera movement and all visuals were subordinate to the lesbian and gay voice, with no voiceovers and a broad representation of intra-communal diversity, with people from different racial, ethnic and class backgrounds interviewed.<sup>90</sup> In addition, even though questions asked were quite pointed at times, the discomfort of some of the subjects about their position as interviewees was maintained in the film, which allowed dissidence within the filmic structure. This was a unique form of representation, evolving Dyer argues, specifically from the needs of lesbians and gay men.

Texts such as *The Word is Out* were instrumental in both Australia and South Africa in generating community awareness and in Australia's case civil actions (see Chapter 2 and 3). In South Africa, documentaries such as Melanie Chait's *Out in Africa* (1989), Zachie Achmat's *Gay Life is Best* (1992) and Achmat and Lewis' *Apostles of Civilised Vice* (1999), to name but a few, illustrate the role local documentaries play as part of the liberation movement.

Documentaries in Australia such as Barbara Creed's *Homosexuality: A Film for Discussion* (1975), Digby Duncan and the One in Seven Collective's *Witches, Faggots, Poofers and Dykes* (1979) and Fiona Cunningham Reid's *Feed them to the Cannibals* (1992) are examples of Australian Queer documentary film making impacting on Queer cultural formation and development. Consciousness raising and facilitating awareness of diversity within the broader Queer communities, has and continue to be an important role of documentaries.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p 236. One of the rare exceptions in terms of voiceover is the Australian Documentary of 1979, *Witches, Faggots, Poofers and Dykes*, made by the One in Seven Collective and directed by Digby Duncan.



### 3. *Positive/Negative Images*

*From the start Gay liberation identified film, in the shape of the movies, as part of the armory of oppression. On the one hand, they denied our existence... On the other hand, on the rare occasion when we were presented, it was demeaning and derisive... Films were needed which would counteract this, make us visible in forms we could feel good about.*<sup>91</sup>

Richard Dyer

The debate about first, representation and secondly, types of representation has caused much controversy in the Queer Cinematic Cultural milieu. One of the reasons why the production of 'positive' images was so important to liberation theorists in the early days of the struggles for representation, was the history of 'negative' images that followed the long period of invisibility. Russo argues that straight after the lifting of the Hays Code, a self regulatory set of censorship rules adhered to by the American film industry from 1930 to the late 1960s, there appeared a whole series of films, which for the first time had openly homosexual characters. They were, however, portrayed in a very negative light.

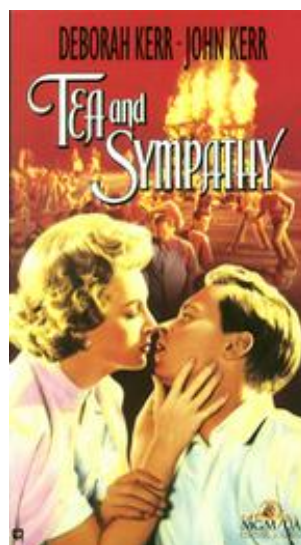


Figure 5

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p 236

Films such as *Tea and Sympathy*, (Vincente Minnelli, 1956), *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961) and *Victim* (Basil Dearden, 1961) amongst others, portrayed homosexuality as a phase, homosexuals as losers and homosexual acts as immoral.<sup>92</sup> It seemed that what 'liberalisation' allowed in representation after decades of invisibility, was films that re-enforced negative beliefs and stereotypes of Queer people.

Documentaries and films emerging a bit later, such as *The Word is Out*, were part of a new 'positive' affirmation politics, which attempted to counter this new, negative visibility. According to Dyer, 'positive' images from this perspective meant three, not always compatible, things: thereness, goodness and realness.<sup>93</sup> Thereness insisted on the fact that Queers existed, goodness asserted their worth and that of their lifestyles and realness showed what they were like. Realness, Dyer argues, conflicts with thereness and goodness so that broad representations are not always facilitated. Internalised homophobia, self-hatred and oppression, to name a few, were seldom addressed.

The focus on a particular 'truth' in documentaries that emerged from affirmation politics and consciousness-raising was also one of their downfalls. Dyer comments: 'At their worst they both sprawl and say the same thing over and over again. This same thing is the affirmation that gay is good. Conflict, contradiction and difficulty are erased.'<sup>94</sup>

The argument for 'positive' and 'negative' characters has continued into the '00s and still is part of Queer Cinematic Cultural debate. Greg Shears, the producer of a popular ABC television series *GP*, commented on the need for 'positive' images and his decision to include gay characters in this popular Australian television show in 1990:

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<sup>92</sup> Russo, *op. cit.*, p 126

<sup>93</sup> Dyer, *op. cit.*, p 274

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p 246

*We haven't been presented with many positive gay role models on television. We're continually given images of victims, we're continually given images of perhaps individual gay men who are the loneliest person in the world and who doesn't have another gay companion and doesn't have a lover or live in a society where there are other gay people. And I think it's an appalling misrepresentation of the world we live in... So I guess I tried to redress an appalling imbalance and appalling misrepresentation and try to educate on a gut level... I'm not interested in negative gay characters. At all.<sup>95</sup>*

Although Dyer argues that realness and goodness are not always compatible and would perhaps see Gailbraith's reluctance to engage with negative characters as one-dimensional, I suggests that negative characters can only really work if there already is a history of 'positive' images against which they can be contrasted. It is the imbalance in representation that creates such damage from the 'negative' images portrayed by the mainstream. Although some of the 'positive' Queer films in the 1980s and 1990s were sometimes unrealistic in their representation, 'making them wholesome enough to win the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval', some of them clearly crossed over into a mainstream that would not previously have been exposed to much same-sex relations.<sup>96</sup> They counteracted some of the incredibly damaging stereotypes of the past, but more importantly, created a history and diversity of representation that could then be challenged by Queer film makers themselves.

Some of the feature films emerging as part of this new, Queer wave of films representing 'positive' images of Queer people, include such movies as Arthur Hiller's *Making Love* (1982), Robert Towne's *Personal Best* (1982) and *Long Time Companion* (Norman Rene, 1990). In Australia films such as *The Sum of Us* (Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling, 1994) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Elliot, Stephen, 1994) could be considered in this vein and in South Africa short films such as *Clubbing* (1994, de Barros) *Signs*, (1995, de Barros) and

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<sup>95</sup> Galbraith, Larry 'Greg Shears: Presenting positive gay images', *Sydney Star Observer*, 1 June 1990, p 17

<sup>96</sup> Russo, *op. cit.*, pp 272-273. For the film *Making Love* (Arthur Hiller, 1982) Russo says the box office opened very strong all across the United States. After the first week, however, it became known as a dull film. The subject matter was, surprisingly, not an issue.

*Gay Life is Best* (Achmat, 1991) could be seen, to some extent as inserting themselves into a mainstream as 'positive'.

In reaction to some of the 'positive' films that appeared, not just from documentaries, but features and shorts, there emerged Queer filmmakers who began once more to populate their films with 'negative' Queer characters. Some of the earlier films directed by Queer people that portray the 'negative' as well as the 'positive' include Tod Haynes' *Poison* (1991) Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1991), Greg Araki's *The Living End* ((1992), Rose Troche's *Go Fish* (1993), Michael Winterbottom's *Butterfly Kiss* (1995), Yvonne Rainer's *MURDER and Murder* (1996) and Lisa Cholodenko's *High Art* (1998).

In South Africa Matthew Krouse's *The Soldier* (1988), Luiz de Barros' *Hot Legs* (1995) and Jack Lewis and John Greyson's *Proteus* (2003) are films that deal with complex, 'negative' issues around desire, revenge and sexuality. In Australia Franco Di Chiera's *Bad News Bachelors* (1990) and Emma Kate Croghan's *Love and Other Catastrophes* (1996) are a two texts that deal with issues of obsession, sexual frustration and alienation.

Taking into account the historical context of Queer Cinema, 'positive' images have played an important role in developing self-esteem and self-worth for Queer people, particularly where Queer images had either been absent or solely 'negative'. However, once a range of Queer images are developed, some films which previously would have been considered 'negative', can actually be viewed as 'positive'. These Queer films offers a fuller range of what is means to be human – both good and bad.

#### 4. Mobilisation

The cinema as a social institution has been seen by many activists and liberation theorists since the beginning of the gay and lesbian liberation movements as a significant place of mobilization and social formation that could not be ignored if broader social goals of fostering self-representation were to be affected. As Martha Gever suggests in relation to films, 'our identities are constituted as much in the event as in the images we watch.'<sup>97</sup>

Queer Cinematic Culture is one of the most powerful, recent international interventions in the structures of dominant cinema, challenging the heterosexist, trans/genderphobic and Queerphobic ideologies underpinning many filmic representations. This emergence can be traced back to the early days of the art, underground and lesbian/women's film cultures nurtured by Queer filmmakers such as Jean Genet, Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren, Andy Warhol and Barbara Hammer.<sup>98</sup>

Although their impact would have been felt more in Europe and the United State at the time, the development of cult followings, of underground screenings and the use of film to educate and mobilize liberation movements such as the women's movement, broadened the role of cinematic cultures and their attendant functions, sowing the seeds for future, creative cultural mobilisations in Queer Cinematic Cultures.

In this spirit, Searle suggests that Queer Cinematic Cultures are not just limited to the screening of films.<sup>99</sup> Queer Cinematic Cultures are also used as sites to mobilise and engage people in fighting for freedom and reform through forums, anti-propaganda showings, interventions, debates and discussions.

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<sup>97</sup> Gever, Martha quoted by White, Patricia 'Introduction: On Exhibitionism', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 5 No 1, Duke University Press, Durham, 1999, p 74

<sup>98</sup> Dyer, *op. cit.* See chapters on 'Shades of Genet', 'Underground and After' and 'Lesbian/woman: lesbian cultural feminist film'.

<sup>99</sup> Searle, *op. cit.*, p 10

In South Africa, for example, the first *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* was used as a forum where the South African police outlined their new policies of protection for the Queer communities as well as creating an atmosphere conducive to the establishment of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition.<sup>100</sup>

In Australia the screening of *The Word is Out* was also one of the catalysts for the first Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in 1978. The audiences' response to the film was to mobilize and take collective action to end their oppression.<sup>101</sup>

These very particular manifestations of Queer mobilisations in South Africa and Australia in relation to cinema are unique. What is clear in both places is that Queer film and Queer Cinematic Cultures played a significant role in the construction and mobilization of Queer culture in general.

### 5. Access

Access means several things in relation to Queer Cinematic Cultures. It means having access to the viewing and screening of films that would not be viewed or screened unless Queer-friendly institutions and audiences supported them. It means access to filmmakers, their ideas and knowledges around Queer filmmaking through seminars and lectures. It also means access for filmmakers to funding, equipment, editing and post-production facilities. All this, in the end, revolves around having access to and control of self-representation.

Access to Queer texts sounds simple enough, but in societies where there is no support for the existence of Queer texts and often active policies to destroy them, Queer Cinematic Cultures are frequently fractured or forced underground. One of the strategies that evolved from the 1970s in terms of creating access to Queer films that would never have ordinarily been seen, was the development of Queer film festivals.

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<sup>100</sup>Murphy, Nodi Interview, *Out in Africa* Film Festival Office, Capetown, 12 January 1999

<sup>101</sup>Harris, Gavin *It's a Riot: Sydney's First Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Australian Telegraph Publications, Sydney, 1998

The development of these Queer film festivals meant room was created for the exhibition and support of more and more Queer film. Although the emergence of gay and lesbian/Queer film festivals such as Queer Screen in Sydney and the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa, is partly attributable to the strategies for representation developed from within these countries by Queer groups, much of the content, diversity and support was possible because of the connections generated globally between international Queer Film Festival circuits that had evolved since the 1970s.

The 200 or so Queer festivals around the world to date that have been growing in size and momentum since that decade, have opened up exhibition spaces for many Queer themed films. Ruby Rich suggests that between 80-90% of all the films shown in the Queer film festivals globally are never seen anywhere else. She writes that 'these figures suggest a world outside the mainstream, with its own communities, markets and customs.'<sup>102</sup>

In addition to screening films from all over the world, many Queer film festivals invite Queer filmmakers to talk about their own work, either before or after the screening of their films, or at specially organized forums or discussion panels. The first *Out in Africa Lesbian and Gay Films Festival* had a panel discussion titled 'Defiant Desire before and after Stone Wall' which included filmmaker Greta Schiller.<sup>103</sup> Queer Screen also has had numerous panels over the years including one on the notions of public space after Melissa Lee's *Mary's Place* (1997) in 1998.<sup>104</sup> These sessions are programmed as part of the Queer film festivals and give access not only to the films, but also to the filmmakers and their particular thoughts and ideas around the film.

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<sup>102</sup> Rich, B Ruby 'Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and their Publics', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 5 No 1, Duke University Press, Durham, 1999, p 82

<sup>103</sup> *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Program, 1994

<sup>104</sup> *A Queer Body of Film*, Mardi Gras Film Festival Program, 1998, p 36

The development and screening of local film products have also been important to Queer Cinematic Cultures in terms of accessing their own cultures. Both South African and Australian Film Festivals are proud to advertise the screening of local films – whether they are features, shorts or videos. In addition, opportunities in terms of funding pre-, post-production and screening opportunities have also been developed where possible. Special screenings and sessions, such as the showing of local videos and shorts, supports and nurtures local Queer Cinematic Cultures.

Ironically, the success of the Queer film festivals, in developing a space and an audience for their screening and growth, has resulted in an appropriation of their audiences and product by a broader film industry. Films which would usually only have been screened in Queer film festivals, have more recently received general release by major distributors. Eric Clark comments:

*As anyone who has been involved in projects like film festivals knows, the increasing commercial competition for queer themed films threatens the survival of nonprofit, media oriented, counter public institutions. While this competition seems to signal gains in the fight for the inclusion of queers in the public sphere, it also threatens to homogenize queer representations.<sup>105</sup>*

The very success of the Queer film festivals, evolving to offer spaces, audiences and facilities for screening and producing Queer films, now threatens to take control of the representations of Queer people. If completely commercial organisations were to take over from community organised Queer film festivals, there could be a possibility that less commercially viable screenings of intra-communal diversity in films and video would not be screened.

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<sup>105</sup> Clarke, Eric O 'Queer Publicity and the Limits of Inclusion', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 5 No 1, Duke University Press, Durham, 1999, p 84



## 6. Self-critique/Self Recognition

*Besides giving public expression to thousands of works (and as exhibition venues, causing work to be produced, as mushrooming annual submissions bear out) and - one hopes - garnering publicity for gay and lesbian media, film and video makers, and organisations, the festival constitute a counter public sphere, providing a collective experience and a literal site of critical reception.<sup>106</sup>*

Patricia White

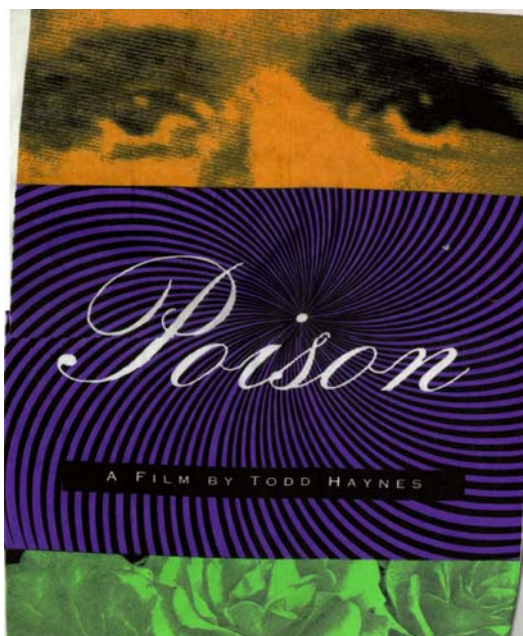


Figure 6

The emergence of numerous Queer film festivals since the 1970s, created much needed space for new Queer counter public spheres and audiences, who could now recognize themselves and aspects of their lives on film. Due in part to this continued support, there emerged a particular moment for Queer Cinematic Culture in the early 1990s, which placed Queer cinema firmly on the world stage and offered important new possibilities for self-critique and self-recognition.

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<sup>106</sup>White, Patricia 'Introduction: On Exhibitionism', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 5 No 1, Duke University Press, Durham, 1999, p 74

This moment arrived at a conference in Britain from 18 - 20 September 1992, titled *New Queer Cinema*, where the idea of a 'self-styled' Cinema in line with the emerging Queer politics of the 90s was proposed. Film critic and author B. Ruby Rich, introducing the ideas and the concept behind 'New Queer Cinema', wrote of the emerging phenomena:

*1992 has become a watershed year for independent gay and lesbian film and video... The prestigious New Directors/New Films Festival... premiered four new 'queer' films... Robert Redford held a press conference and [was] asked, on camera, why there are all these gay films at his festival. Redford finesse[d]: it is all part of the spectrum of independent film that Sundance is meant to serve. He even allow[ed] that awards last year to *Poison* (1991) and Jenny Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1990) might have made the festival more welcoming to gays and lesbians. He could easily have said: these are simply the best films being made.<sup>107</sup>*

Rich acknowledged that the films did not share an 'aesthetic vocabulary', but that they did share a common style she labeled 'Homo Pomo' - an abbreviation for homosexual and post-modernism and heralded a new wave of Queer films that had maturity and could be seen as the forefront not only of the Queer social avant guard, but also of cinema as a whole.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Rich, B Ruby 'B Ruby Rich introduces the arguments for a new queer cinema, together with the directors and films', *Sight and Sound*, Vol 2, Issue 5, London, 1992, p 31. The Films were Christopher Münch's *The Hours of Time*, (1991), Tom Kalins' *Swoon* (1992), Greg Araki's *The Living End* (1992) and Laurie Lynd's *R.S.V.P* (1991).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p 32. Form and content were both radical and new. They could talk to Queer audiences about complex and challenging Queer social and cultural concerns, offer self critique and a deliver a more sophisticated recognition of self and community through a unique and innovative aesthetic. Commenting on the new emerging filmic 'style' that was shared by these films, Rich suggested: '[T] here are traces in all of them of appropriation and pastiche, irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind. Definitely breaking with older humanist approaches and the films and tapes that accompanied identity politics, these works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they are full of pleasure. They're here, they're queer, get hip to them.'

The onslaught of HIV/AIDS and the urgent need to mobilise strategies to combat prejudice and homophobia, also affected the trajectory of these new films. No longer anchored in the needs of only 'positive' images and happy-ever-after tales so desperately needed as counter images in the 1970s and 1980s, 'New Queer Cinema' created a richer tapestry dealing with a wider range of human experiences and characters.

The differences between lesbian and gay male filmmaking also became apparent under the 'New Queer Cinema' phenomena. Rich suggested that *Dyke Cinema* had been at the forefront of renegotiating a historiography with film and Queer Culture, but that these films were hard to find in exhibitions because they were on video format and not the glossy films of the gay men that were being picked up by the distributors. She commented:

*A new kind of lesbian video surfaced ... and with it emerged a contemporary lesbian sensibility. Like the gay male films now in the limelight, this video has everything to do with a new historiography. But where the boys were archaeologists, the girls had to be alchemists. Their style is unlike almost anything that's come before. I would call it lesbian camp, but the species is after all, better known for camping. And historical revisionism is not a catchy term. So just borrow a term from Hollywood and think of it as the Great Dyke Rewrite.<sup>109</sup>*

What this 'New Queer Cinema' did was open up a space for the development of more complex representations of Queer lives for self-critique and self-recognition. Through the mainstream acceptance and cutting edge styles, bringing awareness of Queer issues to a much broader audience, non-Queer audiences were also introduced to Queer issues through these films.

In Australia films that emerged from this new space of acceptance included *The Sum of Us* and *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* and in South Africa, the idea of 'new queer cinema' was discussed in a special panel session titled *Queer Cinema, Queer Sex* as part of the first *Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film*

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<sup>109</sup>Rich, 'B Ruby Rich introduces the arguments for a new queer cinema, together with the directors and films', *op. cit.*, pp 32-33

*Festival* in 1994. Present were international Queer filmmakers such as Barbara Hammer, Isaac Julien and Greta Schiller.

This new self-critique and self-recognition, however, was only possible for some in the Queer audiences. What became obvious from a later vantage point in relation to the 'New Queer Cinema', was that it was a very white affair. Queer Theories and their ideologies of internal difference was not initially translated in the representations known as 'New Queer Cinema'.<sup>110</sup>

### ***7. Diversification***

Diversity in Queer Cinematic Cultures includes diverse representation, in terms of issues such as gender, race, class and ethnicity, but also includes issues such as diverse styles and subject matter.

International Queer feature films that emerged post 1992 such as *The Wedding Banquet*, (Ang Lee, 1993) and *The Delta* (Ira Sachs, 1997) began exploring issues of race and ethnic difference within 'New Queer Cinema'. *The Wedding Banquet* was about a Taiwanese gay man and his pending Chinese wedding and *The Delta* examined sex-for-hire issues in relation to a white man from Memphis and a mixed-race Vietnamese hustler. These films, however, were more the exception than the rule.

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<sup>110</sup> Munoz, Jose Esteban 'Dead white: notes on the whiteness of the new queer cinema', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 4 No 1, Duke University Press, Durham 1998, p. 127-38



Figure 6

Although the diversity that is at the core of Queer Theories may not have been reflected in terms of race, gender and ethnicity, at least in early 'New Queer Cinema', diversity within Queer film festivals was more obvious in the 1990s. Patricia White comments in relation to the dominance and similarity of mainstream Queer media representations and the role of Queer film festivals:

*Fortunately... lesbian and gay film and video festivals have maintained a crucial form of self-representation and have constituted a distinctive feature of Queer life. The range of work they have exhibited is so various in length, format, budget, style, politics, address, national or regional provenance, and sexual explicitness as to resist any unitary definition of queer media<sup>111</sup>*

This diversity was not the product of a seamless, organic evolution of Queer film festivals. The push for representations of difference emerged forcefully in the 1990s from a conscious, theoretical level, where the philosophical base of the festivals' began to insist on the representation of diversity. Having had their origins in liberation politics and using representation of difference as key interventions, it is not surprising that creating room for further difference would be a core philosophy of Queer film festivals globally. What is surprising is that it took until the 1990s to develop strategies for representing complex, internal differences within Queer film festivals.

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<sup>111</sup>White, *op. cit.*, p 73

The emergence of Queer Theory and the deployment of the term Queer into a re-appropriated, popular usage, had a big impact on the way that American, Australian and South African gay and lesbian/Queer film festivals created their representational philosophies. Rich's impact in naming the 'New Queer Cinema' movement in America spawned the emergence of further diversity in American Queer representations. The film festivals in Melbourne and Sydney in Australia changing their names to incorporate Queer in the early 1990s and the South African gay and lesbian film festivals having seminars on Queer Theory, film and diversity, meant that Queer representation and its ideology was a key factor by the mid-nineties.

Queer Film Festivals consequently, have been theorised as particularly important in creating room for the representation of difference within the Queer communities. Pratibha Parmar, whose film *Kush* was shown in the first *Out in Africa* Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in South Africa in 1994, was quoted in the South African *Guardian and Mail* that year as saying that the Queer Cinema Circuit was her 'lifeline'. Parmar suggested:

*Queer festivals are essential for many filmmakers, especially lesbians and people of colour, because it's often the only place we can get our work screened and affirmed.*<sup>112</sup>

Representation of diversity in terms of style and subject matter, however, created conflict within the Queer film festival circuits. Audience expectations and their reception of films dealing with issues of concern to them do not always match those of the filmmaker. The emergence of 'New Queer Cinema' challenging the previous 'positive' Queer films with films such as *Swoon* and *Butterfly Kiss* is one example of this conflict. As Rich points out:

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<sup>112</sup> Parmar, Pratibha Quoted by Gevisser, Mark in 'Coming out of the Celluloid Closet', *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, June 3-8 1994, p 33

*There have always been contradictions and battles within the lesbian and gay community.. Cinematically, such conflicts have been played out both over aesthetic categories (avant garde versus mainstream) and the nature of characters or plots.*<sup>113</sup>

Rich lamented in 1999 that there was still little room in the reactions of Queer audiences that suggested that they engaged with Queer films on a filmic level and that they too often accepted or rejected the products according to whether they were 'acceptability' representations, rather than understand the complexity of the representations. She argued:

*Audiences [Queer and straight] don't want disruption. They don't want "difference". Instead they hunger for sameness, replication, reflection. What do queers want on their night on the town? To feel good. To feel breezy and cheesy and commercial and acceptable and desirable... They just wanna have fun. And if the occasion is serious, it better be predictable: The AIDS quilt or lesbian adoption rights.*<sup>114</sup>

She suggested that for politically constituted communities such as the Queer communities to have such complacency was troubling, particularly given the historical and ideological commitment Queer Film Festivals have had to representing new types of images across class, race and gender. But as she argues: 'In that sense, as the festivals try to stay true to their aesthetic and ideological agendas and as their audiences grow ever larger, the opportunity for conflict between them multiply.'<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Rich, 'Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and Their Publics', *op. cit.*, p 82

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p 83

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

## 8. *Pleasure*

Although Rich rightly points out the dangers in complacency and not challenging predictable, stereotypical film outcomes, the concept of pleasure itself is an important aspect of Queer Cinematic Culture. Enjoying oneself and feeling good allows for often rare pleasures within a sometimes harsh, discriminatory environment. Pleasure assists in making bearable quotidian lives and helps to counteract some of the intense and often damaging Queerphobic experiences many people face on a daily basis. As Searle suggests, quoting Richard Dyer and Eric Cohen:

*The pleasure of queer screen culture needs to be understood as an aim [and] counter... to too much political thought, where pleasure is seen as "something you can guiltily have, or have after the important things, or get as a reward for doing other things... [Rather] pleasure keeps us going, recharges our batteries ... gives us a glimpse of where we are going and helps us enjoy the struggle of getting there."*<sup>116</sup>

This illuminates a key issue in relation to the reception of Queer films. Cinematic pleasure is subjective and what is pleasurable for Rich is not necessarily pleasurable for others. As White suggests, the diverse composition of the festival audiences itself creates varied perceptions of taste, and I argue, experiences of pleasure. She comments:

*As Pierre Bourdieu has shown, tastes are rooted in economics, geography, education and language... Dismissals of the vapid assimilationist values of the romantic comedies and coming-out stories that festivals are often obliged, by economic and publicity demands, to highlight, need to take into account viewer's varying cultural competences [and] their access to innovative forms.*<sup>117</sup>

In places such as South Africa and Australia, these concerns are just as evident. Searle's comments that there is a need, economically, for the Melbourne Queer Film and Video Festival (MQF&VF) to program more popular Queer films as

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<sup>116</sup> Searle, *op. cit.*, p 12

<sup>117</sup> White, *op. cit.*, pp 75-76



opposed to Sydney's Queer Screen, which is more economically independent and thus potentially more experimental, points to the difficulties in supporting a broad range of representations which suits a large range of audiences.<sup>118</sup> Nodi Murphy, co-director of the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival also comments on the difficult balance between catering for specific tastes and thus economic survival and pushing the critical edges of film viewing. She suggests:

*There's the kind of solid diet of American shit we have had here for years, what is easily available, what people are used to reading, what they enjoy reading... It's also the social circumstances of, you know, do you go to movies as a means of socialising or do you go to the bar and have a dop [drink] and have a dance and cruise? I think that is more readily accessible to black communities than films.*<sup>119</sup>

Queer audiences may need mainstream images of themselves because there is such an historical lack of images representing them in the mainstream. To ingest images of themselves, have a sense of reflection and thus a sense of community and self in the face of stereotypical, negative images in the media is very important. Therefore, to be confronted by complex, darker images may not satisfy the need to first feel 'breezy and cheesy' and then have another platform where they can deal with more complex representations. The different reception positions of diverse Queer audiences must be respected. As Rich suggests:

*Queer viewer responses are inflected by something more specific and complex than the subjective tastes governing mainstream movie choices. Queer audiences see themselves as complicit in these representations, as if they were compromised or validated by them, and the cathexis they experience surpasses other audiences' investments.*<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Searle, *op. cit.*, p 78

<sup>119</sup> Murphy, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> Rich, 'Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and Their Publics', *op. cit.*, pp 83-84

What remains important is that room is created for a diverse audience and diverse representation, so that different people can experience pleasure from within their own subjectivity and not be judged by a high art litmus test of acceptable pleasure. Pleasure and its origin in different filmic experiences, is vital for a political movement to develop, survive and thrive.

### **9. Interventions**

Queer Film Festivals themselves are often seen as interventions in the heteronormative film cultures and social structures of a society. As Denise Robinson, the first Sydney Queer Screen Festival Director in 1993 wrote in the introduction of that year's *International Queer Screen Film and Video Festival* program:

*Queer Screen aims to produce on-going productive intervention into Australian film and video culture... Queer Screen's activities include the ongoing events in the form of one-off screenings, guest presentations, and collaborations with other organizations.*<sup>121</sup>

In South Africa, the *Out in Africa* Film Festival also acted as a broader intervention into the larger social and political life of Queer people. Mark Gevisser suggest of the first Festival in 1994:

*There was a sense of absolute euphoria. It was very important as a political gesture and the fact that it was a Film Festival - I think it was one of the most potent gay and lesbian political events that I had been to in this country.*<sup>122</sup>

The simple existence of lesbian, gay or Queer film festivals is often one of the primary interventions of Queer representational objectives. Queer film festivals are central to Queer politics and representation because they create huge Queer visibility, show documentaries and films with both 'positive' and 'negative' images; mobilise the Queer community through shared experience and access;

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<sup>121</sup> Robinson, Denise *International Queer Screen Film and Video Festival Program*, 1993

<sup>122</sup> Gevisser, Mark Interview, Johannesburg, November 1998

provide forums for self-critique; encourages diversification through programming; and insure visual pleasure for those who attend.

In addition to the Queer film festivals, however, and influencing the social matrix in a more targeted manner, there are individual films, special programs and forums that act as interventions. Queer Film Festivals in South Africa and Australia have developed unique forms of filmic interventions which have challenged Queerphobic social systems and oppressive film cultures.

One of the earliest filmic interventions in South Africa, would perhaps be the screening of films by small groups of Queer associated people in the mid-80s. In 1984 GASA *Grens/Border*, a social group for homosexuals, screened for one of the first times, a video tape on AIDS.<sup>123</sup> In the same year, an organization known as 6010<sup>124</sup> had regular Thursday evening meetings, where video's such as *The Naked Civil Servant* (Jack Gold,1980), *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich ,1968) and *Cruising* (William Friedkin,1980) were shown, followed by discussions of the films.<sup>125</sup> Censorship and controversy had affected many films and interventionist tactics such as these at community showings, assured that the films could be at least seen and discussed in a supportive environment (see Chapter 2).

In 1995, the *Out in Africa* team also put together a Film Festival to highlight the growing AIDS pandemic in South Africa titled the *Positive Visions AIDS Film Week*. *Positive Visions* was a festival designed to intervene in and complicate the negative representations and stereotypes around victims of HIV/ AIDS. Run in conjunction with the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on People Living with HIV/ AIDS, the festival included a special program for school children. The festival program introduction put the case for this intervention, suggesting:

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<sup>123</sup>*Gayety*, ' This Month', No 4, 1984

<sup>124</sup>'Club U300 AGM', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 10, 1984, p 19

<sup>125</sup>'Calendar', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 4, 1984

*[T]he material caters for all sections of the community; youth, heterosexuals, homosexuals, IV drug users, sex workers... There is no worse fear than the fear of the unknown. If you had no direct contact with the disease but have only seen the fear-inducing statistics in the media, these films will serve to dispel that fear.*<sup>126</sup>

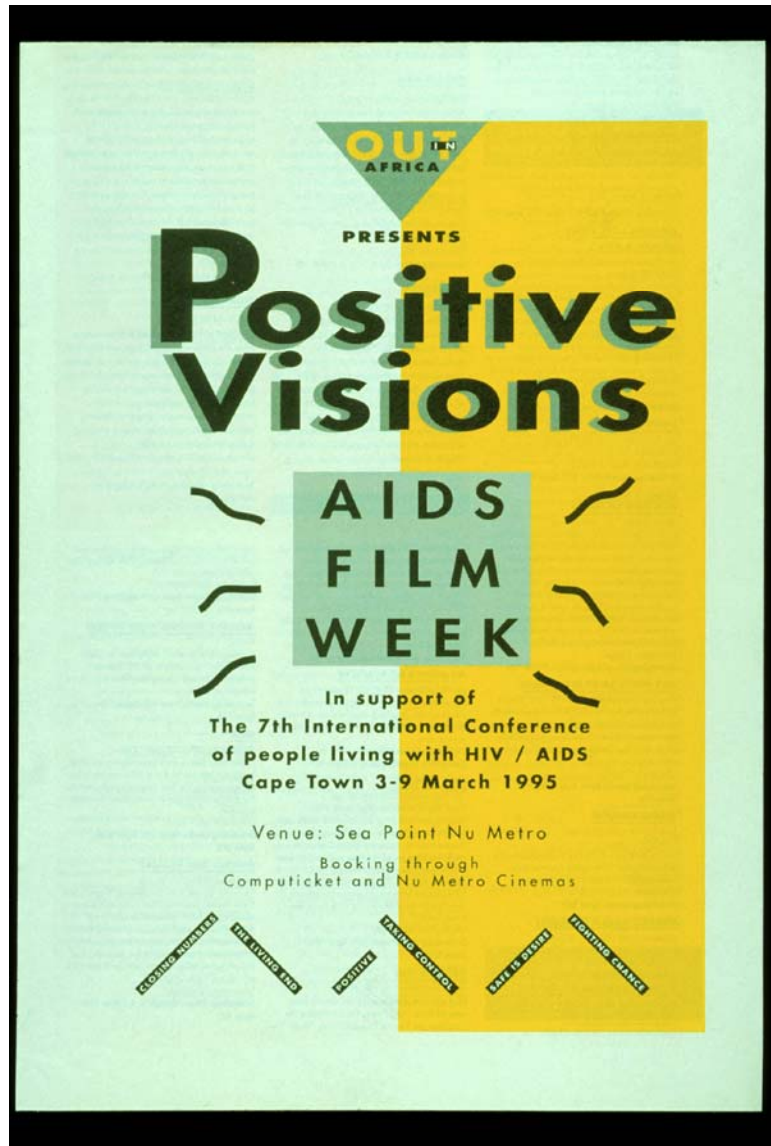


Figure 9

In Australia, as well as having forums about Queer film cultures, specific screenings of controversial films were organised. Denise Robinson suggested when Queer Screen formed in 1993 that it would engage in the politics of Queer culture with filmic 'interventions'. The first intervention took place at the 1993 festival, with the screening of an anti-Queer video produced by the American

<sup>126</sup> Lewis, Jack and Murphy, Nodi *Positive Visions AIDS Film Week Program*, 1995

new-right titled *The Gay Agenda*. *The Gay Agenda* had been circulated by a Christian fundamentalist network and was even screened in the Australian Parliament.<sup>127</sup>

The film was followed by the screening of a video made by Queer filmmakers in response to this video and titled *One Nation under God* (Teodoro Maniac and Francine M Rzeznick, 1993).<sup>128</sup> The response video analysed the agenda behind the misguided anti-homosexual therapies espoused by the parts of the Christian right.

These interventions were aimed at counteracting the anti-Queer actions and the effects they have on the communities by analysing them, counteracting them and placing them in a broader political context. This diffused their negative impact on Queer people, by offering a safe environment in which they could be critiqued and read.

## 10. Queering

*The queerness I point out in mass culture representation and reading... is only 'connotative' and therefore deniable or 'insubstantial' as long as we keep thinking within heterosexual paradigms, which always already has decided that expressions of queerness are sub-textual, sub-cultural, alternative readings or pathetic and delusional attempts to see something that isn't there – after all, mass culture texts are made for the 'average' (straight, white, middle-class, usually male) person, aren't they? I've got news for straight culture: your readings of texts are usually 'alternative' ones for me, and they often seem like desperate attempts to deny the queerness that is so clearly a part of mass culture.*

<sup>129</sup>

Alexander Doty

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<sup>127</sup>Decent, Campion 'Queer Screen-changing the parameters', *Sydney Star Observer*, 3 September 1993, p 15

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p 15

<sup>129</sup> Doty, Alexander *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1993, p xii

In Doty's understanding of Queerness, the act of reading something Queer 'into' mass cultural texts is a debilitating and homophobic practice. Doty argues for the liberation of Queerness from the 'closet of connotation' into a space where it can be read 'in' the text. He also suggests that the focus of Queer readings must broaden from using just the text, to engage with issues around cultural production and reception.

A Queer reading or 'Queering' therefore would describe and foreground the Queer 'content' already in all texts, their production and reception. As Doty argues, 'the day someone establishes without doubt that images and other representations of men and women getting married, with their children, or even having sex, undeniably depicts "straightness", is the day someone can say no lesbian or gay has ever been married, had children from heterosexual intercourse, or had sex with someone of the other gender for any reason.'<sup>130</sup>

The concept of reading Queer 'in' texts brings to the fore issues around spectatorship, audience identification and multiple viewing positions. Allowing for various spectatorship positions enforces Doty's argument that there is not only one, heterosexual reading of a text, but multiple readings and identifications. As Judith Mayne argues in *Cinema and Spectatorship*:

*Identification [in the cinema] understood as a position – and more properly as a series of shifting positions – assumes that cinematic identification is as fragile and unstable as identity itself. Indeed, the possibilities opened up by this reconsideration of identification are enormous, challenging as they do both excessively literal assumptions about the pleasures taken in the cinema as well as any notion of identification as a simple one-way process from one individual to his or her like.*<sup>131</sup>

Analysing how the theories of Freud, Lacan, Metz, Baudry, Althusser and Barthes have been applied to film, Mayne suggests that notions of desire,

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p xii

<sup>131</sup> Mayne, Judith 'The Subject of Spectatorship', *Cinema and Spectatorship*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 27

pleasure, interpolation and 'resistant' reading identified by the latter, reveal that identification in the cinema is a complex process which can more easily be seen as a series of shifting positions.

Mayne continues her argument about different spectator positions by suggesting spectatorship is informed by structures that are both social and psychic. Doty's arguments that Queer readings have always been in popular culture, is supported by Mayne's notion of shifting and multiple identifications.<sup>132</sup> Acts of Queering suggests that there are 'real' and equally valid Queer understandings and readings of all mainstream texts. Doty argues:

*Queer readings aren't 'alternative' readings, wishful or willful misreading, or 'reading too much into thing' readings. They result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along.*<sup>133</sup>

Traditionally, however, it has been easier to justify the reading of Queer lives into films through particular strategies. The Queerness of mass culture, Doty suggests, come from four main areas:

- 1) *Influences during the production of the text;*
- 2) *Historically specific cultural readings and uses of texts by self-identified gays, lesbians, bisexuals and queers;*
- 3) *Adopting reception positions that can be considered 'queer' in some way, regardless of a person's declared sexual and gender alliances; and*
- 4) *Texts that are actually about queers.*<sup>134</sup>

Breaking these strategies into more specific categories, Doty suggests that academic and non-academic Queer reading practices such as the use of camp; sociopolitical commentary; the star cult phenomena; *auteurism*; gossip; and other forms of extratextuality and emotional-erotic connections between

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<sup>132</sup> Doty, *op. cit.*, p 16

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p 16

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p xi

characters or between actors and audiences are key markers on how Queer people have 'made sense' of 'straight culture'.<sup>135</sup> He argues, therefore that there have always been Queer understandings of 'straight' culture.

Searle, commenting on the possible impact of Queering mainstream 'straight' culture, suggests that Doty's Queer readings, although providing valuable insight into how Queer people engage with mass media texts, tend to remain textual and may even end up normalising the 'current structures of mass media distribution and exhibition'.<sup>136</sup> She suggests this occurs because he does not engage with the alternative and non-commercial 'means of production, systems of distribution, spaces of exhibition and forums of critical reception' of Queer products for and/or by Queer people.<sup>137</sup> This lack of engagement ignores the latter's position as a major part of contemporary Queer life.

Doty certainly does not focus on Queer films and texts produced for and/or by Queer people, but that is because the parameters for his thesis is that of larger, mass media culture. Within this focus, however, he does briefly mention as a source of Queerness texts that are *about* Queers.

Doty, therefore, contrary to Searle's observation, not only mentions texts that are about Queers in his analysis, but also insists on the importance of extra-textual influences such as the production and reception of films. Her suggestion that Doty is conducting 'resistant' readings, also misses the central point to Doty's proposal, that is, that Queer readings aren't resistant readings or read 'against real' readings. They are the 'real' readings.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p 333. Camp is seen as the 'bitchy' wit of mostly gay men and the sociopolitical texts, traditionally, are those associated with lesbian feminist texts, critiquing patriarchy and heterosexism. Queer star cults forming around both Queer and non-Queer actors such as Doris Day, Judy Garland or Cary Grant for example, also provide spaces where erotic fantasies about performers engender Queer participation and Queer readings. Auteurism or the 'cult of the director', especially when the director is Queer or rumoured to be Queer, offers another popular angle to read films from a Queer perspective. Other general gossip and 'background material' circulating in the Queer and non-Queer media also ads to how Queer people read texts and form connections between characters, or between the actors and themselves.

<sup>136</sup> Searle, *op. cit.*, p 13

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p 16



Despite Searle's misinterpretation of some of Doty's key points, her understanding of the broader commercial machinery of popular film offers an important analysis on the structure of contemporary Queer Cinematic Culture. Texts for and/or by Queer people are an integral component of Queer Cinematic Cultures in terms of their political effectiveness. Martha Gever, John Greyson and Pratibha Parmar in their introduction of *Queer Looks* on why they chose to compile a series of articles on Queer independent film and video suggest:

*We were dissatisfied with queer critics who endlessly analysed Hollywood but ignored the independent sector. We were bored with tired seventies notions of positive role models, tired of boring seventies preoccupations with classic narrative structures. We were intrigued by the avant-garde canons of the twentieth century, which disproportionately featured lesbian and gay artists yet disconcertingly bent over backward to erase this sexual fact. We were committed to a wholesale interrogation of those canons, enraged by the gaps, the absences, assumptions and privileges that made those canons dominate official discourses.*<sup>138</sup>

Searle rightly critiques the latter three filmmakers' comments for not valuing the important political role of 'tired seventies' representation, particularly outside of academia, but their drive to break free from what would otherwise have become prescriptive canons of representation and their energy for exploring different avenues of Queer film making is critical.

Acknowledging the energy Queer workers in the film industries have put into the making of global film cultures and claiming their rightful place in history, are important acts of archeology. Celebrating the vitality and strength of independent Queer filmmaking and its role in Queer self-critique, recognition and diversification is also essential for maintaining balanced and evolving Queer Cinematic Cultures.

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<sup>138</sup> Gever, Martha, Greyson, John and Parmar, Pratibha 'Introduction', *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, Routledge, London, 1993, p xiv

What is important in analyzing Queer Cinematic Cultures, is that as many strategies as possible are developed to deliver the political and social needs of Queer people through filmic representation, whether that be through Queerings, old liberationist strategies or post-modern ideologies.



Figure 10

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis, Queering a number of historical 'mainstream' films occurs in combination with examining contemporary Queer images for and/or by Queer people. This contextualises contemporary Queer images in their filmic histories and offers an understanding of how Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia evolved.

The emergence of more open Queer Cinematic Cultures in Australia in the 1970s and in South Africa in the 1980s, are unique, historical moments of liberation, self-representation and socio-political activism. Only when these key cinematic movements are examined within their entire political, economic and social contexts, can their significance and importance to the Queer communities be clearly understood.

# Chapter 2

## *Skeef:* A Brief History of South African Queer Cinematic Cultures <sup>1</sup>

### Unbroken Silence

Seeking to violate  
all that you  
were  
is like needing  
to destroy part  
of your soul

Africa goddess of all  
Yours is a soul  
that has been smashed  
by the chains  
of male religion

Names given to you  
labels of intolerance  
bitch, witch;  
but you were  
mother of revolutionaries  
sister to all  
Lesbian!

Spirit of the goddess  
now you're in me  
charging me to  
relive all my  
lives

Giving me the courage  
to be what you were  
and I am  
as I have always  
been your lover<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Skeef* translates from Afrikaans as skew, or not quite straight.

<sup>2</sup> Telela, Rosaleee in Krouse, Matthew (ed.), *Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing from South Africa*, The Gay Men's Press, London, 1993, p 35



In this chapter I suggest that the histories of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa, like the other socio-political histories of this nation, are intimately connected to the ideologies of Apartheid. Specific Queer filmic developments must therefore be contextualised within the broader, racialised histories of this country.

I start by Queering early South African films such as *Sarie Marais* (1931, Joseph Albrecht) and *Fratse in die Vloot* (1958, Pierre de Wet) to reveal a South African cinema divided by race but rich in sexuality and gender ambiguity. Comparing these to openly Queer South African images of the 1960s such as Ernst Thorpe's *Nil Desperandum*, it is not difficult to imagine active Queer readings of predominantly white, mainstream South African films of the time.

I continue this reclamation by examining Queer films screened and made from the 1970s onward. Examples uncovered include the arrival of international Queer films and local, homoerotic military films in the 1970s; consciousness raising video evenings run by groups such as GASA, experimental Queer filmmaking by the Braamfontein Weekend Theatre and multi-dimensional films on race and sexuality such as *Quest for Love* (1987, Helena Nogueira) in the 1980s; and fundraising video evenings for Queer organisations such as ABIGALE in the early 1990s.

Lastly, I suggest that when the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival opened in 1994, in part a result of the aforementioned fundraising video evenings, a national, non-racial, heterognotic Queer South African Cinematic Culture evolved for the first time in the country's history. The festival acted not just as a cinematic space, but also as a forum for community building, access, mobilization and political action. Importantly, it was also part of the debate which lead to constitutional protection on the basis of sexual orientation, the first of its kind in the world.

### ***Sarie Marais: Queering Early South African Cinema***

Anti-Queer sentiments existed from the very beginning of cinema's emergence in South Africa and as a consequence, openly Queer images were not part of these early cinematic histories. Queering these texts is an essential project in the reclamation of hidden Queer lives, evidenced through the very laws which excluded them, but not reflected on screen.

One of the earliest homoerotic images in South African film can be seen in the first, ten minute experimental Afrikaans sound picture *Sarie Marais*, (Joseph Albrecht, 1931, African Film Productions). The story revolves around a group of Boerwar fighters sent to Ceylon as British prisoners of war, who long for home back in the Transvaal. As Chris Blignaut (the main character) and the musical group *The Melodians* sing the song *Sarie Marais*, two men begin to waltz with each other in the middle of the room. The beauty of the melody and the sensual movement of the two men dancing creates an intimate atmosphere totally conducive to a homoerotic reading. The degree of intention is difficult to assert as Queer people have always been able to invest sexually in images not necessarily intended for them or perhaps intended only in coded ways. However, the beauty and eroticism of the two men dancing cannot be dismissed.

During the period *Sarie Marais* was filmed, the depression and various other social forces were slowly creating, for the first time, a visible, urban South African Queer community. There were still few places where black and white Queer people could meet, with suburbs such as Sophiatown, District Six, Fietas and later Hillbrow the only meeting grounds where some inter-racial same-sex activity took place.<sup>3</sup> But these areas were slowly developing into locales where sexual diversity was increasingly possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Gevisser, Mark 'A different fight for freedom: A history of South African Lesbian and Gay organisation from the 1950s to the 90s' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, pp 18-19

Mark Gevisser, commenting on the originating factors of these urban Queer centres, suggests:

*Just as the gay communities were established in urban centers in the United States in part because of the uprooting impact of the depression and World War II, the various urbanising influences of South Africa - first the mining rushes that created Johannesburg, then the flood of people from the rural areas in the 1920s and 1930s - meant that there were people in the cities, away from their families and home communities, able for the first time to practice 'personal autonomy': to 'come out' as part of a homosexual subculture.<sup>4</sup>*

The most prominent subculture, due to financial, gender and racial differences, was still overwhelmingly white and male. Some black gay men who came into the urban areas as mine workers, however, stayed in town rather than return home from the single-sex compounds to lead Queer lives. White lesbian communities, 'alongside and often intersecting with [the] more visible [white] gay male subculture' also existed in the form of small cliques of friendship groups organised by profession.<sup>5</sup> But racially and gendered oppressed groups all had fewer meeting places and experienced much more pressure to conform socially.

The first white, Afrikaans sound feature, *Moedertjie*, (Joseph Albrecht and Stephanie Faure, 1931), made as a result of the success of *Sarie Marais*, deals extensively, and I would suggest uncritically, with issues such as urbanisation and like so many of the South African films that followed, implies cities are places where individuals inevitably *versleg* (become corrupted). Many other films over the next few years continued this theme. Film critics Martin Botha and Adri Van Aswegen comment that 'just as the soap opera explores the conflict between small

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p 18

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p 19.

town and city life, so the South African film portrayed the struggle between rural and urban values...The insider...usually live[d] on the farm.<sup>6</sup> It would not be a stretch to argue that Queer communities forming in the cities at the time were seen as part of the corruption that industrialisation and freedom of economic independence generated.

A consequence of industrialisation was the first seeds of Afrikaner nationalism. After being defeated by the British during the Boer War (1899-1901) and facing displacement and poverty during the depression, the Afrikaners began to mobilise and organise politically 'for [a] redemption of the *volk*'.<sup>7</sup> Their 'redemption', as it turned out, was not far off. In 1948 the mostly Afrikaner National Party was voted into power and the concept of *Apartheid* or separateness introduced officially into the legal and cultural systems of South Africa. Alistair Sparks comments on this moment:

*Once again as at Bloodriver and Majuba, the Boers saw the hand of Providence in the upset victory. For the new Nationalists it was an exhilarating moment of joy and anticipation. They had their country back and now they could make sure they never lost it again. It was theirs for posterity. It was theirs to begin reshaping according to their vision of the ideal of society, a new land of many nations that they were called by God to create. A sublime moment.... But it was also the moment when South Africa parted company with the world. Afrikanerdom chose to intensify and codify the segregationist system and to articulate racism as a national philosophy at precisely the moment that the world began to move in the opposite direction.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup>Botha, Martin and Van Aswegen, Adri *Images of South Africa: the rise of the alternative film*, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1992, p 4

<sup>7</sup>Sparks, Alistair *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, Mandarin, London, 1990, p 147

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p 183



### *Cross-Dressing with Al Debbo and Frik Burgers*



Figure 11

A year after the election victory, one of the next films, which contained a Queer-themed performance and perhaps not surprisingly set in an urbanised town, was produced. It was the first South African full-length Afrikaans musical titled *Kom Saam Vanaand*, (Pierre de Wet - *Come Along/Together Tonight*, African Films, 1949). The actor Frik Burgers paired up with the comedian Al Debbo in a cross dressing comedy scene which was to mark the beginning of many collaborative ventures between Debbo, Burgers and De Wet.

In a bus scene halfway through the musical, Burgers débuts in a cross-dressing outfit that becomes a trademark feature for many of his following movies. The roles of Debbo, as the fool, and Burgers, as the dress-wearing Afrikaanse *tannie* (aunty), were to be reworked and elaborated on many times over in the next few years. Burgers and Debbo collaborated in several movies including *Hiers ons Weer*, (*Here We Are Again*, 1950), *Alles sal Regkom*, (*Everything will be Alright*, 1951), *Altyd in My Drome*, (*Always in My Dreams*, 1952), *Dis Lekker om te Lewe*, (*Its Great to be Alive*, 1957) and *Fratse in die Vloot*, (*Buffoons in the Navy*, 1958).

*Fratse in die Vloot*, revolves around two comedians who join the South African navy after their comedy show fails financially. Burgers again dresses as a woman to get unauthorised shore-leave, and the cross-dressing performance gets him and Debbo into, by now familiar, trouble. The cross dressing role is reversed in a rare moment at the end of the movie, where Debbo has to dress as a ballerina to escape some murderous thieves and he and Burgers are forced on stage to perform a comic dance routine.



Figure 12

Shortly after *Fratse in die Vloot*, Debbo left African Film productions leaving Frik Burgers and Pierre De Wet to develop the next picture on their own.<sup>9</sup> The feature that followed threw itself more continuously into the arms of a Queer critical analysis than any other picture up to this point in South African film making. This film, *Piet se Tante*, (Pierre de Wet, SA Screen Productions, 1959) is set in a

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<sup>9</sup>Le Roux, André and Fourie, Lila *Filmverlede: Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Speelfilm*, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1982, p 53

university/high school ground and may even have been based on Archie Mayo's American film *Charley's Aunt* (1941).<sup>10</sup>

It is the story of a student (Burgers) who gets expelled a few months before he graduates and who has to convince the rector of the college to let him stay. Together with a group of friends, he invents a plausibly fictitious story where his rich aunt will donate money to the institution's insect collection if he finishes college. He has to dress up as his aunt and several instances of same-sex desire and gender confusion follows. Not only does one of his friend's father want to marry him, invoking a gay male scenario, but when he is amongst a group of women, his interest in them creates very overt lesbian connotations. Further conundrums evolve when the real aunt shows up and the comedy resolves itself in a flurry of chaos.

In 1964 a second movie dealing with a similar theme, called *Piet my Niggie* (Peter Gossett, *Piet my Female Cousin*) appeared. It again starred Burgers, this time already playing a female teacher who has to dress as a male teacher to secure desperately needed funding for the school. The complexities of the sexual and gender dissonances are far more varied. The whole saga is initiated by the expectations of gender roles for children and the fear of 'debilitating' them through an 'abnormal' upbringing. The only boy in a girl's school, there because his deceased mother's estate allows him free board and tuition, is discovered by his uncle to be doing ballet classes instead of playing rugby. The uncle is furious with the teachers who, even though insisting that ballet develops muscles and co-ordination, are forced to get a male teacher or lose funding controlled by the uncle. Running out of time, some teachers decide to *vermom* (disguise) a female teacher as a man.

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<sup>10</sup>*Piet se Tante* may have been based on Archie Mayo's *Charley's Aunt*, (1941).



Figure 13

The results confront many assumptions of gender and sexuality in Afrikaner society. Not only does the headmistress fall in love with Piet (who is really a woman, but who we know is actually played by a man), the students also develop a very close relationship with this male teacher who shows them affection the way only female teachers usually do. 'He' tries to cuddle the children when they are crying but realises it is inappropriate for a 'male' to do this. As a 'female', however, she feels their distress but lacks self-control and cannot help but help them. S/he is also offered beer by the headmistress and tries to drink it, but as a woman she finds it unpalatable. Women don't drink beer in this community.

The analysis of sexuality and gender roles, in particular the limitations and awkwardness of masculine constructs and the advantages/disadvantages of having 'female' emotions, makes this a very sophisticated film for the time. It brings to light notions of same-sex sexuality as well as the limitations of the gender

constructs of the time. Ballet, it is often asserted, develops muscles and tone and is a valuable pastime for men. To its credit, it allows a relatively complex understanding of sexuality and gender to emerge, even though ultimately anchoring the outcome in stereotypes of heterosexuality and certain aspects of essentialist gender identities. 'Piet's' real cousin eventually shows up, causing further confusion and creating rich material for slapstick humour.

### *Ernst Thorpe*

A discovery in the late 1990s by the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa (GALASA) of two short home-made films by a man named Ernst Thorpe, titled *Faux Pas de Deux* and *Nil Desperandum*, confirms the existence of a small gay male film subculture in South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s when movies such as *Fratse in die Vloot* and *Piet my Niggie* were produced. Both are interesting in their own right, but become even more so when analysed in conjunction with the latter features.



Figure 14

*Faux Pas de Deux* is a short super 8 about two men doing ballet in a back yard. There is no narrative or sound, simply a *pax de deux* between the one dressed as a ballerina and the other taking on the 'male' role. The dance itself is a tongue in cheek romp on the lawn with pirouettes and falls, often *sans* elegance. In the title, the addition of *faux* seems to play on the concepts that this male duet may be seen as a 'mistake' by many, but it could also be a comment on the humorous intention behind the flawed dance and the ballet 'clowns'.

*Faux Pas de Deux* is particularly interesting when seen in the light of the ballet scenes in *Piet my Niggie* and *Fratse in die Vloot*. The ballet class in the first feature is the pivotal point that sets off the whole plot of enforced masculinisation / heterosexualisation of the young boy. Ballet and perhaps even dance itself seems to produce a fear of 'feminisation' and through implication - same-sex sexuality. It becomes the symbol of what's considered unhealthy for the social order. In *Fratse in die Vloot*, Burgers and Debbo are forced on to stage, with Debbo dressed as a ballerina. Their dance is a comical *pax de deux* reminiscent of Thorpe's super 8. Only when it is comical, such as the final scene in *Fratse in die Vloot* and *Faux Pas de Deux*, is ballet and thus 'feminisation' of the male subject legitimate. When it is seriously employed, it becomes threatening.

The reworking of the dance, by the two men, in *Faux Pas de Deux*, on one level reclaims the space assigned by genderphobes and homophobes to the feminised subject, by celebrating it and having fun, but on another it also reifies the system through the title, insisting it is a *faux pax*. For it to be enjoyable, even in an act of self-representation by Queer people, it needs to mock itself, ending up as a double-edged sword.





Figure 15

The second, short super-8 by Thorp, *Nil Desperandum*, has more of a narrative than *Faux Pas de Deux*. The scene starts off in the apartment of two men, one older, the other young, looking out of their window towards a big navy ship in the harbour. As they point to the ship, a text insert reads 'There lies our future' and the two men quickly dress to prepare for a journey of sexual mis-adventure. The older one puts on a bra, perhaps to create a comical vision of older men who needs breast support, or perhaps to signify himself as a feminised subject. They leave in their car and after refusing to pick up two willing sailor-dandies sashaying by the side of the road, they continue towards the ship, where two rough sailors accept their offer for a picnic.

At the picnic, their amorous intentions towards the sailors lead them into serious trouble. They get beaten up by their rough-trade and also have their car stolen by the two disgruntled pick-ups. As they stumble back home, bruised and battered, a rickshaw carrying the two previously rejected sailors passes by and offers them a lift. They accept, finally realising they cannot refuse willing partners and the rickshaw, a form of transport pulled by a black African man (indicating that the scene was most probably set in Durban) disappears into to the distance.



Figure 16

There are several useful threads to be pulled from this short super 8. What becomes most obvious for people dealing with issues of South Africa and *Apartheid*, is the segregation apparent even at this level of social intercourse between blacks and whites, Queer or not. In a country where there is a huge racial



mix, the two men are obviously only looking for other European men. The man doing the work and unrelated to the sexual tension, is the African pulling the rickshaw. It is as though this person is somehow absent from the happenings, yet vital for the proceedings. As with much of South African society, the histories of white and black people, including Queer lives, followed connected but radically separate paths, and racist ideology permeated all strata of society.<sup>11</sup>

Interesting Queer connections evolve when comparing *Nil Desperandum* with the previously mentioned feature film *Fratse in die Vloot*. Both have two, not particularly masculine, men involved with the Navy and elements of cross-dressing inserted through the film. In addition, the film contains many homoerotic-phallic symbols, such as two cannons painted on the backdrop of Burger's and Debbo's stage show's set. Whether this was intentional or not, is again hard to confirm.

However, when seen in the light of *Nil Desperandum*, where the ship itself becomes the symbol for same-sex sexuality, it may be argued that there were people in the audience, members of an active Queer community, who would have interpreted these symbols as such and inserted it into their own experiences. The homosocial

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<sup>11</sup>Deelman, Neels 'Questioning the colour taboo', *Exit*, December 1984, p 17. Deelman argues that even though the *Mixed Marriages Act of 1957*, which prohibited inter-racial marriages, did not apply to lesbians and gays, the *Immorality Act of 1957* and the *Groups Areas Act* affected inter-racial relationships. The *Immorality Act* prohibits anal intercourse between men, black or white, (anal intercourse between men and women and presumably between women, were not illegal under Dutch Roman law) and a peculiar clause known as the *Men at a Party* clause, prohibited more than two men being in a situation where sexual arousal could occur. The *Group Areas Act* affected same-sex inter-racial relationships by prohibiting people from different races from living together. He argued: 'The *Groups areas act* makes it virtually impossible for any relationship, no matter how platonic, to flourish. Laws restricting the movements of black people and others prohibiting them from making use of "whites-only" facilities, make social interaction a nightmare for the mixed couple. Although here gay couples do have an advantage over non-gay couples as gay venues are generally more willing to turn a blind eye than their straight counterparts. Some people are able to get away with it by setting up a pseudo employer/employee relationship, but should the white partner be transferred to another area of the country, influx control will successfully put an end to this rouse.'

environment on an all male ship and the confined living quarters delivers the predictable homoerotic and homophobic scenarios. Debbo falls asleep and begins to make love to his bedding near Burger, much to his friend's dismay. To get unauthorised shore leave, Burger dresses up as a woman and he and Debbo escapes to create some more comic relief. The two men in *Nil Desperandum*, very clearly cruising, reflect in some way, I argue, Burgers and Debbo's less obvious cruising in the South African Navy.

Mark Gevisser, under a sub-heading 'Queens, tarts and sailors: The gay bar and party scene in the 1950s and 1960s' suggests that the navy in port towns like Capetown (where *Fratse in die Vloot* was set), Durban (where *Nil Desperandum* was set) and Port Elizabeth, played a very important role in the lives of gay men of that era. The bar scenes in these towns were much more varied than in-land cities and prostitutes, sailors and gays often hung out together, perhaps because of a shared social and sexual ostracism by mainstream society. He comments:

*Even in smaller port cities, sailors played a significant role: in Port Elizabeth in the 50s, for example, the bar at the Palmerston Hotel, patronised mainly by prostitutes and sailors, became the only public venue in the city where gay men were welcome. Once the sailors made friends with on-shore gay society, they were assured not only of some extra pocket money, but hospitality and entertainment too.<sup>12</sup>*

The associations of same-sex sexuality and cross-gender roles with sailors, the navy and ballet, clear in *Nil Desperandum* and *Faux Pas de Deux* and insertable in *Fratse in die Vloot* and *Piet my Niggie* link these home-made super 8's and mainstream features with a chain of arguably, similar Queer signifiers. With the background knowledge of the Queer home-film culture and gay 'port' life at the

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<sup>12</sup> Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 24. One interviewee would comment 'the Royal Navy was always a better bet than the South African Navy. They wanted a good time and they didn't ask you for money. The South African chaps, on the other hand, were terribly paid and in need of finance, and, if they didn't bop you on the nose, they made no bones about asking you for rent.'

time, it is possible to interpret/extrapolate from the mainstream a reading for a Queer audience that is very different to that for a non-Queerly aware audience.

### *Apartheid*

In stark contrast to, but intimately connected to the development (or initial lack) of Queer Cinematic Cultures there evolved, politically and institutionally, a stark history of racism and state oppression in South Africa. After the National Party came to power in 1948, legislation, amongst others the *Suppression of Communism Act*, 1950, the *Bantu Authorities Act*, 1951, (establishing 'homelands' for blacks), the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act*, 1953, the *Public Safety Act*, 1953, the *Sabotage Act*, 1962 and the *Terrorism Act*, 1967<sup>13</sup> ensured the government entrenched its white supremacist ideology of separating the races. These laws also helped it gain control over most of the Black populations<sup>14</sup> and the growing resistance that had started already in 1913<sup>15</sup> and manifesting in bloody protests such as the Sharpeville Massacre by 1960.<sup>16</sup>

In 1960 - 61 the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned and one year later in 1962, Nelson Mandela was arrested on

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<sup>13</sup>Coleman, Max 'The Unfolding of the Total Strategy 1948-1989', *A Crime Against Humanity: Analysing the repression of the Apartheid State*, Publication of the Human Rights Committee of South Africa, David Philip Publishers, Capetown, 1998, p 10.

<sup>14</sup>Luphondwana, Nomfundo 'Race Relations in the Lesbian Movement', *Agenda: Empowering Women for gender equity*, No 29, 1996, p 75. Luphondwana suggests: 'We could accept the definition of black, as defined by the black consciousness movement, to entail the following two essential ingredients: Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of attitude. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you as subservient.'

<sup>15</sup>*Panoramas of Passage: Changing Landscapes of South Africa*, catalogue, Wits Gallery, Johannesburg, 1995, p 102. In 1913 the British Colonial government established the *Native's Land Act* which limited land ownership to blacks. In 1914 the ANC, which was established in 1912, (two years before the National Party formed), sent a delegation to London to protest against the Act.

<sup>16</sup>Coleman, *op. cit.*, p 38. 'The first occasion on which the apartheid government... declare[ed] a State of Emergency was on the 30 March 1960. The relevant circumstances then were the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960, claiming the lives of 67 victims and sending shock waves around the country and indeed the world: and the banning of the ANC and PAC one week later. ...Detentions numbered 11727.'

his return from Algeria. The person who fetched him from the border, Cecil Williams, a gay, communist, theatre director was also arrested and imprisoned and became the focus in 1998 of one of the first Queer docu-dramas developed in South Africa about the country's gay history.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 17

Mandela was to stay behind bars for 28 years, until his release in 1990, while South Africa was to go through times of tremendous repression and brutality. In the 1970s repression was stepped up and events such as the 1976 Soweto uprising, the death a year later of Steve Biko, the founder of Black Consciousness<sup>18</sup> and the

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<sup>17</sup>The story of Cecil Williams will be elaborated on later, as part of the discussion on Mark Gevisser and Greta Schiller's documentary, *The Man who Drove with Mandela* (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Sparks, *op. cit.*, p 196. Sparks comments: 'In 1953, the year of the Bantu Education Act, the government spent \$180 on each white child...compared to \$25 for each black child.... This perception of calculated inferiority, made education one of the most explosive grievances in the black community, and it provided the spark for both the 1976 student uprising in South Africa, and to a lesser degree the great national convulsion that shook South Africa in the 1980s' In terms of the rise of Black Consciousness, Sparks suggests: 'At the age of thirty [Biko] was already a legend... and it was largely his influence that triggered the Soweto uprising. As the security police set about crushing that rebellion, they stopped his car at a roadblock near Port Elizabeth one night in August 1977 and took him to their interrogation cells.' Biko was tortured, ended up in a coma, lay naked in

banning of several newspapers, organisations and individuals,<sup>19</sup> continued to map a trail of despair.

South African cinematic cultures were not immune to the ideologies of *Apartheid*. In addition to having segregated cinemas, the percentage of cinemas available to non-white people, Queer and non-Queer alike, were minimal. Of the 574 cinemas in South Africa in 1975, which included drive-ins and theatres with 16mm equipment, 447 were dedicated as 'white only'.<sup>20</sup> In addition, attitudes to the establishment and support of a 'Bantu' cinema by the Afrikaner establishment was infused with the same racial stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in the broader white, ruling society. David Lombaard, in a racist study of the development of a cinematic culture for the African or 'Bantu' people would write:

*Bestaande rolprente is... nie geskik vir die Bantoe nie en kan gevolglik nie in bestaande behoeftes voorsien nie... Daar moet ook gewaak word teen nadelige invloed, polities en sosiaal, wat moderne rolprente – wat gebruik word in the afwesigheid van meer geskikte rolprente – op die Bantoe kan hê.*<sup>21</sup>

*Existing films are not suitable for the Bantu and can therefore not fulfill the existing needs ... One must also guard against negative influence, political and social, which modern films – used in the absence of more suitable films – can have on the Bantu.*

Trying to control the perception of white people's sexuality by Black South Africans, and pointing indirectly to the fear of sexuality in South African and particularly Afrikaner culture in general, Lombaard bemoans the perceived sex and violence of modern cinema and its 'influence' on Africans:

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his cell for three days and eventually was sent seven-hundred miles in the back of a jeep to Pretoria where 'he died the next day unattended', pp 221-222

<sup>19</sup>Merrett, Christopher 'The Security State 1960 - 1974', *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994, p41

<sup>20</sup> Lombaard, David H J *Die Ontwikkeling van 'n Rolprentbedryf vir die Bantoe*, Masters Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1976, p 3 (Translation *The Development of a Film Industry for the Bantu*, Submitted for a Master Degree in Industry Studies, University of Pretoria.)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p 1

*Die moderne rolprente het hoofsaaklik 'n vermaaklikheidsfunksie, met die klem op geweld en seks. Die Bantoe met sy konkrete siening... is geneig om hierdie uitbeelding as die normale gedrag van die Blanke te vertolk en dit as normes te aanvaar.*<sup>22</sup>

*The modern film functions mainly as entertainment, with an emphasis on violence and sex. The Bantu, with his concrete vision, is disposed to see this behaviour as normal for whites and to accept it as the norm.*

There is a distinct hierarchy established in Lombaard's argument where white people are somehow exempt from interpolation through film. White people are incorrectly assumed to have privileged reasoning and reflection, for example in this case, to not accept the sex and violence on screen as 'normal' white behaviour. Lombaard singles out particular population groups, the Bantu, to articulate his, and I would argue many other white South Africans' fears of revolution and uprising against race-privileged rulers.

Lesbian, gay and Queer political struggles of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, although interested in exploding the sexual constraints and moralities in both life and film, argued for by Lombaard, did not resemble in degree or urgency the liberation struggle for South Africans of-colour in terms of racial discrimination.<sup>23</sup> However, human rights abuses cannot be measured in scale and the two-fold and three-fold oppression experienced by African, Asian and Coloured Queer South Africans, vigorously contests the boundaries sometimes set up between that of Queer rights (often incorrectly assumed white) and race rights. As African-American Queer theorists Layli Philips points out:

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p 7

<sup>23</sup> Tomaselli, Keyan *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Films*, Routledge, London, 1988, p 14. In South Africa, the terms black, colored or *bruin* (brown), white, and Asian were used to classify four major racial groups. Sometimes African is used to describe black South Africans in addition to Black African. More recently White African has also been used by white South Africans. I use these terms intermittently in addition to the more Americanised notion of people-of-colour where appropriate.

*The queer experience has often been conflated with the experience of white queers due to the... cultural visibility of white gay men and lesbians... Important intellectual and political strides have been made by white queer cultural workers in both queer studies and lesbian and gay civil rights; however, race-ing queer theory remains essential to the realization of the radical aims of both queer theory and the queer movement.<sup>24</sup>*

Racialising Queer Theories reveal that Queer-associated people of all races faced continuous social, judicial and personal intimidation due to sexual orientation or transgender issues in addition to race. Darren Hutchinson's theories of the multi-dimensionality of oppression, as explored in Chapter 1, can easily be applied here, as Queer people experienced discrimination differently as a result of racial, gender and other differences.

### ***Parallel Queer Histories***

Taking into account racial and gender differences, in their two part documentary *Apostles of Civilised Vice* (1999) directors Zachie Achmat and Jack Lewis show that white, black and coloured South African Queer histories have always existed in sections of the broader community, but were often hidden not just from the mainstream, but also from each other.<sup>25</sup>

Mark Gevisser shows that white gay and lesbian histories did on occasion mix, but agrees that the histories of white and of-colour Queer people rarely intersected. Most of the time, these histories ran parallel rather than linked to each other.

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<sup>24</sup>Phillips, Layli 'Race-ing Queer Theory: Beyond Sexual Subversion', Conference paper delivered at *Performing Unnatural Acts: Critically Queering Racial Cultural Studies*, University of California, Berkeley, 5th November, 1999, p 3

<sup>25</sup> *Apostles of Civilised Vice* (1999). The title of Achmat and Lewis' documentary reflects the attitudes of the time where African homosexuality was seen as a result of European influence and sodomy was viewed as a *civilized vice*. Miners who were practicing sodomy were seen as *apostles* spreading a foreign import.

One film that reveals a rare exception to this rule is John Greyson and Jack Lewis' *Proteus* (2004), in which they re-historicise an 18th-century, cross-racial homosexual relationship between a white man named Rijkhaart Jacobsz and a Khoi convict, Claas Blank (see later on in this chapter). It is one of only a few cross-racial Queer histories that have been recovered to date.



Figure 18

What researchers and film makers such as Achmat, Lewis and Gevisser have been able to offer, are glimpses of some discovered and recovered fragments of these early Queer South African lives. Their stories offer fractured vignettes into an undoubtedly more complex past.



Fragmented narratives about the cinema and Queer people of the 1950s and 1960s are also occasionally found within these histories. They reveal that Queer people in this period were not only influenced and responsive to the content of the movies screened at the cinemas, but also by the physical reality of the cinema as a meeting place.

Cafe Bio's in particular, as they were known by their white only patrons in those days, were frequented by mostly Afrikaner working class teenagers. Often white gay men from various backgrounds would go to the movies to meet them and buy sex. According to Joe, a source of Gevisser's, 'the cafe-bio's were very important white cultural institutions were 'where you could eat, smoke and have it off while watching a movie.'<sup>26</sup> There was also a drive-in cafe in Newlands where the Afrikaner boys hung out, but it was considered safer to meet them in town.

A transgender/lesbian-of-colour at the time, Gertie (Johnny) Williams, also commented in *The Golden City Post* in September 1955 on the cinema and its role as meeting place for herself and her gang the 44 Boys. She suggested that 'our gang... hung around a cinema in Wynberg [where] we had lots of fun teasing the girls when the lights went off inside. Sometime when we were fooling around with the girls in the bio, one of the dames screamed so loud that the ushers chucked us out and the manager barred us from entering again. We also had fights outside the place because some of the other fellows who had dough didn't want to stand us for a show.'<sup>27</sup>

Another interesting link back to the cinema comes from the hairdressing and entertainment cultures of the gay male coloured communities of District Six in

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<sup>26</sup> Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 26

<sup>27</sup> Chetty, Dhianraj 'Lesbian Gangster: The Gertie Williams Story. Excerpted from Golden Post and Drum' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 131

from the 1940s to the 1960s. In these sub-cultures the gay men or *Moffie Queens* as they were known, often took movie star drag names for themselves. Dhianaraj Chetty suggests that in the same way as camp practitioners in the 1980s looked to Madonna and Grace Jones for inspiration, in this era it was the cinema that provided gay icons. Gay men from the District Six became 'Capuccine', 'Doris Day', 'Eartha Kitt', and 'Lena Horne'<sup>28</sup> Other names included Miss Hayley Mills of Woodstock, Mitzi Gaynor of Maitland Salon, Carmen Miranda and Shirley Bassey of Sir Lowry Road. It seems fitting that these personalities were honoured in Lewis and Achmat's film *A Normal Daughter* (1997), creating 'real' movie stars appropriate to their *Moffie Queen* stage names.



Figure 19

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<sup>28</sup> Chetty, Dhianaraj 'A drag at Madam Costello's: Cape moffie life and the popular press in the 1950s and 1960s' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 121

For white lesbians one interesting issue with public spaces such as cinemas was understanding acceptable 'straight' codes of dress. 'Jackie' recalls that the charade of dress for lesbians was a constant source of anxiety and had to be negotiated depending on where you went. The cinema consequently became a place of both pleasure and restrictions. She remembered that 'during the week you kept up pretences. I had my hair set every week and wore high heels, skirts and makeup [and] I wouldn't have dreamed of going to the movie in town in slacks.'<sup>29</sup>

The movies in the 1950s and 1960s therefore seem to have been influential not just because of the content of the films screened, but also for the contact it afforded Queer patrons and for the various anxieties it imposed due to codes of dress and behaviour. The cinema as a public space produced different effects and possibilities for different Queer people.

What must be remembered, however, is that throughout this period, all cinemas were segregated and cross-racial cinemas illegal. The culture of cinema-going Queers in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was not only influenced and responsive to the films screened, the stage names they inspired and the gender codes they dictated, but also by the physical reality of the racially segregated cinema as a meeting place and the different social positions audiences occupied in relation to race, gender and class.

### *Forrest Town and the Club Scenes*

One of the first white lesbian/gay/Queer directed law reform movements in South Africa started after a 1966 raid on a 'mass orgy' in a suburb called Forrest Town. The 'orgy' was in fact a party where around 300 men, some in drag, were 'dancing

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<sup>29</sup> Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 20

with males to the strains of music, kissing and cuddling each other in the most vulgar fashion imaginable<sup>30</sup>

In response to this 'discovery', the minister of Justice, PC Pelsaert, proposed amendments to the *Immorality Act*, to make 'male and female homosexuality an offence punishable by compulsory imprisonment by up to three years.'<sup>31</sup>

Soon after the amendments were proposed, a Homosexual Law Reform movement formed, established by a small group of professional people in Johannesburg and Pretoria. People raised money for the cause and were successful in having the amendments altered. The first amendment became known as the 'men at a party' clause, where a party was defined as 'an occasion where more than two men were present.'<sup>32</sup> This was seen as '[o]ne of the most curious provisions... on the statute books in South Africa, and perhaps one of the most curious statutory crimes anywhere...' by Judge Edwin Cameron.<sup>33</sup>

Gevisser suggests what could have turned into a bigger liberation movement failed for several reasons. First the freedom charter and its authors were banned, placing a huge stigma on left-wing politics. Secondly, the lack of racial integration meant that few white Queers knew anything about the plight of black Queers. Thirdly, the movement was too accommodationist and worked with the National Party

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<sup>30</sup>Retief, Glen 'Keeping Sodom out of the laager: State repression of homosexuality in apartheid South Africa' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 101. Excerpt from the Submission by the South African Police to Parliamentary Select Committee 7 of 1968

<sup>31</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 31

<sup>32</sup>*Sexual Offences Act, Immorality Amendment Act 57 of 1969*, Section 20A, South Africa. The clause criminalises any 'male person who commits with another male person at a party any act which is calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification.'

<sup>33</sup> Cameron, Edwin, "'Unapprehended felons': Gays and lesbians and the law in South Africa" in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 92

rather than against it. After the 'victory', white Queers went quietly on with their business.<sup>34</sup>

The result in the 1970s from this persecution was the evolution of a club culture and disco scene, where white Queer people could congregate without much police harassment. Gevisser comments that rather than try to wipe out Queer culture, the police simply sought to minimize its social effects, resulting in a subculture that moved indoors, into bars and clubs.<sup>35</sup>

All white clubs such as *The Dungeon* (1969), *The T-Bar* (lesbian, 1974) and *The Butterfly* (early 1970s) opened in Johannesburg. *The Dungeon* was raided only once in 24 years - in 1969, when it showed an unknown banned movie.<sup>36</sup> However, as more obvious 'pink' and 'grey' areas began to develop and communities became more visible, raids were increased.

### **Emerging Queer Film in the 1970s**

Internationally, more Queer films began to appear in the seventies as the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s manifested in more liberal and open representations. Globally, openly lesbian and gay directors also began portraying same-sex sexuality in a different light to the homophobic projections which had opened up the closets of representations in the 1960s.

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<sup>34</sup> The Law Reform, it is suggested by Retief and Gevisser, managed to unite white Queer people in a common cause for a short period. Soon after the amendments were passed, the social gatherings ended and meetings stopped. White Queer life became hidden again and continued organised opposition almost disappeared. A parallel to the liberation movements in the US, Britain and Australia did not occur.

<sup>35</sup> Gevisser, *op. cit.*, pp 36-37

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p 40. Later on *The Res Club*, amongst others, also showed movies on its premises as part of its entertainment schedule. "Fassbinder's 'Querelle' more than just for Davis fans", *Link/Skakel*, April 1984

The editor of *Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing*, Matthew Krouse, suggests that there '[was] a naughty moment, in a lot of seventies movies, where there were gay couples in the room, because the early seventies were characterised by a sort of openness.'<sup>37</sup> Many international films flirted also with some Queer sexual representation and contained Queer sexual undertones.

Due to the censorship regimes and social conservatism in South Africa however, very few of these films reached the screens untouched. South African made films in the 1960s and 1970s, strictly regulated by censorship, saw even less of this openness. In addition, multi-racial funding was not even established until 1973, making black Queer representation glaringly absent.<sup>38</sup> The restrictions and funding processes ensured that few, if any, alternative images of Queer people were seen.

Botha comments:

*[W]eens die streng sensuurskodes, sou enige subversiewe beelde van politieke andersdenkendes, of enige iets... wat die Suid Afrikaanse realiteite sou uitgebeeld het... basies nie subsidie ontvang nie, of sou verbied gewees het. So jy het... 'n klomp faktore gehad wat redelik in plek was om seker te maak dat... gay beelde en gay mense, [nie] uitgebeeld sal word nie. Ook binne die swart bedryf.<sup>39</sup>*

*As a result of the strong censorship codes, subversive images from political divergents or anything which would have portrayed the South African reality, would not have received funding or would have been banned. So you basically had several factors in place which made sure that gay people and gay images would not be portrayed. Also in the black industry*

### **Army Movies**

The few South African films from the 1970s that dealt with homoeroticism visually, if not openly textually, are army movies such as *Seuns van die Wolke* (Sons of the

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<sup>37</sup>Krouse, Matthew Interview, Johannesburg, 16 December 1998

<sup>38</sup> Lombaard, *op. cit.*, p 4. 'Die subsidie skema wat op 19 Maart 1973 in werking getree het... is van toepassing op rolprente in enige van die erkende Bantoetale' The subsidie scheme which came into being on 19 March 1973, was applicable to any films in known bantu languages.

<sup>39</sup> Botha, Martin Interview, Capetown, 2 February 1999

*Clouds*, 1975, Franz Marx), *Ses Soldate* (*Six Soldiers*, Oscar Burn, 1975) and *Mirage eskader* (Bertrand Retief, 1975). There are often scenes where the homosocial bonding verge on the homoerotic and the actors' intimate relationships with each other open up room for Queer readings. These representations were rare in terms of nudity and implied male homosocial affection.



Figure 20

*Seuns van die Wolke*, loosely based on the life of the German pilot Jochaim Marseille, is the story of two World War II enemy fighter pilots, who find themselves stranded together in the desert after trying to destroy one another in combat.<sup>40</sup> The German, *Oberleutenant* Werner von Steinhausen and *Kaptein* Reynecke, the South African pilot, find themselves forced to co-operate for survival. A strong homosocial friendship evolves while they have to negotiate to get out of the desert. Botha explains the homoerotic overtones:

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<sup>40</sup>Le Roux and Fourie, *op. cit.*, p 161

*Daar is een betrokke toneel [in Seuns van die Wolke] waar die twee mans uit die see uitkom en die een dra die ander een... Dit was amper n... skok in terme van die nudity in 'n Suid Afrikaanse film, maar dit was ook geweldig eroties.<sup>41</sup>*

*There is one particular scene in Sons of the Clouds where the men come out of the sea, the one carrying the other...it was almost shocking in terms of nudity in South African films and also incredibly erotic.*

Their bonding and physical intimacy released a lot of emotions and anxiety around same-sex contact. The homoerotic feelings these films facilitated was part of a new, emerging South African Queer cinematic sensibility.

Two other films about the friendship of men in the Army, *Ses Soldate* (1974) and *Mirage eskader* (1975), were soon to follow and allowed for homosocial and homoerotic reading from Queer spectators. Lieb Bester played the character *Liebling* in *Ses Soldate*, (the name translates as darling in German) and also Martin, the *boesemfriend*<sup>42</sup> of Gerhard in *Mirage eskader*.<sup>43</sup> In both instances he is implicated in a Queer textual reading, first with the name *Liebling* as a feminised subject and then as the 'intimate' friend of a main male character.

The homoerotic overtones of male-bonding in the army involving close physical intimacy between people of the same sex and emotional dependency developing from adverse situations, allowed a broad avenue for Queer sensitive and erotic readings to take place.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup>Le Roux and Fourie, *op. cit.*, p 162. *Boesemfriend* has connotations of a more intimate relationship than just friendship.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p 162. *Mirage eskader*, was a *spannings verhaal* set in the South African Airforce. *Spannings verhaal* translates as thriller.

<sup>44</sup>Some other features of the seventies involving the gay actor and famous South African comedian Toby Cronje include *Babbelkous en Bruidegom* (1974, Koos Roets) and *Kooitjie Emmer* (1977, Koos Roets). They are less obviously Queer but have a camp value which have made them endearing to many audiences and ensured their popularity.



### Queer South African Film in the 1980s

The early eighties saw the continuation of the military genre in films such as *Boetie on the Border* and the creation of different viewing positions through acts of active Queering. Gevisser, commenting on the military nature of the films and their implied homoeroticism suggests that a gay male 'underground' film culture emerged from this engagement with military themes in the 1970s and also early '80s. He comments on this military genre by suggesting:

*There are a whole lot of alternative films that were made... Boetie on the Border films... All those films that were subsidised through slash funds about going off to war. They are so fucking queer. They are amazing. They really are... [W]hether it was about male bonding in the army, or a response to that, there is a lot of homosexual imaging and positioning happening in the whole white boys and the army thing.<sup>45</sup>*

Military films from the 1970s and early 1980s, therefore, seemed to lay the groundwork for a more aggressively Queer Cinematic counter-culture in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The filmic engagement with the military and the sexualisation of military service, however, had very little to do with official military policy or behaviour. A revisionist article in the *Mail and Guardian* describes the discrimination many Queer people in the military experienced, suggesting:

*Apartheid's intellectual class sought, as they did in other areas as well, to dignify their suppression of homosexuality with a veneer of science... And forms of treatment - notable for both their barbarity and conspicuous lack of success - were dragged up from the murkier corners of psychiatry's past to be applied on a category of vulnerable young men trapped in military uniform.<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Gevisser, Mark Interview, Johannesburg, November 1998. *Boetie* translates as brother.

<sup>46</sup> 'Damaged by a culture of brutality', *Mail and Guardian*, August 3, 2000 [www.q.co.za](http://www.q.co.za) Accessed 17 August 2000

Indeed, recent research has revealed that the military was involved during this period in some of the most systematic and debilitating experiments and 'treatments' of the Apartheid era. Paul Kirks reveals the extent of this brutality:

*Sex-change operations, medical torture and chemical castration were perpetrated on national servicemen in a bizarre program to cure 'deviants' during the apartheid era. To this day dozens of victims of the program are crippled and disfigured, stranded halfway between male and female by incomplete sex-change operations performed by the South African Defence Force (SADF). Many more are sterile after being chemically castrated. A number of the victims have committed suicide... [S]urgeons [suggested] that about 50 sex-change operations were performed a year between 1971 and 1989.*<sup>47</sup>

This brutality continued even in the face of more and more visible Queer communities and the strengthening of Queer Cinematic Cultures in the eighties.

### ***Queers, Politics and Video Evenings***

A visible increase in Queer political activity in the early eighties was perhaps due to the increased harassment by the police in raiding lesbian and gay clubs, the homophobia of the military and promoted in turn by an increased confidence and visibility amongst Queer people in 'pink' and 'grey' suburbs such as Hillbrow. In addition, the 1979 *Mandy's Raid*, as it is known by many South African Queer people, is believed to be South Africa's Stonewall, an event that mobilised groups into political action that resulted in the formation of broad based gay organisations.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Kirk, Paul 'Apartheid army forced gay soldiers into sex change operations. A new report uncovers a secret SADF project to 'cure' homosexuals by giving them sex changes, Paul Kirk reports', July 28, 2000 [www.q.co.za](http://www.q.co.za) Accessed 17 August 2000

<sup>48</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, pp 46 - 47. 'This is because clientele, and particularly the drag queens, fought back (there are stories, perhaps apocryphal, of police officers with head wounds incurred by high heels), and also because... [it] prompted some gay people to move beyond the 'social support' model and begin talking of rights once more.'

Gevisser suggests the early eighties were also significant for Queer people as major social reform programs, however problematically applied, were beginning to be instigated by the Apartheid government. Hand in hand with the 'Total Onslaught' mentality and the State of Emergency throughout South Africa (1985-86), there was the repeal of the *Mixed Marriages Act* and the *Political Interference Act*, abolishment of the pass laws and influx control and the first sitting of the tri-cameral parliament (Whites, Coloureds, Indians).<sup>49</sup> Gevisser comments:

*For the very first time since the National Party came to power in 1948, there was a tangible sense that the decades of Afrikaner Calvinist rule were coming to an end, and that the strict apartheid packaging of people would give way to a more liberated and integrated society... White urban gay men, having consolidated their subculture in the 1970s participated in this new counterculture and by 1982, were ready to assert themselves politically.*<sup>50</sup>

The political developments in the early to mid-eighties were also partially due to the increasing impact of the AIDS epidemic on the Queer communities in South Africa. AIDS was to become synonymous with gay sexuality and the homophobia that emerged required immediate and urgent action. It was part of the impetus behind the emergence of a much more open and activist Queer culture.<sup>51</sup>

This increasing cultural confidence can be glimpsed in the archival documents and newsletters from the many Queer organisations in this decade. One of the first was the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA). GASA first formed in Johannesburg in April 1982,<sup>52</sup> but soon there was interest shown in having branches in Durban

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<sup>49</sup>Panoramas of Passage: Changing Landscapes of South Africa, *op. cit.*, p 102

<sup>50</sup> Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 48

<sup>51</sup> Sapa 'Aids causes one in four deaths in South Africa', *Q-Online: The Gayteway to South Africa*, 17 October 2001, [www.q.co.za](http://www.q.co.za) A consequence of the inaccurate association of AIDS with homosexuality was soon to impact negatively on Africa as a whole. In 2000, Malegapuru Makgoba, the president of the Medical Research Council (MRC) of South Africa released a report that estimated 40% of adult deaths in the 15 to 49 year age group, and about 20% of all adult deaths in South Africa in 2000 were due to HIV/AIDS. Accessed December 2001

<sup>52</sup> 'Kom trek jou kruisie - GASA GAAN STEM', *Link/Skakel*, June 1982, p 1

and Pretoria.<sup>53</sup> By the end of 1984 there were nine affiliated groups - *GASA Rand*, *GASA Northern Transvaal*, *GASA Natal Kus*, *GASA Oos Kaapland*, *GASA Natal Binneland*, *GASA OVS*, *GASA Noordkaapland* and *GASA Grens* with more than 1500 members.<sup>54</sup>

Gevisser argues that 'GASA... had formed a gay national association that constituted, for the very first time, something approximating the kind of grassroots movements to be found in Western Europe and North America.'<sup>55</sup> Lesbians also started forming subgroups within GASA to create a safe space within still very male dominated organisations and in Capetown another group called LILACS (Lesbians in Love and in Compromising Situations) formed as an offshoot of the gay students association. These groups held together for short periods with various degrees of success.<sup>56</sup>

Mixed gender organizations, although unbalanced in relation to gender and racial representation,<sup>57</sup> continued to serve various social and political functions, including using film as a form of entertainment and discussion. In the *Randstand*, the *6010* and associated newsletters from the early eighties, there is plenty of evidence of video evenings and discussions of films being used to inform, entertain and politicise members of the organisations. In addition to the *Link/Skakel* magazine, other gay newsletters, some associated with GASA and with similar content, including *Gay Natal View*, *Goudveld/Goldfield*, *Gayety - GASA Grens/Border* and *Tiara - GASA Northern Cape* printed film reviews and also contained extensive social calendars which included video evenings and discussions on film. GASA

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<sup>53</sup>'Gasa goes bananas', *Link/Skakel*, October 1982, p 1

<sup>54</sup> 'Uit die Voorsitterstoel', *Link/Skakel*, No 7, December 1984

<sup>55</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 48

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p 50

<sup>57</sup> Armour, Mary and Lapinsky, Sheila "'Lesbians in love and in compromising situations': Lesbian feminist organizations in the Western Cape' in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 299



was shown<sup>62</sup> and *GASA Natal Inland* started its own video library of 'suitable educational films'.<sup>63</sup> In the same year, 6010 had dinners, associated with Club U300 which owned its own video tape deck and generator<sup>64</sup> and regular Thursday evening meetings, where videos such as *The Naked Public Servant* (starring Quentin Crisp and directed by Jack Gold, 1975), *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968) and *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980) were shown, followed by discussions of the films.<sup>65</sup>

Censorship had affected many of these films in the mainstream circuit and at these community showings, they could be discussed within a non-homophobic environment. As Botha suggests:

*Gay films... veral [die wat] eksplesiete seksuele tonele gehad het, [is] geweldig gesny of verbied... Films soos Cruising is verbied.*<sup>66</sup>

*Gay films, particularly those with explicit sex scenes, were heavily cut or banned... Films like Cruising were banned.*

*Cruising* was a particularly controversial video as it was not only banned by the censorship board but also considered by many Queer critics to be an anti-gay movie.<sup>67</sup> Although contemporary criticisms surrounding debates of positive/negative representations of Queers have re-evaluated this negative stance and suggested that another, pro-gay subtext can be read, during this period, it was considered as mainly negative.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> 'This Month', *Gayety*, 'No 4, 1984

<sup>63</sup> 'A Gay Video Library', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 10, 1984, 1984, p 19

<sup>64</sup> 'Club U300 AGM', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 10, 1984, p 19

<sup>65</sup> 'Calendar', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 4, 1984 and 'Calendar', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 6, 1984

<sup>66</sup> Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> Maltin, Leonard *TV Movies and Video Guide*, New American Library, New York, 1990, p 233

<sup>68</sup> Searle, Samantha, *Queer-ing the Screen: Sexuality and Australian Film and Television*, The Moving Image, No 5, Australian Teachers of Media, St Kilda, 1997, p 10

The fact that it was censored was a mixed blessing. How could people make up their own minds about the value of this type of gay representation if they could not see the film? This dilemma may have occasioned the video evening, where viewers could see for themselves the pros and cons of the text. Discussions often followed these video showings, although other more mainstream videos such as *Victor Victoria*, *The Muppet Movie* and *Casablanca* were also shown and discussed in conjunction with Queer themed films.<sup>69</sup>

In this period, for the first time in South African history, Queer culture began to flourish, with successful gay-conventions and Queer film festivals held, despite the repressive political backlash by the Apartheid government. A cultural agenda to this movement was one of the key binders which helped articulate the possibility and purpose of liberation.

One Queer film which seems to have had a great impact on the establishment of a sense of community, with its first public showing in August 1984, is *The Word is Out* (1978, Mariposa Film Collective). In 1984, six years after it was first shown in Sydney, and as some claimed, was a catalyst in the formation of the Mardi Gras Parade, *The Word is Out* was shown in South Africa as part of the 6010 Thursday Group discussions. It was advertised as follows:

*The first public showing of this film, a full length documentary of gay lifestyles in the USA, will take place ...on the 16th August at... Lecture Hall 2C, Leslie Building, UCT. This film... will be available to GASA-6010 and the gay community of Capetown at a later date.*<sup>70</sup>

The film must have had a big impact on the audience, as in the next newsletter, it was advertised again for showing at UCT on the 20th September. In addition,

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<sup>69</sup>'Calendar', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 7, 1984, 'Calendar', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 1, 1985 and 'Calendar', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 2, 1985

<sup>70</sup>'Word is Out', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 7, 1984, p 21

GASA-6010 had arranged another screening at a later date preceding a public screening at the Labia.<sup>71</sup>

This was not to be the last showing of *The Word is Out*. It was again programmed as part of the Thursday Discussion Group a few months later, at the beginning of 1985. The Monthly Calendar advertises it extensively as follows:

*Now EVERY Thursday at the Community Centre, starting at 7.30 pm. 15th, 22nd and 29th of Feb., in three parts- the screening of 'Word is Out' a film from the USA, taking the form of interviews with many diverse gay people. In each case it will be followed by a discussion.*<sup>72</sup>

No other film in the newsletter records received such extensive screenings within the community groups and also in a public theatre. It is interesting to note that *The Word is Out* was screened at the end of 1984 and again at the beginning of 1985, the year of the biggest organised *Gay Convention* in South Africa, which Gevisser describes as 'a public exploration into the nature of gay life in this country the likes of which has not been repeated since.'<sup>73</sup> Perhaps the showing of such a political and heartfelt film also propelled South African Queer people, as it did Australian marchers in 1978, to take action against oppression by giving them positive self-images and courage to fight against injustice.

### ***Braamfontein Weekend Theatre***

It is evident when reading through the newsletters and scanning the social pages of these grassroots organisations, that there were very active communities, not necessarily in broad contact with each another, but nevertheless debating aspects of Queer representation, liberation, social cohesion, politics and pleasure. At the

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<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p 21. The Labia theatre, a well known arts cinema near *De Companje Tuine* in Capetown, is still in existence today.

<sup>72</sup>'Thursday Discussion Group', *Sixty Ten Newsletter*, Issue 1, 1985, 1985

<sup>73</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 49



micro-level, these movements were vital for the continuation of identity formation, and at the macro level, part of an ongoing struggle for Queer liberation in South African society.

One such event of cultural resistance which has come to light in terms of Queer South African Cinematic Culture, is *The Weekend Theatre* run by a small group of Wits drama students in Braamfontein in the early 1980s. This was the first manifestation of a small Queer resistant film culture, other than the two short super 8 films of Ernst Thorpe.

*The Weekend Theatre* was held in the small, one roomed apartment of Andrew Wordsdale and his lover at the time, Marius de Vos. The people involved in running the theatre created a stage in one corner of the apartment and held shows on weekends, where perhaps 30 to 50 people would cram into the flat and watch the performances. These shows varied from drag shows to small dramatic, multi-media productions. Krouse lived upstairs and was involved in the organisation of this theatre along with a group of friends from the Wits Drama School. He remembers:

*[W]e had people like funny drag queens come in and talking shit for a night and bringing along pretty boys and ripping off their shirts and doing funny suggestive things with bananas and that kind of thing to lip-synched songs...[I]t was never... like the New York of the sixties, where Andy Warhol had a following of twenty little starlets and a funny experimental cinema where he could show his art films and start an entire movement... [These] were sporadic incidences, and I am sure others have existed that I don't know about.<sup>74</sup>*

It was a space they created where a Queer sensibility and sexuality could be explored within the broader domain of the film and theatre in South Africa. Krouse

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<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*

suggests the groundwork laid by the group, in terms of assisting the development of a Queer cultural future, 'was to push the boundaries of the perceptions of other people in the arts community and inadvertently push forward the perceptions of people who took into account the opinions of those in the art industry.' It was also part of a small but significant exploration of Queer representation in film.

The first 'gay' film made within the group was related to the shows held at the *Weekend Theatre*. Wordsdale was the author of the film and it involved his partner de Vos. When de Vos was conscripted into the army in 1981/82, Wordsdale decided to put on a small performance called *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woof*, where the *I* was deliberately left out. Part of this performance was a multi-media video show of all their friends talking about their relationship with Marius and how they felt about him going of to the army. Krouse remembers:

*[Andrew ] took a video...their television set and he took his video machine - in those days they were enormous things- [and] he put it under the blanket... and the audience watched their bed basically, their little marital bed that was about to be torn apart and the video [of] talking heads of Marius de Vos' friends, all speaking about how they felt about the fact that he was going away to the army.<sup>75</sup>*

The audience was aware that it was about the two men's relationship and the effects of military conscription on their future together. From that perspective, it was perhaps the first 'gay' film produced within the group. Over the two nights it showed the effects on a small Queer community struggling with the repercussions of living in a South Africa that was not only institutionally racist and military, but also homophobic. Krouse suggests that *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woof* 'was a very meaningful display for the people in the room, because they could all understand

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<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

it was an acting out, a sort of an... inside, inner community acting out what military conscription was doing to a gay couple.'

Wordsdale and de Vos' relationship did not survive the separation and when de Vos came out of the army, left South Africa. Just before his departure, he wrote a play called *Tickets Cheap* where he and his new partner Andrew Morris took their entire bedroom to the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and in a style reminiscent of *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, acted out 'the dissolution of the relationship because he was immigrating.'<sup>76</sup>

### *International Queer Cinematic Influences*

In 1982, one of the first feature films which dealt with same-sex sexuality 'positively' and with 'minimum cuts' was released in South Africa. <sup>77</sup>The film was *Making Love*, (Arthur Hiller, 1982) starring Michael Ontkean, Kate Jackson and Harry Himlen. Botha recalls that what was startling about the film was the minimum censorship and that only the 'soentoneel [was] gesny. [En] waar die twee mans hulle hemde van mekaar afgehaal het is gestop op 'n sekere plek.'<sup>78</sup>[ the kissing scene was cut out. And the two men taking off their shirts were stopped at a certain point]. From here on, a flood of international films with some Queer themes began to appear on South African screens.



Figure 22

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<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Davis, Ken 'Getting it Together', *Johannesburg Star*, 1 June 1982

<sup>78</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

*Making Love* is the story of a married man who has to come to terms with his same-sex desires after falling in love with a male novelist. A review in the gay newspaper *Link/Skakel*, after its release in May 1982, praised its representation of same-sex issues:

*Making Love is in meer as een opsig 'n uitsonderlike rolprent. Dit is die eerste keer dat die probleem van 'n getroude gay so ondubbelsinnig onder die aandag van Suid Afrikaanse gehore gebring word. Dit is ook die eerste keer dat gays as doodgewone alledaagse mense voorgestel word en nie as karikature nie.*<sup>79</sup>

*Making Love is an outstanding movie for several reasons. It is the first time that the problems of married gay's were brought to the attention of South African audiences without ambiguity. It is also the first time that gays have been portrayed as ordinary people and not caricatures.*

The clearance for the film was issued only after a 'strong argument' by a Pretoria University Professor in legal Philosophy, Professor Jan van der Westhuizen, who insisted that 'the film had every right to be seen - particularly against the background of previous films which mocked homosexuality having been approved.'<sup>80</sup>

This movie was soon followed, in October the same year, with the first gay film premiere at a public cinema. The film was *Partners* (James Burrows, 1982) and critics suggested that although '[i]t was perhaps not the most perfect film ever made and its image of the gay made *The Boys in the Band* look like a revolutionary manifesto... the boys in the audience did not seem to mind.'<sup>81</sup> *Deathtrap* (Sydney Lumet, 1982) starring Michael Caine and Christopher Reeves as a gay playwright, was also shown at the time.

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<sup>79</sup>'SA sien ander beeld van gay', *Link/Skakel*, June 1982, p 11

<sup>80</sup>'Official OK for Film', *Link/Skakel*, May 1982, p 5. Presumably the films which mocked homosexuality and was approved would include movies such as *Cruising* and *Boys in the Band*, often mentioned by movie reviewers.

<sup>81</sup>'*Partners*: The crowd loved it', *Link/Skakel*, October 1982, p 9

In 1984 Fassbinder's *Querelle* (1982) and Mike Nicols' *Silkwood* (1983) were released on South African screens. *Querelle* was shown in the context of the Johannesburg Film Festival and was so popular that it was screened again on video at the regular Sunday night movie session in the local gay club, *The Residential Club* in Berea.<sup>82</sup> *Silkwood* also released in 1984, received a less positive response from a reviewer in *Link/Skakel*:

*Meryl Streep as Karen Silkwood is faultless. Kurt Russel as Karen's lover is completely credible but Cher, as Karen's lesbian housemate is so unremarkable as to be entirely forgettable, Oscar nomination notwithstanding.*<sup>83</sup>

*Another Country* (Marek Kaniévska, 1984) and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (Hector Babenco, 1985) was also released in 1985 and 1986. The movie critic for the new lesbian and gay paper *Exit*, known only as Petronius, commented on *Another Country*:

*[A]t the risk of being boring and doctrinaire I think that a gay audience has to think twice about a film that begins with an exquisite lad committing suicide from the shame of having been caught masturbating with another boy.*<sup>84</sup>

He did suggest, however, that the characters involved were 'charged with a sweet intense eroticism that has eluded almost every other gay film ever made... like *Cruising* and *Making Love*'.<sup>85</sup> Petronius also reviewed *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* and quoted John Hurt as saying that *Making Love* had been turning point for making actors feel more comfortable in 'positive' gay roles.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Its all happening at The Res Club', *Link/Skakel*, April 1984, p 9

<sup>83</sup>South, Joan 'Streep saves disappointing film', *Link/Skakel*, April 1984

<sup>84</sup>Petronius, "Fear and loathing in 'Another Country'", *Exit*, September 1985, p 9

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, p 9

<sup>86</sup>Petronius, "First Oscar for gay character in 'Kiss of the Spiderwomen'", *Exit*, May 1996, p 8

### *Emerging Gay and Lesbian/Queer Film Festivals*

Perhaps the increase in films with lesbian and gay themes produced in Hollywood was a contributing factor to the emergence of 'the first full-scale gay film festival in South Africa'.<sup>87</sup> Plans for the festival, which was to be held in April/May of 1985, to 'coincide with the planned gay convention in Johannesburg'<sup>88</sup> and organised by the Wits Gay Movement (co-ordinated by James Burt), were revealed at the end of 1984 in *Link/Skakel*.

The movies, which were to be screened at Wits had not been chosen and it was hoped that gay people themselves would ring in to suggest titles. In January of 1985, in conjunction with advertisement for the 1985 gay convention, it was announced that part of the activities would include a film festival which would show '[a] range of gay films that ha[d] been screened over the past years, and maybe a brand new surprise'.<sup>89</sup> The convention, or *Gay OK '85* as it was named, was organised by the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) and was to be held at the *President Holiday Inn*, Johannesburg.

It is difficult to find information about the actual film festival that year, assumed to have been held as planned during the convention from 30 May to 2 June 1985. Part of the reason is that the local gay paper, *Link/Skakel*, which usually reported on such events, was banned by the Publications Control Board who deemed it 'offensive'. The editor of the then newly formed *Exit*, and also the previous editor of *Link/Skakel*, Henk Botha, commented that 'the decision by GASA decision makers not to appeal against the ban, marked not only one of the worst blows to

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<sup>87</sup>Film fest on cards', *Link/Skakel*, December 1984, p 16

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p 16. The first gay convention was thought to have been organised in 1982. The organisers of this initiative proposed that, '[a]lthough this is probably the first time such an event will be organised in South Africa, we intend doing it on a very grand scale, but with a distinctly local flavour.' 'Plans rolling for Gay Day', *Link/Skakel*, August 1982, p 11

<sup>89</sup>'Help set wheels in motion', *Link/Skakel*, January/February 1985, p 2

the gay liberation cause in general, but also the beginning of the end for *Link/Skakel* as we knew it'. To fill the gap, *Exit* took over and aimed to build on the achievement of *Link/Skakel*, by making the South African gay public aware of the need for 'indigenous' gay writing.<sup>90</sup>

*Exit* appeared in July 1985, a month after the convention and commented on the success of *Gay OK '85* by suggesting: 'The National Convention held by GASA in Johannesburg over the Republic Day long weekend, proved undeniably - and for all to see - that South African gays are fast growing up to face the world with pride and dignity.'<sup>91</sup> The only mention of films, however, comes from reports on the Gay Solidarity Week Celebrations held in Pretoria at the end of June that year, in commemoration of the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969, where 'a group discussed pornography in the movies...[and] on another night...videos were shown on AIDS.'<sup>92</sup> The convention, however, had a big impact on the participants and heralded the beginning of several, subsequent Queer cinematic cultural events in South Africa.<sup>93</sup>

### ***The Problem with Racism and the Delmas Treason Trials***

Although GASA organized important Queer events such as *Gay OK '85* and raised consciousness in South Africa on many levels, its apolitical stance, part of a strategy to have a larger membership and act as a support group, was to be the cause of its eventual demise. Its non-confrontational stance towards both Queer

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<sup>90</sup>'Adapt or die is not a cliché', *Exit*, No 1, July 1985, p 2

<sup>91</sup>'Four days of pride', *Exit*, No 1, July 1985, p 2

<sup>92</sup>'Solidarity from border to border', *Exit*, No 1, July 1985

<sup>93</sup>'Fourth Man' not to be missed", *Exit*, May 1986. In 1986 Paul Verhoeven's *Die Vierde Man* (1983) was screened as part of the 'Mardi Gay' cultural festival.

'Gay film festival with wide choice', *Exit*, January 1987. In February 1987 GASA Rand, the gay organisation of the Witwatersrand also held a gay film festival in its community centre from the 8th - 15th of that month. The *GASA Rand Gay Filmfest*, as it was named, featured films such as *The Naked Civil Servant*, *An Early Frost* and *A Question of Love*.

'Gay film festival coming', *Exit*, April 1989, p 1. By 1989, 'the biggest gay festival ever in South Africa', including a film festival was held in Johannesburg.

sexual reform and Apartheid meant that many of the unjust laws against people of colour were not campaigned against.<sup>94</sup>

When a black, gay South African man named Simon Nkoli joined GASA in 1983, he was one of only a few black people in the organisation. Many Queer black people felt they were used only to 'blacken' the organisation with Nkoli suggesting that 'every time there was a function in a private house, the picture would be taken with the few darkies prominently displayed and would be sent overseas'.<sup>95</sup> GASA was trying at the time to join the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), but its apolitical stance was being questioned by a Scottish Homosexual Rights Group who suggested the organisation could not be non-racist if it was not actively opposed to Apartheid.

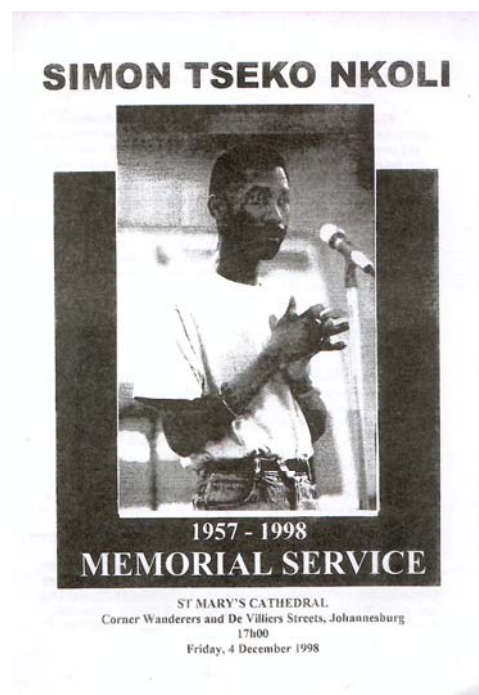


Figure 23

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<sup>94</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 53

<sup>95</sup>Nkoli, Simon Quoted by Mark Gevisser in Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1994, p 54



Black people were still, amongst other things, excluded from Queer bars because of the Apartheid laws and GASA did not want to contest these laws. They were not prepared to take on Apartheid laws, even though they themselves were treated unjustly by the State under these racial and sexual divisions placed on society. After disagreements and misunderstandings between the white and black members, the black members left GASA and decided to meet in the townships, where they created their own gay *shebeens* (township pubs).

Nkoli, however, stayed and organised the *Saturday Group*. Gevisser quotes Simon as saying the Saturday Group's 'main reason for existence was to provide counselling for black gay people trying to come out... We had white members and for the very first time in a South African gay organisation, some black women'.<sup>96</sup> The first two documentaries on Queer lives in South Africa, *A Moffie Called Simon* (John Greyson, 1986) and *Out in South Africa* (Melanie Chait, 1988), place Nkoli as critical to the Queer rights movement and its reconciliation with racism in South Africa.<sup>97</sup>

Nkoli's homosexuality was always a key part of his life, and he never shied away from expressing who he was openly and clearly. Writing from New York to Nelson Mandela in the early nineties, he argued:

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<sup>96</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 54

<sup>97</sup>Nkoli's first relationship was with an Afrikaner man named André and he not only fought for Queer rights, but was also a key fighter in the anti-Apartheid movement. His arrest along with other activists such as Terror Lekote and Popo Molefe and the consequent Delmas Treason Trial in 1984, saw him become an important figure in the resistance struggle and later a key player in convincing the ANC that homosexuality was not something to be feared.

*Dear Comrade Mandela,*

*What makes your visit [to New York] very moving is that you arrived during the most important week for the gays and lesbians of all races throughout the world. Just as black South Africans observe June 16 as the day of the Soweto Uprisings, gays and lesbians observe the last Sunday in June as the day of the Stonewall uprising when gay people... stood up to those things we know so well - repression and the denial of human rights. Of course the scale of state sanctioned violence is so much greater in South Africa. Nevertheless, certain analogies are appropriate. In our country, if you are placed under a banning order, you may not meet with more than one other person... Before 1969, every gay person was under a type of banning order - gays could be arrested for just drinking and talking with one another in a bar...*

*Under apartheid which tries to keep not only black and white [but] also gay and straight apart, at least 300 people are arrested each year for loving people of the same sex...*

*Like apartheid, homophobia turns black person against black person and tears families apart... More and more black gay people are moving into the so called grey-areas of the white cities, which also happens to be gay areas. It is safer for them than in their own communities... Women in the liberation movement have already taught us that there is no such thing as a main struggle for racial equality. I cannot separate the gay part of me from the black part of me, Just as our great women leaders cannot separate their identities as black people and women...*

*[T]he ANC has remained the voice of the people...because it has stuck to the principal of equality... This principle... impels us to fight for gay and lesbian liberation too.*

*Yours in the struggle for all the oppressed,*

*Tseko Simon Nkoli<sup>98</sup>*

The year Nkoli was arrested saw the beginning the collapse of GASA, partly because of its lack of support for him in the Delmas Treason Trials and the members' unwillingness to engage with issues of racial oppression. Gevisser argues:

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<sup>98</sup>Nkoli, Tseko Simon Glowletter: *The Newsletter of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand*, September 1990, pp 16 - 18

*[W]hile Nkoli was celebrated by the gay world abroad, he was at best ignored and at worst abandoned by South Africa's own gay movement... Nkoli's politics were intensely threatening to the [GASA's] conservative white membership, who feared that any support of Nkoli would be construed as support for the illegal liberation struggle.<sup>99</sup>*

The very month Nkoli was arrested, GASA became a member of the International Gay Association. Its response to Nkoli's arrest, ironically, was the very reason for its expulsion a year later and as Gevisser suggests, its consequent collapse.

### *The First Local Queer Films*

It was only in the late 1980s that 'open', locally produced gay/lesbian/Queer cinematic images began to appear in South Africa with productions such as Helen Nogueira's *Quest for Love*, (1987) and Matthew Krouse's *The Soldier*, (1988).

*Quest for Love*, released in 1988, was the first South African made film dealing with lesbianism in addition to inter-racial sex, in feature form and appeared seemingly out of the blue to the shock and amazement of South African audiences.<sup>100</sup> The main actors were Sandra Prinsloo and Jana Cilliers, two of the most prominent South African, and particularly, Afrikaner screen personalities. One reviewer

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<sup>99</sup>Gevisser, *op. cit.*, p 56. Nkoli was arrested in 1984 after a rent boycott demonstration in Sebokeng, charged with another 21 United Democratic Front activists for treason, held in custody for two years and then charged for murder in 1986. He was acquitted of murder during the trial, but the fact that GASA members could not support him and assume that he was innocent until proven guilty, and that they could not see that the Apartheid State was corrupt was part of the cause of their eventual collapse.

<sup>100</sup> *Quest for Love* is set in a fictitious, post independent African nation called Mozania. The name Mozania can perhaps be interpreted as a fusion between Moçambique and Azania (a pre-liberation name for South Africa). Based on a short novel by Gertrude Stein, Nogueira wrote the script in six days. The film starts off in Johannesburg, where Alex (Jana Cilliers) a journalist, has just been freed from a year in prison after having accused South Africa of military intervention in Mozania. She and her lover, Michael, played by Andrew Buckland, had both been imprisoned by the South African government for their reporting of the events. She leaves for Mozania to meet Dorothy, who had also been her lover. Although Alex has an affair with a local African man, she and Dorothy finally end up together.

commented: 'Wow we all thought, what is happening to the *volk* [nation] when two of its greatest actresses make love on the big screen.'<sup>101</sup>



Figure 24

A year before the film's release the Sunday newspapers had already caught onto the fact that two of South Africa's most famous actors were doing lesbian scenes and sensationalized the sexual aspects of the film. However, Prinsloo and Cilliers had taken on the roles seriously and were not dissuaded from doing the film, with Prinsloo playing the role of Dorothy, a marine biologist and Cilliers playing Alexandra, a journalist.<sup>102</sup> Another well-known South African actor, Joanna

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<sup>101</sup> Lotter, Karen 'Gay movie has dignity, reality', *Exit*, October 1988, p 7

<sup>102</sup> Prinsloo, Jeanne and Tomaselli, Keyan 'Third Cinema in South Africa' in Blignaut, Johan and Botha Martin (eds.), *Movies, Moguls, Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979-1991*, Showdata, Capetown, 1992, p 331. Nogueira had been working on feature films since 1985, when she produced *Fugard's People*. *Fugard's People* was still banned in South Africa at the time of the release of *Quest for Love*. Her production of *Quest for Love* stood out as a Queer beacon in an otherwise bleak South

Weinberg played Mabel, an actor herself and friend of Alex and Dorothy in a small supporting role.<sup>103</sup>

The appearance of such a film without any Queer Cinematic Cultural history, either in short, experimental or feature films in South Africa, is difficult to contextualise or comprehend. How could a film dealing so openly with same-sex sexuality and inter-racial sex appear seemingly out of nowhere?

Part of the answer lies in the specific opportunities created by tax incentive initiatives driving non-government film-making in South Africa at the time (see Chapter 4). Taking advantage of these incentives, distributor Anant Singh and the production companies Vision International and Elegant Film mustered the courage to produce a remarkable, sexually transgressive film.<sup>104</sup> There was not to be another Queer feature like it for more than 10 years.

Another reason for the film's sudden emergence lies in the specific background of the director, Helena Nogueira. Nogueira's interest in the politics of Southern Africa and lesbian and gay issues stems from her experience of racism in Moçambique where she lived with her family before they were forced to relocate to South Africa, and her confrontations with homophobia whilst living in London. She comments on these influences:

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African Film Culture, not only because it embraced issues such as lesbianism and inter-racial (albeit heterosexual) sex, but also because it featured some extraordinary South African actors.

<sup>103</sup> Lotter, *op. cit.*, p 7

<sup>104</sup> Prinsloo and Tomaselli, *op. cit.*, p 331

*I was living in London.... with an ex-boyfriend who is gay and because of that had a lot of contact with the gay world... In a way the intolerance and discrimination against the gays that I encountered there reminded me very much of the racial intolerance I experienced in Moçambique... While I was in London the Harvey Milk scandal was revived and Time Out hit the streets with a cover story on AIDS...Margaret Thatcher brought out Section 28 tightening the oppression against gays and I realized that if one allows any minority to be oppressed and persecuted, you are just opening the door to oppression and persecution of all minorities.<sup>105</sup>*

Although *Quest for Love* was an extraordinary film at that time in South Africa's history, commercial success eluded it. It had been sold to eleven countries, but in South Africa it only had a short screening period. Botha comments: '*Na twee weke was dit af van die circuit gewees. So eintlik het daardie film nie eintlik 'n impact gehad nie, as mens dit nou sou beskou in terme van die audience wat dit bereik het.*'<sup>106</sup> [After two weeks the film was off the circuit. So really that film did not have an impact, if you think in terms of audiences that it reached.]

Box office success or not, it was the first open representation of lesbian sexuality in the history of South African film making and in a feature film, a remarkable achievement considering the lack of same-sex sexual representation in South Africa at all in this period. In addition to having a woman director, the film crossed the racial-sexual lines, rare occurrences in South Africa in general.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Lotter, *op. cit.*, p 7. Harvey Milk was one of the first openly gay San Francisco city supervisors and was assassinated in 1978. Clause 28 in Britain stopped local Municipal Councils from 'intentionally promoting' homosexuality or take any steps that might recognize homosexual relationships as 'a pretend family relationship'. Miller, Neil *Out of the Past; Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to Present*, Vintage Press, New York, 1995, p 503

<sup>106</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>107</sup> Marx, Lesley 'Where Angels Fear to Tread' in Blignaut, Johan and Botha Martin (eds.), *Movies, Moguls, Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979-1991*, Showdata, Capetown, 1992, p 240-242. Of the 605 feature films made in South Africa between 1985 and 1989, only three were directed by women. The other two were Katinka Heyns' *Fiela se Kind* (*Fiela's Child*, 1988) and Elaine Proctor's *On the Wire* (1989).

Openly gay male characters in commercial films were still stubbornly absent from the screen. Botha questions this discrepancy between male and female same-sex representation in light of the South African political climate of the time, asking:

*Is daar geen Suid Afrikaanse akteur wat die moed het om gay te speel nie? Hoekom kon in 1987 twee van ons beste aktrises lesbian scenes speel, Jana Cilliers en Sandra Prinsloo? Hoekom het hulle die moed gehad binne die tyd van die kwaaieste oppression binne die land, om dit te doen? ... Ek praat nou van die manlike akteurs. Hoekom het hulle 'n probleem daarmee om gay te speel? Is die homofobia in die samelewing so erg dat iemand se loopbaan gekelder sal word as hy waag om gay te speel?* <sup>108</sup>

*Was there no South African male actor who had the courage to play gay? Why in 1987 could two of our best actresses play lesbian scenes, Jana Cilliers en Sandra Prinsloo? Why did they have the courage, in the middle of the most oppressive time in the land, to do this? I am talking now of the male actors. Why did they have problems playing gay? Is the homophobia in society so strong that someone's career would be destroyed if they played gay?*

Was there more fear of gay images because male same-sex relations were more threatening in a patriarchal culture? Did the earlier acceptance of lesbian films in fact reinforce women as less important and effectual, even when in same sex relationships? These questions remain to be answered.

Although no major gay male feature films were on the horizon, the first experimental Queer film made by gay men in South Africa, titled *The Soldier* (Matthew Krouse, 1988), soon appeared. *The Soldier* focused on issues related to same-sex sexuality and the military and the relationships of power between men in this institution.

It should perhaps not be surprising, given the strong male same-sex homophobia in South African society at the time and the role of the military in maintaining the status quo, that the first South African gay male resistance films should engage

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<sup>108</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

with military themes. As shown earlier, the military films of the 1970s allowed for a small homoerotic visual expression to take hold and laid the groundwork for further critique. Wordsdale's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woof*, started this critique of the military, which continued into the 21<sup>st</sup>- century with later films such as Gerald Kraak's *Property of the State: Gay Men in the Apartheid Military* (2002).<sup>109</sup> Gevisser commenting on these gay films suggests:

*[W]hat I... know about that sort of underground sub-culture and what I find very interesting about it is that is very tied up with the military and militarization... That is...my understanding of a gay underground.*<sup>110</sup>

One of the people involved in the making of *The Soldier*, Matthew Krouse, commented that the film was initially going to be one of a series of black and white episodes documenting the history of Apartheid through people having sex. He stated:

*We were going to make a big film about the whole of Apartheid history - fucking. We were so enamored by the idea, that we were going to do Van Riebeeck fucking, and this one fucking - everybody fucking. But what we decided to do was just defile the army uniform while we had the chance.*<sup>111</sup>

On 16 December, 1989 the crew sneaked into the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, a building commemorating the Afrikaner's victory over the Zulus at Bloodriver, known at the time by many Afrikaners as *Dingaans Dag* (Dingaan's Day) and in English as the Afrikaners' Covenant Day. Many of the participants in the film had experienced conscription in the South African army and they

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<sup>109</sup> *Property of the State* deals with the various abuses that took place in the South African military during the apartheid era and documents the lives of members of a Queer platoon, including people such as Mike Smith, Matthew Krouse, Greig Coetzee, Anthony Akerman, Damon Galgut and Sir Antony Sher.

<sup>110</sup> Gevisser, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>111</sup> Krouse, Interview, *op. cit.* Van Riebeeck was the first Dutch Governor of the Cape and he started the Dutch colony in Southern Africa in 1652.



constructed the film to be a critique of this institution. They were all still very angry about the state of the army and developed the film to reflect the abuse to which people in the military were subjected.

Initially the story was going to revolve around two men having sex on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Voortrekker Monument and be filmed on 16 December, perhaps in an attempt to insert a Queer history and sexuality into the dominant and oppressive, national, mostly Afrikaner, heterosexual narratives that infused the country. But as Krouse laughs: '[This] would have been the penultimate act and I would have been dead by now!'<sup>112</sup>

The film was eventually constructed around an inspection where a lieutenant goes around examining the bed of a young soldier, with footage of the Voortrekker Monument interspersed throughout. The complex, suppressed sexuality of the army and its destructive influence on many of the soldiers of all sexual persuasions were key concerns of the film makers. Krouse comments:

*What people would do in the army, is they would take cigarettes and burn female forms into their foam mattresses. After lights out in those dormitories, you could see rows of boys fucking their mattresses. A thing that was done in the army. While it was quite sexy on one level, it also showed the desperation people had come to.*<sup>113</sup>

*The Soldier* commented not only on the sexual frustration and loneliness of these men, but also on the hypocrisy of Afrikanerdom in subjecting these young men to institutions such as the army. Krouse comments on one of the scenes:

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

*So what we did was we had this inspection and this Lieutenant rips up the bed because he did not like the way its been made, finds this female form, burned with cigarettes into the mattress, throws the young boy down on the bed and sodomises him. That bed is supposed to duplicate as the tomb to the Unknown Soldier.<sup>114</sup>*

The Lieutenant raping the young soldier on the bed in a sense acts as a metaphor of the damage done to many other men by the institution of the army. It is a brutal and debilitating abuse of power, in the interest of a fearful and authoritarian regime.

*The Soldier* was shot in the Wits Auditorium and funding for the film came from Mary Slack, a relative of the Oppenheims, a prominent South African family, who after seeing the rushes donated R10 000 for the film to be developed. *The Soldier* could not be processed in South Africa because of censorship issues and Krouse recalls:

*We managed to smuggle, and this sounds very dramatic, but we did smuggle, the negative of The Soldier out of the country. We took it to a small laboratory that was processing 8mm and blowing them up to 16 mm in London, and then the laboratory burned down. However, I subsequently found ... one slash-negative - it sort of gets a run in order to make an interprint which you look at in order to edit off.<sup>115</sup>*

A 16mm version of this slash negative still exists and Krouse suggested that if it was found it would at least be a record of a very important film. From the photographic stills it appears that the film was done with heavy chiaroscuro, shadows overpowering the characters in an ominous tension. Interspersed within these images were dark, monumental shots of the friezes and bas-reliefs running around the inside of the Voortrekker Monument celebrating the Afrikaners'

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

victory over the Zulus. Eisenstein's monumental imagery of people overpowered by their environment come to mind.

### **Towards the New South Africa**

On February 18, 1990 Nelson Mandela was released. He had been incarcerated by the South African, minority government since 12 June 1964 and had been imprisoned for more than 26 years.

On 13 October 1990, the first Gay and Lesbian Pride march in Africa was held in Johannesburg. An ANC leader, Albie Sachs, in a message of support for the march wrote: 'What we are fighting for is a South Africa where everybody feels free, where there is no discrimination or abuse, and this march makes a contribution to that kind of South Africa. Many of us in the ANC would like to see a new constitution in South Africa that guarantees members of the Lesbian and Gay community full protection.'<sup>116</sup>

By 1994 South Africa had its first non-racial, democratic elections. Dr. Max Coleman, one of the National Chairs of the South African Human Rights Commission, embodies both the surprise and relief at the peaceful change of Government in South Africa with the following quote:

*The South African elections of April 1994 have been widely hailed as a 'political miracle' and the subsequent installation of South Africa's first democratically elected government [have been] referred to as the result of 'negotiated revolution'.<sup>117</sup>*

This momentous event saw the implementation of the first interim constitution for a New Democratic South Africa and entrenched in the core of that document were

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<sup>116</sup> Sachs, Albie 'Message of support for the march', *Glowletter*, September 1990, p 1

<sup>117</sup>Coleman, *op. cit.*, p 229

provisions of equal rights not just for people of different races, colours, genders and beliefs, but also for all Queer citizens of South Africa - the first in the world. It reads:

### *Equality*

1) *Every person shall have the right to equality before the law and to equal protection of the law.*

2) *No person shall be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, and, without derogating from the generality of the provision, on one or more of the following grounds in particular: race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language.*

3) *a. This section shall not preclude measurements designed to achieve the adequate protection and advancement of persons or groups or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, in order to enable their full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms.*<sup>118</sup>

That same year the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival was organised by Jack Lewis and Nodi Murphy in Capetown, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Durban. As demonstrated in this thesis, there had been smaller film festival held in various cities before on an erratic basis, but this was the first time that a national and inclusive Queer film festival was held and officially recognised and celebrated by the South African establishment.<sup>119</sup> It also played a significant part in the

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<sup>118</sup>Equality Clause, Section 8, *South African Constitution*

<sup>119</sup>'Weekly Mail Film Festival', *Glowletter*, September 1990, p 4. Specific gay and lesbian film festivals seemed to have disappeared by 1990, with the broader *Weekly Mail* Film Festival taking over the role of screening Queer themed films. A reviewer in the Queer press suggested that '[a]lthough having no specific gay and lesbian category' [The *Weekly Mail* Film Festival] did show two gay movies - Isaac Julian's *Looking for Langston* and a documentary feature called *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*. ... It is encouraging to see gay and lesbian films aired in SA. GLOW [Gays and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand] hopes to organise a Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festival at a later date to allow a wider range of films to be seen by a larger audience. Supplement to *The Weekly Mail*, October 16 to 22, 1992, pp 7 -11. By 1992, the sixth annual *Weekly Mail* Film Festival had a much broader selection of Queer themed films including *Poison*, *Oranges*

lobbying process to have sexual orientation included in the equality clause of the new South African constitution.

### ***The First Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival***

*[The First Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian] was right at the height of the constitutional debate... It was during the build up to the writing of the constitution, which was passed the following year, May 1995. So there was at the time a lot of lobbying around these issues and that made part of that event too.*<sup>120</sup>

The *First Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, was in part the result of a general build up of video evenings Jack Lewis had been organising since 1992, and in part because of a niche market Nodi Murphy saw opening up in South Africa.<sup>121</sup> Mostly, its success was due to the enormous shift in consciousness taking place in South Africa in this period of transition. Lewis remembers:

*[I]n that period there was a special atmosphere broadly round in South Africa... Everything was kind of special at that time and bathed in a special rainbow aura and nothing was quite real. It was a revolutionary moment in its own way, although the revolution was a very muted one, in terms of what had originally been envisaged for South Africa, but none the less, the enormity of what was happening, the former government voluntarily surrendering power, got to people, and at the Queer level people felt that something was happening... It is no co-incidence that the film -festival came into existence in that period. It is a symptom of what was going on, of catching the wave, also for Queers.*<sup>122</sup>

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*are Not the Only Fruit, Young Soul Rebels, The Lost Language of Cranes and The Fourth Man.* In addition, the FAWO/WM Shorts competition screened a short of one of the new directors of Queer South African Cinema, Luiz de Barros' *Pretty Boys After Dark*.

<sup>120</sup> Gevisser, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>121</sup> Lewis, Jack Interview, Muizenberg, 2 February 1999. Commenting on the nature of the film evenings he was organising prior to the first National Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Lewis suggests that they weren't exactly underground, but not entirely above board either: 'We were doing our own thing in 1992/93 - those shows I was talking to you about. But we just didn't ask anyone else's permission... we advertised informally. So our approach was more, I wouldn't say underground, but less official.'

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

The shift in consciousness and legal and social recognition, not only heralded Queer rights, but helped open up further space by advocating 'measurements designed to achieve ...adequate protection and advancement ... [in] order to enable... full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms.' Some space had already been carved out, but now much more attention could be focused on complete, open access and visibility.

As part of a political project to raise funds for a mostly Black Queer association, ABIGALE (Association for Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians) and building on the atmosphere of the prevailing expectations, Lewis decided in 1992/93 to organise several video evenings of Queer films, mostly chosen from his personal collection. Lewis remembers:

*The South African gay and lesbian film festival started because I was active with the forming of ABIGALE, the first black led gay organisation in Capetown. It was always a majority black run organisation... To raise money for the organisation I started taking some of the video's that I had and started showing them at places like Jazz Art and Don Pedro's... and what we found was that the A gay set from Camps Bay and Bantry Bay and Clifton was prepared to roll up to Jazz Art and sit on the bloody floor on crates to watch gay movies/Queer movies on video projector and stay around for a drink.<sup>123</sup>*

Lewis showed movies such as Bruce la Bruce's *No Skin of my Ass* and *Desert Hearts*. Most of the titles weren't widely available, or available at all in South Africa and it was the first time that many people saw Queer films which in other countries had been screened since the 1970s. The evenings were hugely successful and attracted large and varied crowds.

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<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

*It was those screenings, of which there might have been half a dozen or more... that gave the impetus to form the formation of the Festival... I started organising the first film festival on my own and... Nodi actually joined me, about a month away from the opening. She had much more film festival experience and provided that critical input which I think was what made the first festival such a success.<sup>124</sup>*

The film festival know-how of Murphy, the co-organiser of the first *Out in Africa* festival, complemented Lewis' more community based background. From a film festival point of view, having worked on three of the major South African film festivals, the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* Film Festival section in Capetown, the *Capetown International Festival* and through those offices on the *Grahamstown Festival's* film component, Murphy realised that in addition to the political project, there was a definite niche market for lesbian and gay film in South Africa. She comments:

*I, for purely exploitative reasons had noticed that gay and lesbian films did quite well and there was obviously a gap in the market here. [T]he last time I worked on the Capetown International Film Festival, we had a film from Israel called *Amazing Grace* which did incredibly well, and I was trying to persuade James [the organiser] to have more and more queer movies as a side bar, to have at least three, because they would make us money... [I]t was in that that I decided I would phone up all the queer organisations... and therefore bumped into Jack<sup>125</sup>*

With solid political, social and economic rationale, in a climate of increasing liberalism, the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival was planned. It aimed to embrace a wide range of Queer issues including coming out stories,

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<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>Murphy, Nodi Interview, *Out in Africa* Film Festival Office, Capetown, 12 January 1999. 'Jack said he would love to tell me what films he would love to show but he had two hats on his head here because he was also going to try and get a lesbian and gay film festival together. So I kind of mustered my way in...[and] he said very sweetly, 'I think we should meet.' So we did and we got on like a house on fire.'

sexuality, race, alternative families and AIDS. It was to serve an educational and well as an entertainment purpose.

*Out in Africa* was organised around a manifesto developed by a voluntary film festival committee, keen to see the development of a not-for-profit association which would 'support gay and lesbian equality and visibility and promote gay and lesbian film-makers in South Africa.'<sup>126</sup> The committee included key people from ABIGALE (The Association of Gays, Bisexuals and Lesbians), GLOW (The Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand) and the Gay Persons Health Forum. Representing these organisations were people such as Simon Nkoli who also later established TAP (Township AIDS Project) and Zackie Achmat, activist, film-maker and co-founder of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition and TAC.<sup>127</sup>

The manifesto, originally more orientated towards an educative agenda addressing the 'anomalous situation where the level of awareness... amongst the gay and lesbian population as well as the readiness of the straight populations lag[ged] behind the tremendous promise of equality',<sup>128</sup> included in its final draft three main aims. The first one was to form a presence as part of the national campaign for the retention of the sexual orientation clause on the Bill of Rights of the interim constitution; the second was to promote visibility; and the third was to assist in helping people become aware of HIV/AIDS. The introduction to the first festival reads:

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<sup>126</sup>'Manifesto of the Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee', *Report on the 1st South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, Johannesburg, Capetown, Durban, Bloemfontein, June-July 1994

<sup>127</sup>'Introduction', *First SA Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* draft outline, p 1

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p 1



*South Africa's past was one of infamous repression - its future holds the hope of building a democratic, tolerant and free society. This is as true in the realm of sexuality as in every other area of life... [However], [g]ay rights might be in the constitution, but they're not yet in our lives... We believe that this festival will give gay men, lesbians and bisexuals a chance to build their self-recognition and self-worth. We believe it will prompt everyone... to recognise the validity of gay and lesbian experience and creativity.<sup>129</sup>*

Elaborating on the first purpose, it was suggested that as the largest, national, public lesbian and gay event, the film festival 'provide[d] an important focus that w[ould] assist in keeping issues pertaining to gay and lesbian equality on the political agenda.'<sup>130</sup> The need to mobilise politically was instrumental in ensuring the clause protecting against discrimination in the interim constitution was retained. Mentioning the international move towards recognising lesbian and gay rights was also an important political point.

Lesbian and gay visibility was the center piece of the second aim. It was suggested that '[u]nlike other groups which society has traditionally discriminated [against], this invisibility is a unique form of discrimination which affects [gays and lesbians]. It prevents [gays and lesbians] from conducting... relationships and declaring... identities openly and forces many ... to lead secretive, hidden existence[s]'<sup>131</sup> The festival aimed partly to educate and explain aspects of gay and lesbian lives and foster an acceptance in the broader community, elaborating on arguments for equality.

The third purpose, in recent developments in South Africa perhaps one of the most important social issues facing the African continent as a whole, was HIV/ AIDS education. HIV/ AIDS is not only a gay issue in South Africa, although the festival committee suggested '[g]ay and lesbian communities internationally have played a

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<sup>129</sup>'Introduction', *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Program, 1994

<sup>130</sup>Manifesto of the Out-In-Africa Film Festival Committee', *op. cit.*

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

leading role in pioneering effective HIV/ AIDS education'.<sup>132</sup> The spread of HIV/ AIDS is an African wide phenomenon.

The film festival aimed to promote safer sex practices through a selection of films and ancillary events among the lesbian and gay communities. Five months later, in March 1995, a separate film festival, titled the *AIDS Film Week* was organised by the *Out in Africa* board, in support of the *Global Network of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS* conference held in Capetown. It was in recognition of the great threat HIV/ AIDS had on all the people of Africa.<sup>133</sup>

The first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1994, however, had HIV/ AIDS awareness as a side-bar, not a central focus. Guided in its trajectory by the three aims of national presence, visibility and HIV/ AIDS education, it was organised on R30 000 and was received with enormous enthusiasm by more than 17 000 people attending screenings all over South Africa. Honorary Patrons of the festival included international Queer film-makers such as Barbara Hammer, Greta Schiller, Isaac Julian and the well known South African political satirist and drag celebrity, Evita Bezuidenhout (alias Pieter-Dirk Uys). The new political climate and the pro-Queer clause in the interim constitution, added to the jubilations of the event. Lewis states:

*The first festival in 1994 [was] straight after the elections and there was an atmosphere there that was electric... For the people who attended, outside of the election itself, it was the social occasion of the year....The atmosphere was something like - I have never been to a social event which hummed quite in that way.*<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup>*Report on the AIDS Film Week, in Support of the GNP+ Conference, Nu Metro Cinema, Sea Point 3 - 9 March 1995*

<sup>134</sup>Lewis, Interview, *op. cit.*

The movies which were shown included Queer classics such as Derek Jarman's *Sebastian* (1976) and Barbara Hammer's *Dyketactics* (1974) to recently released, and very well received films such as *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Australia, Stephan Elliot, 1993) and Isaac Julian's *The Darker Side of Black*, (UK, 1994). Films ranged from experimental texts to documentaries and full feature films. It attracted huge Queer and non-Queer crowds and set the precedent to come not only for Queer film festivals, but also for other South African film festivals.

Murphy remembers:

*What we did... was absolutely phenomenal. We ran the first gay and lesbian festival, we did it in four cities, we did it over a month, we did it through June and July. We ran for two weeks in Johannesburg, a week in Durban, two weeks in Capetown and a week in Bloemfontein... We couldn't get the people out of the foyers into the cinemas. We had all of a sudden provided an incredible social space for an awful lot of queer people who were thirsting for that.*<sup>135</sup>

The opening night was attended by many South African officials, itself a unique development in South African Queer history. The key political and symbolic moment arrived when Jesse Duarte, the PWV's Minister of Safety and Security (Gauteng), delivered a speech to an audience including the regional commander Brigadier Jacque de Vries, which for the first time in South Africa, officially recognised gays and lesbians and offered them complete protection by the law under the new constitution. In her speech she argued in relation to social change that:

*[M]indsets and cultures have to be done away with too. It is one thing... to have your rights and equality within the law, it is quite another to have them each day in the street, at work, in the bar, in public places where you socialise, where you cruise.*<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Murphy, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>136</sup>Duarte, Jesse Quoted in Pretorius, Willem 'Festival in Retrospect', *Exit*, Issue 66, 1994, p 13

Her frankness and commitment was phenomenal. The fact that she proposed that Queer rights should even be extended to cruising grounds, made it an extraordinary outreach from a governing body, unparalleled in countries such as Australia. Other speakers included Justice Edwin Cameron and Makaziwe Mandela, the University of the Witwatersrand Equal Opportunities Chief and the then president's daughter. If one event could signify the coming of age in South Africa of Queer rights, it would arguably have to be the *First Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival opening night in Johannesburg.

### ***Political Outcomes: The National Gay and Lesbian Coalition***

One of the key Queer political outcomes from the first film festival was the establishment of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition.<sup>137</sup> The sense of community generated from the interaction of a group of people who were rarely together on mass at specifically Queer Cultural events, brought about a great sense of belonging and purpose. The report on the film festival alludes to this sense of community building:

*One of the most rewarding aspects of the festival was the palpable sense of community that characterised the atmosphere from the opening night to the close. The festival succeeded in drawing gay and lesbian people together from all sections of our diverse community and creating a sense of presence, creating a tangible sense of self-recognition as part of civil society.*<sup>138</sup>

As Searle suggests, screen cultures can be sites for mobilisation.<sup>139</sup> In the South African context, the very site of the film festival became the organisational ground of a national body for gay and lesbian rights. A broader concern for all discrimination faced by Queer people, developed out of this specifically Queer

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<sup>137</sup>Murphy, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>138</sup> 'Introduction', *Report on the 1st South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, *op. cit.*

<sup>139</sup>Searle, *op. cit.*, p 10

cinematic forum, because it offered one of the only opportunities for a collective coming together in pleasure and celebration.

Pride marches were also sites of mobilisation, but they did not seem to carry as much social possibility as the film festival. Pride organisers themselves found that the film festival offered an opportunity to meet and discuss plans. As Murphy comments, the festival also gave an impetus to those concerned with 'the organisation of the Pride marches and other positive manifestations of our existence as an equal and accepted part of social life.'<sup>140</sup>

The film festival acted as a mobilising force in a similar fashion to the way the Mardi Gras did in Sydney. It offered a forum space and a meeting ground for activist and community leaders in a spirit of pleasure and replenishment. And a better social adhesive is hard to find, for in the context of numerous film texts dealing specifically with relevant and contemporary issues facing all Queer people, what more significant event can bring about such a broad range of discussions, debates and concerns and help activate a large group of people for the betterment of their own lives. Queer film festivals played a key role in bringing about co-ordinated community activism.

### *Township Showings*

South Africa's history of segregation has left the country divided not just economically and racially, but also physically. One of the greatest difficulties in organising a multi-racial event, was finding practical solutions to the great physical distances people of different races had to travel to get to common points. This has led to one of the most difficult problems for the film festival. Botha commented in 1998:

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<sup>140</sup>Murphy, Interview, *op. cit*

*Op hierdie stadium is die fees verskriklik toeganklik tot wit gays... Dit sluit 'n redelike groot deel van die swart en bruin gay populasie uit. Daar is byvoorbeeld nie enige ekwivalente van die fees in die Kaapse vlakte bv. of in enige van die townships nie, behalwe downtown Johannesburg met twee of drie vertonings.<sup>141</sup>*

*At this point, the festival is very accessible to white gays. It locks out a rather large proportion of the black and brown gay population. There is for example, no equivalent of the festival in the Cape flats or any of the townships, with the exception of two or three showings in downtown Johannesburg.*

The first film festival, however, had showings in venues in the townships of Soweto and Guguletu. This was an attempt to get the films out to as broad a range of Queer South Africans as possible. Film-maker Barbara Hammer's workshop was also held in the township, for similar reasons.<sup>142</sup>

The aim was to reach an audience that would not necessarily come into town. The issues that were of concern to the organisers, were not just related to getting balanced representations into the festival program where gender and race were concerned, but also to address the specific problems related to the segregated living conditions of blacks, coloureds and whites. Hammer, after she had realised just how difficult it was for people from the township to get into town, raised funds to help pay for transport to the festival. Murphy comments, however, that splitting audiences caused its own problems:

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<sup>141</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>142</sup> Report on the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, *op. cit.*, pp 10-11

*I have been quite a champion so to speak... in victorious terms... that I don't want to split the audiences. We have done it a couple of times where we've gone into the townships and showed films there. Obviously your audience is going to be all black, because whites aren't going to go into the townships, and I don't want to split the audience. I want some kind of cohesion. I want the recognition of differences yes, but ... there also has to be a recognition of what we have in common... There are [also] not the venues in the townships.<sup>143</sup>*

Murphy also suggests that there must be a recognition of entertainment priorities in the new South Africa. The American films that had so easily been available, had affected the reception skills of all South African communities.<sup>144</sup> Educating the communities in terms of visual languages is a major focus of the festival. She also argues that there needs to be a recognition that many people simply cannot afford going to a film and have much simpler needs for entertainment. The combination of race, class and poverty has had a huge impact on the types of audiences and venues that could be utilized.

### ***Skeef Cinema Entja: New Queer South African Cinema*<sup>145</sup>**

What becomes clear when analyzing the number of Queer films produced in South Africa, post-Apartheid until 1999, is that there was a significant increase in Queer films and their quality, creating a unique South African Queer Cinematic Culture. This South African Queer Cinematic Culture continuously referenced and integrated Queer histories into the legacies and history of Apartheid, linked its themes to the homophobic oppression of institutions such as the South African military and attempted interventions into the representation of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The focus on documentaries and the reclamation of South African Queer Histories was also a key feature of the moving images that emerged in this decade.

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<sup>143</sup>Murphy, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup>*Entja* translates as new in Zulu and is often used to describe the new, post-Apartheid South Africa. The title, *Skeef Cinema Entja*, therefore, roughly translates as New Queer Cinema.

The *Out in Africa* film festival kick-started this development in part when in 1995 it began a film development initiative for short films. The philosophy behind this initiative was to encourage a culture where short, but significant moving images could be produced for South African Queer people, particularly by black South African Queer film maker. Lewis suggested:

*We believe that we can create a black audience if we put films by young black South African film-makers on the screen. It will be a small audience to begin with, but it will be an audience of their friends, family, organisational contacts, to come along and see what [someone's] done... And the word will get out and next time she does a film the audience will be bigger and in that way we will build a black audience for our festival... It will inevitably be a video driven festival because we aren't going to be able to do hundreds of half-million rand M-net New Directions type things. We need the... one, three, twenty [minute], half-hour, one hour, video made projects [to build] up the depth of work of other countries and we can do that.*<sup>146</sup>

The first two films that emerged from the project were titled *Vula Ucano* (1995) and *Signs* (1995). They were made in small groups assisted by filmmakers John Greyson and Catherine Saalfeld and supported by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology as part of the then emerging government assistance for the representation of marginal voices.<sup>147</sup>

*Vula Ucano* is set in one of the townships and deals with the tribulations and difficulties of being gay and black. *Signs* is set on a railway station platform, with the main focus a bench covered in labels reminiscent of the Apartheid days, starting off with a *Whites Only* sign. This sign gets thrown away, and is replaced with new signs, with people from different races, genders and sexual orientations taking turns to use the bench to oppress others, eventually coming to a sign saying *Straights Only*,

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<sup>146</sup>Lewis, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>147</sup>*Out in Africa* Film Festival Committee Report, 1995, p 9



and ending with the acceptance of difference. Linking homophobia with racism, the films points to the multi-dimensional nature of oppression, where the different types of discrimination often overlap, inform and replace each another.

1995 also saw the production of *Hot Legs* by Luiz de Barros and *The Dress* by Stephen Jennings. De Barros, dubbed by Botha as 'an important new voice in the creation of a South African gay and lesbian cinema' started with previous films such as *Pretty Boys* and *Clubbing*. *Hot Legs* is the story of Tim, a gay Doctor who is holding Dave, his ex-lover, captive in a hotel room to examine what led them to be the people they had become. Botha comments: 'Although psychologically troubled, both characters are attractive, non-stereotypical gays. They are not falling into the traps of either being sissies or villains, just two human beings trying to sort out their conflict within a homophobic society.'<sup>148</sup>

*The Dress* by Stephen Jennings is the story of a younger man who has an affair with an older man, and then gets abused by his lover as a consequence. Shot in black in white it is a study on domestic abuse, but also on the possibilities that emerge through the connections and love that can be formed between two people.

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<sup>148</sup> Botha, Martin 'Homosexuality and South African Cinema', *Kinema*, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, Spring 2003, [www.arts.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca) Accessed 22 April 2003



Figure 25

Another important film-maker who emerged post-Apartheid is the co-director of the first *Out in Africa* film festival himself, Jack Lewis. In 1997 Lewis produced *Dragging at the Roots* (initially titled *A Normal Daughter*) and in 1998 *Sando to Samantha: aka the art of Dikvel*, with Thulanie Phungula. Lewis commented that:

*There is a need to do Queer product [such as] Sando to Samantha, because that's [had] a fantastic impact in South Africa precisely because it has a black or specifically coloured vibe about it and aesthetic characters, mannerisms [and] responses that people relate to and they look at this and they say they can see themselves. They see people they know in those films in a way that they don't when they watch a Westcoast film or something that has come out of a Californian Film School. I've really noticed this and this has been vindicated for me.*<sup>149</sup>

*Sando to Samantha* is the story of Sando Willemse, a young man of mixed race descent, who works as a prostitute and performs in drag shows under the name Samantha Fox. The film is a mixture of documentary style representations which

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<sup>149</sup>Lewis, Interview, *op. cit.*

include actual interviews with Willemse and footage of the *moffie* shows held in the Cape and a dramatisation by actors performing events that led up to Willemse's conscription into the South African armed forces. This docu-drama combination tells the tale of his life in the army and the role he forged for himself as a drag queen under the oppression and the sometimes unexpected pleasures the army produced. His army life ended abruptly when he was outed as HIV positive by his senior officers in front of his troop and dismissed.

Also produced in 1998 was *The Man who Drove with Mandela*. Botha comments: 'In a glittering ceremony at the 49<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival a full-length South African film, *The Man who Drove with Mandela* won the documentary Teddy Prize. It was rewarded for its unique contribution to gay and lesbian history and for bringing forward a challenging and politically engaging subject.'<sup>150</sup> The film was set around the life of a gay man Cecil Williams, played by a British actor Corin Redgrave.

Like *Sando to Samantha*, *The Man Who Drove With Mandela* is a drama style documentary countering the lack of Queer visual histories through dramatizations. The life of this South African theatre director, communist party member, ANC supporter and gay man, Cecil Williams, was an attempt to link the various identities some Queer people in South Africa were engaged with and to show that resistance to Apartheid was a complex and multi-layered process involving people from many social strata, sexualities and races.

Support by Government organisations of alternative South African visions and histories dramatically increased the output of Queer films in South Africa in the post-Apartheid era. *Apostles of Civilised Vice* (1999), a seminal history of South African lesbian and gay lives directed by Jack Lewis and Zachie Achmat was

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<sup>150</sup> Botha, 'Homosexuality and South African Cinema', *op. cit.*

completed in 1999 and Queer images and histories such as these were key markers of the major shifts that had occurred in the country. *Apostles of Civilised Vice* displayed a wide range of histories, examined in part in this chapter, and brought diverse Queer subjects from all races, classes, genders and backgrounds to the South African consciousness. It documented the scattered Queer of histories of South Africa, often disconnected completely from each other, and pulled them together into a rich quilt of Queer South African experiences.



Figure 26

A film titled *Pressure*, in production by de Barros, received R200 000 in 1999 from the New Film Fund established by the Department of Arts and Culture and started shooting in June 2000. *Pressure* is about the friendship between three straight men who have sex with each other, and if realized, will be one of the few long South African films dealing with Queer sexuality that will not be in documentary form.

The most recent and critically successful Queer feature film, however, is *Proteus*, a co-production with Canada, with financing from the National Film and Video

Foundation (NFVF), Telefilm Canada and several Canadian broadcasters. It was directed by John Greyson and Jack Lewis and produced by Steven Markovitz and Platon Trakoshis from *Big World Cinema*. Botha comments:

*Based on a true story, it is a period film that raises issues still of enormous relevance today. Historian and filmmaker Jack Lewis was fascinated by a court record in the Cape Archives, dated 18 August 1735, giving judgment in the case of two Robben Island prisoners. Dutch sailor Rijkhaart Jacobsz and Khoe convict Claas Blank received extreme sentences for what the court called 'the abominable and unnatural crime of Sodomy'. The film features five languages - English, Afrikaans, Dutch, Nama and Latin<sup>151</sup>*

*Proteus* is arguably one of the most successful Queer films in terms of its engagement with multi-dimensional issues around race, class and sexuality, perhaps even in global terms. Using several languages and giving agency to people of all races, the film's structure sets it apart as one of the most succinct Queer films dealing with racial and cultural differences to date.



Figure 27

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<sup>151</sup>Botha, Martin 'The Song Remains the Same: the Struggle for a South African Audience 1960-2003', *Kinema*, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, Spring 2004. [www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca) Accessed 10 July 2004

### *African Lesbian Images*

In 2001, a black lesbian-of-colour film-maker Beverly Ditsie made the first Queer film by a black South African woman titled *Simon and I*. She co-directed the film with Nicky Newman as a documentary which was part of a Social Transformation and Empowerment Project (Step). The Steps for the Future documentary series, initiated by Iikka Vehkalahti, the senior commissioning editor of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, raised R20 million and commissioned about 40 films to examine issues of HIV/AIDS.<sup>152</sup>



Figure 28

Another film, co-directed by a young African gay man, Mpumi Njinge and Paola Alberton, who now lives in Sydney, titled *Everything must come to Light*, was shot in 2000. *Everything must come to Light* is a film about three same-sex identified *Sangomas* or traditional healers. The three women live in Soweto and two of them, after

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<sup>152</sup> Mabanga, 'Aids Day airing for Steps', *Mail and Guardian*, 30 November 2001, [archive.mg.co.za](http://archive.mg.co.za) A film titled *6000 a Day* by Australian born filmmaker Peter Brooks, was also commissioned and screened as part of the Steps project. Accessed 13 April 2003

leaving their husbands, were instructed by their male spiritual ancestors to take wives. The documentary examines the role their healing power and sexuality plays in their lives as *sangomas* and was co-produced by the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa and the *Out in Africa* film festival.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the progress in South Africa, one of the most debilitating developments for Queer right in the Southern Africa region in recent times has been the anti-Queer backlash that has occurred in neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, Uganda and Zambia.<sup>154</sup> Despite or perhaps in response to this developing homophobia, a lesbian film was made in Zimbabwe in 2002 titled *Forbidden Fruit* and shown at the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. Directed by Sue Maluwe Bruce and Beathe Kunath, it is the story of two rural women, Nongoma and Tsistsi, who fall in love and find ways to negotiate the homophobia in their community. When their relationship is discovered, they have to face the wrath of their families.

The making of *Forbidden Fruit* was a difficult process. Just days before the shooting was to start, the entire cast pulled out because of fear of repercussions from the government. Malawu Bruce eventually rounded up enough friends and family to complete the film. Julia Beffon, a critic for the *Mail and Guardian* commented on *Forbidden Fruit*:

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<sup>153</sup> *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Program, 2003

<sup>154</sup> Simo, Ana 'The Bermuda Triangle of African Homophobia', 28 March 2001, [www.thegully.com](http://www.thegully.com) Accessed 9 August 2003. Simo suggests: 'The diversionary use of lesbian and gay people as national scapegoats has turned parts of the region into a kind of dangerous Bermuda Triangle of homophobia...The escalating war of words by Mugabe homophobic-copycats like the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni and Zambia's President Frederick Chiluba, besides Namibia's Nujoma, may well translate into a disaster – a flood of tortured, dead, imprisoned, deported queers, instead of the current, nearly invisible trickle.'

*If you'd asked me a couple of months ago what I thought the country of origin of the best lesbian film at this years Out in Africa festival would be, I seriously doubt whether Zimbabwe would have sprung to mind. An African country with a sketchy movie history, a struggling economy and a homophobic nutter as a president is not the most obvious candidate for the honour...Maluwa Bruce is an inspired story teller – not just a film-maker, but as a narrator/actor... but this is no Romy and Juliet in the African bush, it's a delightful story told simply and with charm.<sup>155</sup>*

With infra-structure such as the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival assisting in the screening of stories such as *Forbidden Fruit*, South African Queer Cinematic Cultures here ensured that Queer issues were never off the agenda for Africa.

### **Towards the Future: South African Queer Cinematic Support**

*Out in Africa's* role has only increased since its inception in 1994 and more recently it has started to co-produce films and become involved in film distribution.<sup>156</sup> In 2003 *Out in Africa* developed a *Video Suitcase* project which was aimed at distributing around 30 Queer titles to rural areas in Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The British Council in Capetown sponsored the project, and the Rainbow Project in Namibia and the Gay and Lesbian Association of Zimbabwe were all involved. Cross-border initiatives were incredibly important as the rise of homophobia in neighbouring countries continued unabated.

In 2004, renowned filmmaker Rikki Beadle Blair directed the *Out in Africa* Just a Minute Filmmaking Workshop, which produced nine films that were selected to be screened at the 2005 London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. In 2005 he directed the 4 More Filmmaking Workshop for 15 minute documentaries, where four filmmakers were selected from 17 submissions. The four films to be screened at the 2005 *Out in Africa* film festival includes *Barman* by Stanimir Stoykov and Sasa

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<sup>155</sup> Beffon, Julia 'Zimbabwe lesbians on top', *Mail and Guardian*, 15 February, 2002, archive.mg.co.za Accessed 13 April 2003

<sup>156</sup> *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Program, 2003



Stojovic, *Breaking the Silence* by Fanney Tsimong, *Enraged by a Picture*, Zanele Muholi and *Outlaw Culture* by Phybia Dlamini.<sup>157</sup>

As an organization, *Out in Africa*, not only contributes to the production of new Queer images in South Africa, but is at the forefront of increasing Queer visibility throughout Africa. It has been instrumental in developing a strong, heterognotic Queer Cinematic Culture for the entire region.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I started by Queering early South African films such as *Sarie Marais* (1931, Joseph Albrecht), *Fratse in the die Vloot* (1958, Pierre de Wet) and *Piet Pit my Niggie* (1964, Pierre de Wet) in conjunction with local Queer super 8 films by Ernst Thorpe in the 1960s such as *Nil Desperandum*. This comparison reveals an early South African cinema rich in sexual and gender ambiguity with enormous scope for active Queer readings.

I then moved on to the arrival of international Queer films and local, homoerotic military films in the 1970s; and 'breakthrough' international Queer films screened in South Africa in the 1980s such as Arthur Hiller's *Making Love* (1982), which opened the floodgate for more Queer films to enter the country. In this latter period, in part as a result of the increasing number of Queer films emerging globally, I also observed the use of consciousness raising video evenings organized by groups such as GASA, to assist in activism and community building. More radical experimental Queer filmmaking by the Braamfontein Weekend Theatre and the emergence of a Queer sensibility connected to the military is also suggested as the base on which a more open Queer Cinematic Culture was to eventually emerge.

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<sup>157</sup> [www.oia.co.za/2005-Films.htm](http://www.oia.co.za/2005-Films.htm)

By the second half of the 1980s, multi-dimensional films on race and sexuality such as *A Moffie Called Simon* (1986, John Greyson) and *Quest for Love* (1987, Helen Nogueira) finally began to represent the lives of Queer South Africans on screen. However, it was not until the mid-1990s, in a post-Apartheid South Africa, that a significant number of Queer films were produced.

When the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival opened in the wake of the newly emerging South Africa in 1994, it created for the first time a cohesive, non-racial, national cinematic space, that helped build Queer communities, gave access to Queer products, mobilised people towards political action and contributed to debates which eventually saw the inclusion of same-sex sexuality in the post-Apartheid constitution. This constitutional protection on the basis of sexual orientation was the first of its kind in the world.



Figure 29

## *Chapter 3*

### *The Wolf is After Your Basket!*

## **A Brief History of Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures**

*There was one scene where I had to be chased by sailors. I said I can't do this. I have never been chased by sailors. I have always given them what they wanted!*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drag queen Ken 'Candy' Johnson at the 2004 Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festival opening of *The Set*, (Frank Britton, 1970).



In attempting to describe Australian cinema as a hybrid practice of intersecting discourses, Tom O'Regan, using Latour's idea of the 'quasi-object', suggests that depending from which context it is examined, Australian cinema can be either seen as a thing, a narrative or a social bond.<sup>2</sup> O'Regan, deploying Ian Hunter's idea of the 'unprincipled assemblage', also argues that as a 'quasi-object', Australian cinema does not have a general principle that coheres its component parts or allows for a unitary principle to explain its many facets. It exists as a multifaceted practice.<sup>3</sup>

I suggest Queer Australian Cinematic Culture also functions as a 'quasi-object'. Similar to Australian cinema in general, it is an unprincipled, heterognotic assemblage with hybrid groupings of people, texts, elements, social practices, discourses and technologies, interrelated in complex ways. It is a 'discursive milieu', as Barrett Hodsdon terms such groupings, which reveals the multiple tensions and forces that shape both Queer and non-Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures.<sup>4</sup>

I start the process of mapping a Queer Australian cinematic milieu in this chapter, by Queering some early Australian films from the 1900s through to the 1960s and reveal a cinematic history rich in gender and sexuality play. Queering films from this period not only fleshes out some interesting traditional texts, but also offers alternative narratives which balance, to some extent, the historical lack of openly Queer representation in Australian cinema of the time.

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<sup>2</sup> O'Regan, Tom *Australian National Cinema*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p 38

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p 40

<sup>4</sup> Hodsdon, Barrett *Straight Roads and Crossed Lines: The Quest for Film Culture in Australia*, Bernt Porridge Group, Shenton Park, Western Australia, 2001, p 129. Components of these cultures include contextual and secondary order texts such as criticism and theory, in addition to more obvious activist, commercial and national interests.

By the 1970s, however, a publicly visible Queer Australian Cinematic Culture began to emerge as a result of the lifting of censorship and increased funding for Australian cinema as a whole. The march towards a vibrant, Queer Australian Cinematic Culture was unstoppable.

A decade later, the first case of AIDS in Sydney in 1983 marked this era with a new, urgent activism. The decade was, consequently, a period of consolidation and visual experimentation directed towards critical social and judicial reforms. Although a limited form of law reform was eventually achieved, deep social prejudices were still painfully prevalent.

The consequent renegotiation of activism and aesthetics of the 1980s, saw a much more commercial, confident and powerful Queer Cinematic Culture emerge in the 1990s. The arrival of hugely successful Queer feature films and the development of multi-dimensional images through Queer features, shorts and documentaries, contributed to a new, energised and dramatically expanded Queer Cinematic Culture. This culture became a fixture not only of the new Australian national cinema, but also of a newly visible, international Queer cinema.



Figure 30

## Natural Born Milkmaids: Queering Early Australian Cinema

*At the turn of the century motion picture production was essentially a cottage industry, accessible to any enthusiastic entrepreneur with a modicum of capital and know-how. The world's first feature film of over an hour's duration was made not in France or America but in Australia, where The Story of the Kelly Gang was produced in 1906... By 1912 Australia had produced thirty features and feature length productions.<sup>5</sup>*

Ruth Vasey

At the beginning of the 1900s, Australia as a filmmaking country was at the global forefront of developing motion pictures. Films dealt with topics as diverse as religion, Australia's convict beginnings, the outback, bushrangers, the return of soldiers from war and the status of Australian women.<sup>6</sup>

The histories of Queer Australians at the birth of cinema, however, can only be glimpsed through rare Queer autobiographies and novels of the time, not films. Tabloid newspaper such as the *Truth*, as early as the 1890s, spurred on by events like the Oscar Wilde trials, began publishing stories and 'graphic exposés' of homosexual practices within prisons, among 'vagrants' and the Chinese,<sup>7</sup> but sympathetic views of Queer sexuality were rarely found.

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<sup>5</sup> Vasey, Ruth 'The World-Wide Spread of Cinema' in Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Oxford University Press, London, 1996, p 53

<sup>6</sup> Pike, Andrew and Cooper, Ross *Australian Film, 1900-1977*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p 2

<sup>7</sup> Chesser, Lucy 'Cross-dressing and Sexual Mis-representation' in Phillips, David and Willett, Graham (eds.) *Australia's Homosexual Histories*, Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Histories, Sydney and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archive, Melbourne, 2000, p 11. The connections between racial difference and sodomy in the early popular press, is an interesting example of a multi-dimensional crossover of racism and homophobia at the dawn of Australian cinema. The same relationship between racism and homophobia can be seen in Australia when compared with Darren Hutchinson's description of the feminisation of Asian men's masculinity and its conflation with homosexuality and the inter-racial African and Chinese sodomy in South Africa highlighted earlier (see Chapter 2).

In addition, the White Australia Policy and other discriminatory and eugenic practices that emerged at the Federation of Australia in 1901, meant that Queer people from different cultural backgrounds, genders, races and economic structures were additionally impacted in relation to other attendant differences.<sup>8</sup> Australian films of the time rarely reflected these complex, social inequalities.

In 2004, the Research and Academic Outreach program of Screensound Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive, premiered two live audio-visual presentations at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festival titled *Imagining Queer: Historical Views From Australian Film and Television in the National Screen and Sound Archive*. Session one dealt with images from 1910 - 1950 and session two showcased images from 1950 - 1980. At the start of both screenings, curator Barry McKay and presenter Marilyn Dooley prefaced their presentations by suggesting:

*Camp, queer, drag, butch, femme, tranny, sissy, tom-boy, lesbian and gay, 'gender benders' have always been represented in Australian moving images, not always, however, in ways that were perhaps obvious to everyone. Sometimes you had to look behind the images with a certain sensibility.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Clark, Manning *A Short History of Australia*, Third Revised Edition, NAL Penguin Inc., New York, 1987, p 197. Any person who failed to pass a dictation test of fifty words in any European language could be declared as a prohibited immigrant. Any immigrant resident for less than five years who failed the test could also be deported. The Pacific Islanders Act of 1901 (modified slightly later that year to allow exceptions on compassionate grounds) forced all Pacific Island labourers who had immigrated to Australia back to their country of origin. In addition, Section 16 of the Commonwealth Posts and Telegraph Act of 1901 stated that the Commonwealth would only enter into contract for the carriage of mail if white labour was used. Section 4 of the Commonwealth Franchise Act of 1902 stated that no Aborigines native to Australia, Asia, Africa or the Pacific Islands was entitled to be on the electoral roll (unless exempted by section 41 of the Constitution which allowed the Commonwealth to include who they wanted). Section 16 of the Invalid and Old Pensioners Act of 1908, excluding the same group as above (except Asians born in Australia) from receiving a pension, the New South Wales Shearers Accommodation Act of 1901 segregated Chinese from whites and some Unions, like the Australian Workers Union, excluded Asiatics, Aborigines and those from mixed-race descent from membership.

<sup>9</sup> MacKay, Barry *Imagining Queer: Historical Views From Australian Film and Television in the National Screen and Sound Archive* notes, Research and Academic Outreach Program of Screensound

Their video screenings used newsreel footage, advertisements, documentaries and feature films from the Australian Screensound Archives. Through the presentation of these historical images in a Queer context, MacKay and Dooley offered new Queer Australian images for contemporary eyes. Their re-visioning of classical images through what they termed a Queer 'sensibility' created a radical new Queer image library.<sup>10</sup> An important re-visioning of Australian cinema had taken place.

Starting with 1913 newsreel footage of male University of Sydney students parading in the streets in female attire after a graduation ceremony to the amusement of onlookers, Queer in this instance embraces what Dooley refers to as 'gender bending', where gender stereotypes are played upon, reinforced and/or complicated through cross-dressing. Cross-dressing and the same-sex scenarios they often invoke, often allows easy, traditional access for Queer 'sensibilities'.

### ***Silent Crossings: Sunshine Sally and Jewelled Nights***

Imagining Queer may have started off with male cross-dressing, but what becomes obvious when analysing their early Queered images further is the significance and sustained presence of female cross-dressing and tomboys as central characters and as a consequence same-sex scenarios. The presence of female directors and female driven texts, unique in Australia at this time compared to South Africa, offer interesting self-representations on the status of Australian women and their role in

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Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive, 2004. Session one was screened on 15 February 2004 and session two on 18 February 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Doty, Alexander *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1993, p 16. Alexander Doty would argue that you don't have to rely on 'sensibility' or having to look 'behind' the image to find Queerness, as Queerness is and has always been 'in' the text. Traditionally, however, it has been easier to justify the reading of Queer lives into films that dealt with particular themes such as cross-dressing, burlesque, camp characters and Queerly read character relationships between actors. It is from this angle that MacKay and Dooley approached their Queerings.



the social structure of Australia. Films by early Australian women filmmakers throw a rare light on many of the taboos and anxieties around the roles of men and women and the enforcement of heterosexual norms in post-Federation Australia.

Films that include cross-dressing men include, amongst others, *The Laugh on Dad* (AC Tindale 1918) where the farmhand, on Dad's insistence, dresses as the farmer's daughter to marry the fiancée Dad does not like, *The Breaking of the Drought*, (Franklyn Barrett, 1920) where Damper the farmhand dresses up as a maid to serve tea to guests and *Should a Girl Propose* (PJ Ramster, 1926) where there is 'a wealth of melodramatic and farcical incident, including a male suitor in drag, disguised as a heroine.'<sup>11</sup> However, whereas the male cross-dressing in these films by men were often additional comic relief to the main text, female cross-dressing in films such as *Sunshine Sally* (Lawson Harris and Yvonne Pavis, 1922) and *Jewelled Nights*, (Louise Lovely, 1926) was often a central pivot to the films women directed.

By the 1920s, several women directors were active and working in the Australian Film Industry. Feminist author and film critic Sally Speed argues that one of the reasons for women's involvement in the film industry so early on is the shift in the structure of Australian industries and manufacturing as a whole. She comments:

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<sup>11</sup>Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 131

*It would seem that, in the uncertainties of the rural-urban shift, a few women took up new opportunities and some made significant breakthroughs in new expanding professions. The local filmmaking business was not expanding; yet we find women film-makers at this time - not earlier or later... The 1920s will continue to be of particular interest to feminists, as a time when women began to define what roles they could and would take up in an urban society.<sup>12</sup>*

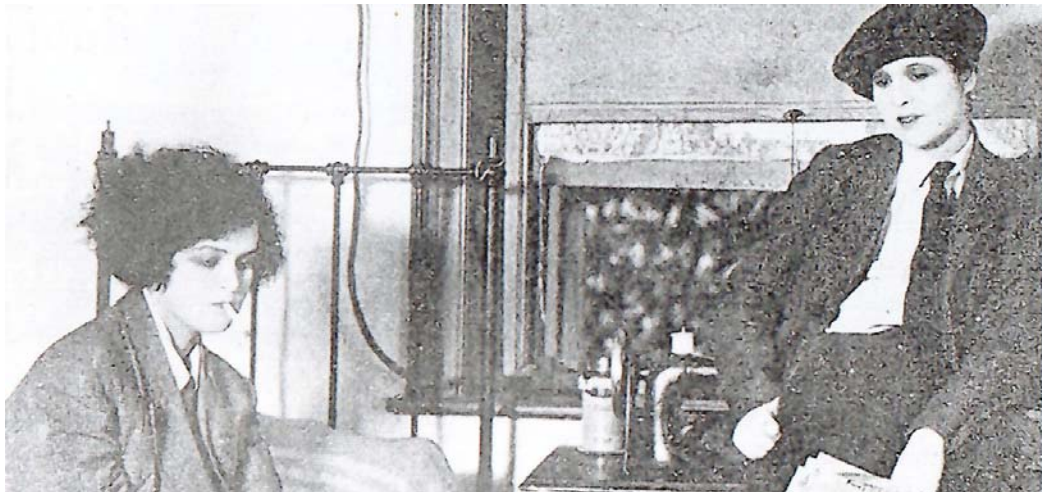


Figure 31

*Sunshine Sally* and *Jewelled Nights* are two of the earliest silent feature films directed by women dealing with cross-dressing women and as a consequence, same-sex sexual scenarios. In both films, women cross-dress to overcome the social limitations placed on them by patriarchal social rules and to provide space to move in a restricted public sphere. The films not only expose the restrictive gender roles of 19th century Australia, but also explore strategies women developed to overcome them.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Speed, Sally 'Voices from the Silent Era' in Blonski, Annette, Creed, Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 26

<sup>13</sup>Ford, Ruth "'And Merrily Rang the Bells': Gender-Crossing and Same-Sex Marriage in Australia, 1900-1940" in Phillips, David and Willett, Graham (eds.), *Australia's Homosexual Histories*, Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Histories, Sydney and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archive, Melbourne, 2000, p 48. Ford, writing on cross-dressing and same sex marriage in Australia between 1900 -1940, suggests that there is a long history in Australia of working class women dressing, living and/or working as men. For some it was because of financial needs and for others it was an

*Sunshine Sally* is about a working class woman Sal (played by Yvonne Pavis) who lives in the 'Loo (Woollomoolloo). In an effort to see a fight for her hand, Sal and her friend Tottie dress up as men to get entry into the male-only boxing arena. It is one of the first instances where women cross-dress in Australian film. Their male clothes are their tickets to participating in pastimes normally exclusive to men and they have enormous fun engaging in traditionally non-female behaviour. The film ends, however, with Sal marrying a wealthy man from Potts Point, Basil Stanton, who saves her from drowning at Coogee beach. Her position as a female, saved by a man, is re-established and her life is anchored in traditional female roles in the end.

Pavis was as interesting a person in life as she was in her movies. She arrived in Sydney from California on 1922 where she immediately established the *Yvonne Pavis Production Syndicate*.<sup>14</sup> Pavis played across the gender roles assigned to women, not only in the movies, but also in her work. With her partner, Lawson Harris, she produced *Circumstance*, *Daughter of Australia* and *Sunshine Sally*, all in 1922. Pavis not only starred in these films, but was a partner to Lawson in their production too.<sup>15</sup>

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issue of disguising their sexuality and creating heterosexual anchors for their same-sex relationships.

<sup>14</sup>Speed, *op. cit.*, p 27

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p 27



Figure 32

*Jewelled Nights*, starring the famous Australian Hollywood actor Louise Carbasse known also by her screen name as Louise Lovely, is another film that revolves around the possibilities of cross-dressing for women.<sup>16</sup> *Jewelled Nights* is based on a novel by Marie Bjelke-Petersen and set in northern Tasmania, where a young woman, Elaine Fleetwood, escapes to after deserting her fiancée at the altar. She disguises herself as a man to go prospecting, where 'he' meets a 'handsome miner, who befriends him and develops a close friendship. Only after many adventures and much confusion does he guess 'her' true sex.'<sup>17</sup> They end up getting married.

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p 15. Lovely appeared as early as 1911 in films such as *A Tale of the Australian Bush* (Gaston Mervale, 1911) where she played adult roles as a teenager. In 1914 she went to Hollywood and was signed on with Universal Pictures, where she became a star actor working for several production studios including Universal and Fox. She returned to Sydney in 1923, after having made several Hollywood features. In Sydney she and her partner Wilton Welsh formed *Louise Lovely Productions*.

<sup>17</sup>Speed, *op. cit.*, p 128

*Jewelled Nights*, the first movie shot by Louise Lovely Productions is of interest for several reasons. In contrast to the cross-dressing scenes in *Sunshine Sally*, where there are no obvious sexual connotations to the gender changes, in *Jewelled Nights*, there are complications that arise between the heroine who dresses as a man and the miners with whom 'he' keeps company. Lovely's performance as a 'man', however, raised a few eyebrows. A quote from the *Sydney Morning Herald* on March 26, 1926, highlights the disquiet of critics about Lovely's gender bending skills:

*[T]o play the part of 'Dick' Fleetwood, Miss Lovely plasters her fair hair close on her head [but] both her make-up and her gestures as 'Dick' are precisely those she uses as 'Elaine'.<sup>18</sup>*

What distinguishes the cross-dressing in *Jewelled Nights* from earlier cross-dressing scenes in *Sunshine Sally*, is that sexuality is questioned and confused in the former. Perhaps some of the disquiet from the press came from the confusion created by fluid gender boundaries and desire. In *Sunshine Sally*, Pavis and Revelle dress up as men simply to gain access to the boxing stadium. The miner who has been 'Dick's' protector, when discovering that 'he' is a she, however, declares his love for her and marries her, a love that may have developed while she was a 'he'. The connotations around same-sex sexuality are obvious and suggestive of transgression. The end of the film, again however, anchors Elaine in a heterosexual role.

Although both films fall into Queer categories, the confusions around gender and sexual desire in *Jewelled Nights* opens up a richer territory for critiquing sexuality and gender relations in Australian society of the time. The imaginary transgressions in the relationship between the two leads, concerning both gender and sexuality, are more developed in *Jewelled Nights* than in *Sunshine Sally*.

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p 129

*Jewelled Nights* is reminiscent of and perhaps partly takes its title from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, where sexual confusion and gender crossing causes severe anxiety around same-sex sexuality and gender roles. Although Alexander Doty's argument that all films can be Queered still holds true, *Jewelled Nights* offers a more obviously filmic engagement with same-sexuality than does *Sunshine Sally*. Degrees of Queerness are possible within Queer readings of hitherto 'straightly' read texts.

### *Queering the Talkies*

Silent films such as *Sunshine Sally* and *Jewelled Nights*, popular in the early to mid-twenties, were soon outdated. Sound arrived in the late twenties on the world stage and Australia was quick to develop its own sound productions. The first commercially viable sound feature titled *Diggers*, was produced in 1931 and was directed by FW Thring and financed by Efftee Film Productions.<sup>19</sup>

Many sound features followed in *Diggers'* wake, with *On Our Selection* (Ken G Hall) produced in 1932, the first film from the Cinesound Studios and hugely successful. It was the first in a three part sequel that included *Grandad Rudd*, (Ken G Hall) in 1935, followed by *Dad and Dave Come to Town*, (Ken G Hall) in 1938 and *Dad Rudd MP*, (Ken G Hall, 1940).

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<sup>19</sup>Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 150. *Diggers* was a war film about Australians in France during the first World War. It is a comedy about two 'cobbers' who try to evade active duty and it follows their predicaments as they try to escape the army. The homoerotic overtones of mates at war, easily established through Queer readings by contemporary Queer audiences and assisted by the same-sex environment of war and its representations, potentially offer rich contemporary Queer spectatorship. Although made on imported American equipment, Arthur Smith from Australian Cinesound soon constructed his own equipments on which most of the features for that decade was made.



Figure 33

In *City of the Plain* Garry Wotherspoon suggests that most Australian films of the 1930s ignored homosexuality with the exception of *Dad and Dave Come to Town*. In *Dad and Dave Come to Town* the dress shop that Dad inherits promotes a male floorwalker, Entwistle, an archetypal 'sissy' character, to the position of manager. Wotherspoon comments that 'no one seeing the movie can be in any doubt as to the type of character that Entwistle (played by Alec Kellaway) was meant to represent'.<sup>20</sup> His treatment, however, similar to sissy characters in American film such as *Professional Sweethearts* (1933) and *Easy Living* (1937), Wotherspoon suggests, is never demeaning. Dad calls him 'a natural born milker', but he is never diminished in the film, with his actions actually saving the business and turning him into a hero.

McKay and Dooley, however, screened clips from earlier Australian films such as *Rangle River* (Clarence Badger, 1936) and *Lovers and Luggers* (Ken G Hall, 1937) offering images of earlier Queer Australian characters. The films they chose suggested a range of Queer readings, many of them reinforced by the audience's positive reaction to their screening at the 2004 Mardi Gras Film Festival. The

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<sup>20</sup>Wotherspoon, Garry *City of the Plain: History of a Gay Sub-Culture*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, p 53

audience enthusiastically clapped at the 'positive' Queer resolutions in these clips and booed at some of the earlier texts where cross-gendered or sissy characters were mistreated. A whole new Queer Australian image library was created, reinforced and celebrated at this event.

Comic 'new chum' and RAF pilot Reggie Mannister (Robert Coote) Dick Drake (Victor Jory) and Marion Hastings (Margaret Dare), for instance, shared several Queer moments in Clarence Badger's *Rangle River*.<sup>21</sup> Dick is managing a farm when the neighbouring farmer cuts off the flow of the Rangle River. With the help of Reggie and Marion, Dick eventually saves the day and the water again flows freely.

Although Dick ends up marrying Marion, there are several scenes where Reggie's desire for Dick is apparent. When Dick injures his hand, Reggie is quick to offer assistance. Dick is equally pleased, obvious through his affectionate stares at Reggie and also in his comment that Reggie has a soft touch. MacKay comments: '[Dick] and [Reggie] exchange awkward, verging-on-infatuated glances whilst romantic mood music lifts the scene. An implied love triangle [also] develops involving a jealous squatter's daughter [Marion].'<sup>22</sup> This 'Australian Western' has a delightful plot when Queerly read.

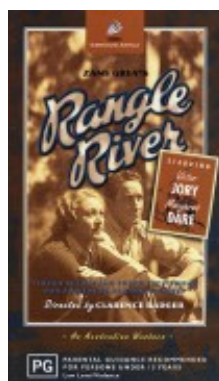


Figure 34

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<sup>21</sup>Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 176

<sup>22</sup>MacKay, *op. cit.*





Figure 35

Other interesting Queer readings can be found in *Lovers and Luggers*, where the cast, including Daubenney Carshott (Lloyd Hughes), Lorna Quidley (Shirley Ann Richards) and Archie (Campbell Copelin) find themselves pearl diving on Thursday Island. MacKay suggests:

*Following show business conventions of the time, well-spoken English men were perceived in Australia as effeminate. This theme is jokingly used in Lovers and Luggers, which also features a cross-dressing Shirley Ann Richards a-la-Marlene Dietrich in 'Morocco'.<sup>23</sup>*

Hall comments that the film was widely referred to as *Lovers and Buggers*.<sup>24</sup> Not only is there a cross-dressing heroine who prefers men's clothes because she can walk around at night without being noticed, but there are also wonderfully camp exchanges between the English gentleman Archie and the rugged Captain Quidly in a bar on Thursday Island. Like *Rangle River*, this film's play on gender and use of camp humour offers easy Queerings for participating audiences.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Verhoeven, Deb 'The sexual terrain of the Australian feature film: Putting the Out:back into the Ocker' in Jackson, Claire and Tapp, Peter (eds.), *The Bent Lens: A world guide to gay and lesbian film*, Australian Catalogue Company, Melbourne, 1997, p 26



Figure 36

Although Queer readings of films of this period may offer rich material for contemporary audiences, Queer people at the time were discriminated against by the law and rarely accepted socially. Their recorded histories are also sadly, few and far between. Wayne Murdoch, who compiled a list of articles in the *Truth* dealing with homosexuality and cross-dressing from 1913-1945 suggests primary source material such as letters, diaries and photographs have often been destroyed and that 'the memories of those willing to be interviewed as part of oral history projects rarely stretch further back than the end of the 1930s.'<sup>25</sup> Information about Queer people in this era is very scarce indeed.

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<sup>25</sup> Murdoch, Wayne 'Homosexuality and the *Truth*; An Annotated Listing, 1913-1945' in Phillips, David and Willett, Graham (eds.), *Australia's Homosexual Histories*, Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Histories, Sydney and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archive, Melbourne, 2000, p 177

One interesting newsreel item from 1937, discovered by MacKay, however, throws some light on the media's treatment of transgender people. A pre-operative female to male transgender man, Peter Alexander from Palmerston North in New Zealand, comments in the newsreel that he quite enjoys seeing make-up on women and reminds other men that he has an advantage over them, as he understands the needs of women more intimately. MacKay suggests that the tabloid newspapers of the day had a field day with the story, but that the newsreel was surprisingly sensitive in its portrayal of the young man.<sup>26</sup>

Contemporary filmic reclamations, through the use of Australian films of the 10s, 20s and 30s, using in particular camp content, cross-dressing and Queerly read character relationships, has created new Queer visual histories for Australia, which counter the perceived absences of the times. Queer readings of films such as *Sunshine Sally*, *Jewelled Nights*, *Rangle River* and *Lovers and Luggers*, amongst others, offer completely new historical genealogies of Queer images for contemporary Queer audiences. This is an important project as it balances on some level the absences in Queer film histories, enforced through censorship and social oppression. Further Queerings will assist in developing a more substantial Queer Cinematic history for Australia.

### *Trimmed with Feathers: War and the Emergence of Queer Sub-Cultures*

The outbreak of World War II had a major impact on the mobilization of Queer people for liberation and equality. Enforced same-sex surroundings and economic independence allowed many Queer people to live their lives for the first time as they chose.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>MacKay, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p 86

The war also affected the types of films produced within Australia and the possibility of Queer visual positionings within them. MacKay suggests, however, that 'into the years of the Second World War...the camera did not capture the upsurge in same-sex activity that ensued by necessity of wartime gender separation'.<sup>28</sup>

Filmmaking itself suffered heavy casualties. During the war the Australian government re-focused its spending priorities and film funding was dramatically cut. Only ten feature films were made from 1940 – 1945 and, really surprisingly, none dealt openly with Queer issues.<sup>29</sup> Newsreel footage and war propaganda films became the main focus of the industry and the end of the war did not herald any significant changes in this focus. From 1946 - 1964 only 38 Australian feature films were made.<sup>30</sup>

To engage Queerly with Australian film of this time, again requires a Queering of the texts. Films such as the Chauvel's *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, (1940), one of the classics of the era, offer interesting homoerotic readings and re-appropriations, as both male and female cross-dressing feature in this film.



Figure 37

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<sup>28</sup>MacKay, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup>Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 188

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p 200

Substituting the Sinai Desert for the dunes at Cronulla, the film followed the campaigns of the Light Horse Brigade of the First World War, recreating battles such as Romani and the famous charge at Beersheba. Queer film critic Deb Verhoeven comments:

*Set among the Middle Eastern dunes of the first World War, the film screams costume drama from the outset. As the opening credits roll away, a German officer sneers over a captured Australian uniform - 'Mein Gott! He exclaims, 'A women's hat, trimmed with bird feathers. And these are the men you would have me worried about?'*<sup>31</sup>

Verhoeven suggests that even the romantic lead, Juliet Rouger, a beautiful French spy, is in on the Queer act. She succeeds in not only deceiving the Germans, but also the allies, by cloaking herself in male Arab robes.

Openly Queer lives, however, continued to be absent from films. The closest the movies perhaps came to engaging with Queer lives was as a mobilising site in providing opportunities for sexual encounters and meeting places. Wotherspoon argues that in addition to exhibiting films during World War II 'the new movie theatres, spreading during this period... provided a place for erotic encounters or just meeting others like oneself.'<sup>32</sup> Although the content of the films may not have been Queer, the content of the movie theatres may very well have been. Cinemas offered rare, public spaces where Queer people could meet others for sexual encounters and friendships.

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<sup>31</sup> Verhoeven, *op. cit.*, p 27

<sup>32</sup> Wotherspoon, *op. cit.*, p 92

The beginning of the Menzies era in the late 1940s saw little concern raised either for the state of Australian filmmaking or for Queer rights.<sup>33</sup> Australian Queer people, who had just experienced a form of liberation and the loosening of social mores during the war years, found themselves suddenly scapegoats of the Cold War, with an increase in police attention paid to those who committed homosexual acts. In some states such as NSW there was actually an increase in penalties against homosexual activity.<sup>34</sup> Wotherspoon suggests this, ironically, had a positive effect by creating in Australia for the first time a sense of the existence of 'the homosexual' as an identity

One of the only openly Queer moving images in Australia from this era is amateur filmmakers Ken Garrahy's recordings of his gay and lesbian friends playing football and having picnics in the 1960s. Screened on SBS in 2003 as part of a series titled *Home Made Histories*, the film shows men on the beach in 'incredibly skimpy Speedos', lesbian friends cuddling under an overturned rowboat and 'moustached hikers mincing down a mountain track on a social excursion to the Blue Mountains'.<sup>35</sup>



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<sup>33</sup>Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 201. 'In the Menzies era, public and Governmental preoccupation with material well-being and political security made the absence of an Australian film culture a matter of little general concern.'

<sup>34</sup>Wotherspoon, *op. cit.*, p 110

<sup>35</sup>Benzie, Tim 'Homo Movies', *Sydney Star Observer*, Issue 676, 21 August 2003

Figure 38

Garrahy comments about the film that there was nothing that was illegal except that there were still anti-gay laws. He suggests: 'I suppose it was a risk factor in a way that we were going out and having open air functions, but it was all part of a surge at the time, with the university students and other people protesting about different things... We were just getting fed up really with being suppressed the way we were. And of course the churches had everybody in a missionary position at that time!' <sup>36</sup> Footage such as this is rare, but invaluable representations of Queer life in Australia in the 1960s.

The neglect of the Australian Film industry and its role in reflecting Australian society finally ended after the Menzies era, when in the late 1960s and early 1970s the Gorton and Whitlam Governments started investing more heavily in the arts.<sup>37</sup> Many social welfare issues and law reform concerns such as Aboriginal rights, women's and same-sex rights also started to be addressed. It is with the social reforms of the 1960s and the advent of the film subsidies of the early seventies, that not only openly Queer subcultures emerged, but also an open Australian Queer Cinematic Culture.

### **From the Movements: The 1970s and the Birth of Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures**

The Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 produced a major impetus for Queer liberation globally and impacted extensively on the gay and lesbian/Queer movements in Australia.<sup>38</sup> The need for Queer visibility became a major part of Queer cinematic discourse of the 1970s and was articulated through the language of

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 201

<sup>38</sup> 'A Short History of Gay Liberation', *Campink*, Vol 2, No 2/3, December 1971/January 1972, pp 4-6

the Women's Movement, Feminism, Marxism and Effeminism.<sup>39</sup> Various educative and dissemination strategies were argued for and film was eventually considered one of the tools to be used in the march towards liberation.

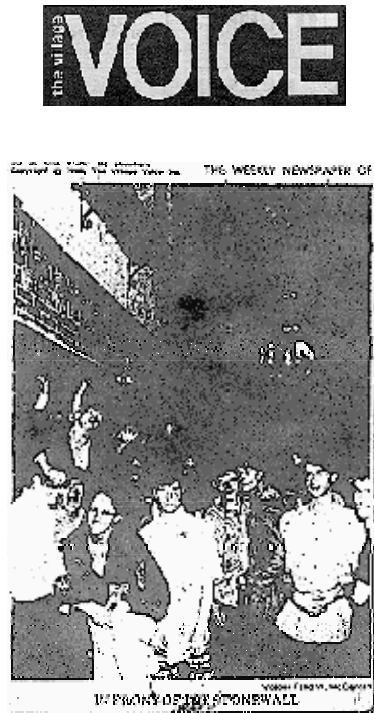


Figure 39

In terms of Queer politics, utilising film to broadcast critical debates and to lobby for the removal of laws that inhibited the representation of Queer issues, was one of the ideological strategies of the time. The production and exhibition of new, if controversial, homo-movies from overseas, in combination with actions by local Queer activist groups<sup>40</sup> and the emerging independent film cultures, kick started an unstoppable Queer visual activism that has reverberated through Australian film culture ever since.

<sup>39</sup> Johnston, Craig 'Ef(feminism)' *a Sydney gaze: the making of gay liberation*, Schiltron Press, Sydney, 1999, pp 4-6 and Johnston, 'The homosexual movement in Australia 1970 -1975', *op. cit.*, p 21

<sup>40</sup> Wotherspoon, *op. cit.*, p 166. The earliest groups were small gay friendship groups that had formed in the 1960s, such as the Knights of Chameleon (1962), the Boomerangs, Diggers and Daughters of Bilitis.



### *Film and Activism*

Three key examples of the local Queer movements forming in Australia was Campaign Against Moral Persecution Inc. (CAMP Inc, 1970),<sup>41</sup> Gay Liberation (1971)<sup>42</sup> and Radical Lesbians which formed in 1973.<sup>43</sup> CAMP Inc., Gay Liberation's and Radical Lesbians' perception at the time was that there was an increase in public tolerance and that they were ready to 'gamble' their careers and reputations to bring about social change and understanding.<sup>44</sup>

By 1973 some of their first political protests had taken place, including actions against the ABC in relation to the invisibility of Queer lives on television, demonstrations during a psychiatry conference titled *Psychiatry and Liberation* and protests at the inaugural rally of the conservative, anti-Queer Festival of Light group.<sup>45</sup>

As a part of this broader struggle for social reform, some international and a few local Queer films finally began appearing in Australian cinemas dealing openly with homosexuality. British films such as *Victim*, *The L-Shaped Room*, *A Taste of Honey* (all 1961) and *The Killing of Sister George* (1968) were more or less sympathetic to same-sex sexuality, but American films such as *Advise and Consent* (1962), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), *The Sergeant* (1968) and *The Detective* (1968) were seen as homophobic. Who was actually representing this same-sex sexuality, with what

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p 168.

<sup>42</sup> Johnston, Craig 'The homosexual movement in Australia 1970 -1975' first published in *Axis*, 18 October 1976, in a *Sydney gaze: the making of gay liberation*, Schiltron Press, Sydney, 1999, p 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 19-20

<sup>44</sup> *The Australian*, 15 September 1970. Article reprinted in *The Star Observer*, No 10, September 1985, p 6

<sup>45</sup> Harris, Gavin *It's a Riot: Sydney's First Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Australian Telegraph Publications, Sydney, 1998. In addition, during a Gay Pride Week demonstration in Sydney in 1973, 200 supporters fought the police resulting in the arrest of seventeen people. The arrests in 1973 were the precursors of further arrests a few years later during a similar march, that lead to the formation of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

agenda and at what cost to the Queer communities became questions of immediate concern.<sup>46</sup>

New strategies such as the need for self-representation and self-recognition, documentation, positive images and cultural autonomy quickly emerged. Globally in the 1970s, openly lesbian and gay directors began portraying same-sex sexuality in a different light from the homophobic projections of the 60s. International films such as *Boys in the Band* (Friedkin, USA, 1970), *A Very Natural Thing* (Larkin, USA, 1973), *The Word is Out* (Mariposa Film Group, USA, 1977), *The Consequence* (1977), *Nighthawks* (Peck/Hallam, GB, 1978) and New Zealander Richard Turners *Squeeze* (1979) were all seen in Sydney Cinemas.<sup>47</sup>

In *Campink* in June 1971, a magazine which was published by the then only recently formed CAMP Inc., an article by Robert Connell titled *Disappearing Taboos* suggested that the screening in Australia of one of these new, openly gay films *Boys in the Band* was a turning point in Queer male representation and that 'a good film like *Boys in the Band* treats homosexuals not just as a curiosity, but as part of the human condition.'<sup>48</sup> After years of complete invisibility as a result of censorship and social stigma, Queer images, albeit from overseas, were finally being screened in Australian cinemas.

The use of art and film to counter oppressive cultural norms and as part of the armoury for liberation, however, was not initially a natural extension of CAMP Inc. or Gay Liberation ideologies at the beginning of the movements. Anton Veenstra and Rod Byatt commenting in 1974 in *Campink* on the need for these organizations to deal with culture as well as politics and not see the two as separate entities, pointed to the divide between those who saw 'politics' as separate and more

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<sup>46</sup> Wotherspoon, *op. cit.*, p 185

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p 185

<sup>48</sup> Connell, Robert W 'Disappearing Taboos: the changing face of homosexuality in the dramatic media', *Campink*, No 8, June 1971, pp 8-11

important than bourgeois, 'decadent' art and those who saw the need to link the two. They suggested:

*Obviously Gay lib has made a determined effort... to class Art and Culture as 'anti-revolutionary'... Given that Gay liberation has at last achieved recognition by the Australian left, one wonders how quickly (if at all?) the organization will assimilate standard socialist and Marxists concepts in Art and Culture.<sup>49</sup>*

Veenstra and Byatt concluded by suggesting they believe homosexual liberation is as much a matter of cultural consciousness as socio-political consciousness and that liberation goes beyond even cultural consciousness in the 'art' sense when it involves change of lifestyles.<sup>50</sup> Their words were thankfully not lost, and film became one of the key catalysts for the Mardi Gras and consequent social and judicial changes.

### ***Queer Australian Films in the 1970s***

Starting as early as 1970 as a result of the revival of the Australian film industry, a series of new feature films, with a small contingent containing Queer characters, began appearing on screens in Australian cinemas. The New Australian Cinema as it came to be called, not only showed more diverse representations of contemporary Australian life, but also challenged the restrictions of the previous decades in relation to sexual mores and censorship.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Veenstra, Anton and Byatt, Rod 'art and culture', *Campink*, Vol 4, No 1, August 1974, pp 19-20

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p 21

<sup>51</sup> Rattigan, Neil *Images of Australia: 100 Films of the New Australian Cinema*, Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, 1991, p 3. Rattigan suggests: '[T]here was an easily observable movement in the early 1970s not only towards increased production within Australia, but towards film that were Australian in both origin and content. Credence can thus be given to accepting 1970 as the moment of the New Australian Cinema.'

As Vito Russo suggests for American films of the time, however, the texts which included Queer characters in the New Australian Cinema, often contained 'negative' Queer role models. Although some of these 'ocker' films as Verhoeven terms them, were 'initial attempt[s] to figure [an] on-screen sexuality... steeped in a colloquial and deliberately vulgar humour',<sup>52</sup> she suggests that more often than not they failed in their treatment of same-sex sexuality.

Queer characters in 'ocker' films of this decade included a predatory gay television producer called Tranter (*The Great McCarthy*, David Barker, 1975)<sup>53</sup>, a Doctor who rapes a male patient (*Wake in Fright*, Ted Kotcheff, 1971),<sup>54</sup> a campy Queer drug dealer who gets his 'stash' nicked by two marauding straight blokes (*High Rolling*, Igor Auzins, 1970),<sup>55</sup> Dame Edna dipping into the well of loneliness in *The Adventures of Barrie McKenzie* (Beresford, 1972), lesbian characters displaying themselves for predominantly heterosexual male fantasies (*Fantasm*, Richard Franklin, 1976, *Fantasm Comes Again*, Eric Ram, 1977)<sup>56</sup> and a sado-masochistic, ahistorically interpreted captain of a convict ship (*Eliza Frazer*, David Burstall, 1976).

One surprising exception to the predominantly negative attendant roles played by Queer characters in Australian feature films, is *The Set* (Frank Britton, 1970).

Although having ambivalent 'positive'/'negative' outcomes, *The Set* was the first Australian feature film dealing with rare, central Queer characters in a same-sex relationship.

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<sup>52</sup> Verhoeven, *op. cit.*, p 28

<sup>53</sup> Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 288

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p 259 'John Grant is an English teacher in an outback school... Gradually he is overwhelmed by the nightmare of life in 'the Yabba'[Bundanyabba]... especially their insistence and claustrophobic 'mateship'. In despair, after participating in a violent kangaroo hunt and being homosexually assaulted by an alcoholic doctor, Grant is driven to shoot himself in attempted suicide.'

<sup>55</sup> Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 315. 'Tex, an American carnival hand, and Alby, an Australian boxer... steal a car and a marijuana hoard from a homosexual, Arnold... Pursued by thugs sent by Arnold they hijack a tourist bus...survive... and set of once more on the road.'

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p 301



Figure 40

Scriptwriter, Roger Ward, at the re-screening of the film at the 2004 Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festival, commented that the film was a big hit when it was first released. He had been completely overwhelmed at the time when he heard there were traffic jams in Australian drive-in cinemas, with people queuing for miles to see it, when it opened in the early 1970s to sensationalist headlines.

The homosexuality was not such an issue apparently as was one of the actors Hazel Phillips' full frontal nudity.<sup>57</sup> At the screening in 2004, Phillips commented that as she was known more as an afternoon television host for house wives, this radical departure from script raised many eyebrows. She was sure, however, that it boosted her career! About the evolution of the film, Ward remembers:

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<sup>57</sup> Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p 245

*Upon leaving Australia for Tahiti where I intended to live and write, I decided to write a novel that was controversial. At the time there was a novel called Peyton Place that was raunchy and it did wonders in sales... I decided to use the homosexual world of which I had experienced a great deal through my theatrical experiences... Seven years later when I sold the film rights the producer asked me to lift every homosexual ingredient from the film and make a script around that.. Despite the pleasure I get from the film now, at the time it was made I was not happy. It was a lot weaker than I intended but it appears to have 'grown' over the years and now I don't mind it at all. <sup>58</sup>*

Dubbed by some in the media as Australia's first successful sexploitation movie, its central plot follows the life of Paul Lawrence (Sean McEuan), who is struggling to escape his working class upbringing. Through his mentor, internationally renowned designer Marie Rosefield (Brenda Senders) he is commissioned by artist Mark Bronoski (Denis Doonan) to design a stage set. <sup>59</sup>

During one of the many parties held by 'the set', a gay party goer engages Paul in intimate conversation. In one of the more memorable warnings against seduction in Australian cinematic history, a drag queen played by Ken 'Kandy' Johnson, who later owned the infamous Purple Onion Bar in Sydney, cautions Paul against this amorous individual with the warning – 'Watch out Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf is after your basket!'

What is interesting about *The Set* is that sex between men was just part of a broader sexual agenda. The opening credit images, flashes of a diptych of a naked man on top of a naked woman with a cross dangling from the man's neck, next to an image of the key male sculpture at Sydney's Hyde Park fountain, sums the film up in simple visual terms. It's about breaking strict religious moral codes around

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<sup>58</sup> Ward, Roger E-mail correspondence, 17 July 2004

<sup>59</sup> Pike and Cooper, *op. cit.*, p245. Paul eventually becomes the lover of a young, male architecture student named Tony, but their affair is doomed by Tony's internalized homophobia. Tony treats Paul appallingly and his misogyny is only somewhat more virulent than that of the film itself. Paul attempts suicide, but when he recovers, is reunited with his former girlfriend.

sexuality, unearthing same-sex sexuality from its symbolic closet, but unfortunately remaining anchored within a misogynist mindset.

*The Set* is 'negative' in its Queer representations in the sense that it does not allow a 'positive' same-sex relationship to survive and resolves homophobic anxiety by anchoring the finale in heterosexuality. The treatment by Tony of Paul is 'misogynistic', with every mistake Paul makes ridiculed as being 'just like a woman'. Homosexuals, like women, are seen as useless and incompetent.

Within these limitations, however, some important 'positive' Queer moments exist. People who have same-sex relations are shown to be ordinary individuals, who have ordinary emotions and lives. Human relationships are shown as complex, no-matter which gender is involved. And the camp behaviour of some of 'the set' also adds a humorous element to the film which saves the day in many of the more predictable scenes.

Other more obviously Queer 'positive' Australian films of the time include *Number 96* (Peter Benardos, 1974), *Journey Among Women* (Tom Cowan, 1977), *The Naked Bunyip*, (John B Murray, 1970), *Devils Playground*, (Fred Schepisi, 1976) and *Mad Dog Morgan*, (Philippe Mora, 1975) where gay male and lesbian characters either exist 'positively' within a society of diverse sexualities or are alluded to positively in the text.

The television series on which the *Number 96* was based, began on 13th March, 1972, known by many as 'the night Australian television lost its virginity'. The series played five nights a week to a big and devoted audience until it ceased production in 1977. The easing of film censorship allowed the inclusion of sex, occasional frontal nudity and of course openly homosexual characters.<sup>60</sup> One of the first homosexual kisses in Australian film history took place in *Number 96*, between the popular

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p 276

lawyer Don Finlayson (Lebanese Australian actor Joe Hasham) and Simon Carr (John Orcsik).



Figure 41

*Journey Among Women* was also of interest to the press at the time because of nudity and Queer content. Set in the late-eighteenth century, it was an historically inaccurate projection of a 1970s lesbian utopia onto an earlier colonial period. Set in a remote Australian penal colony, the film portrays a colonial woman Elizabeth Harrington assisting a group of escaped convict women and looked at these convict women's lives from a contemporary perspective. Not surprisingly, it attracted controversy in the media for its aggressive themes and 'acquired a reputation for lesbianism and nudity.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p 317





Figure 42

Interestingly, *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976) directed by Philippe Mora is possibly the first Australian film where an interracial same-sex relationship is implied. Martin Smit in an interview with the Mora, asked him whether he saw the relationship between Morgan and his Aboriginal friend Billy as being homosexual. Not perhaps aware of *The Set*, he enquired as to whether the film could be in fact Australia's 'first' gay movie? In response, Mora responded by saying 'Well... er... let me say that it's possibly Australia's first gay movie. It's certainly an element in the story that we wanted to suggest.'<sup>62</sup> *Mad Dog Morgan* may not be the first Australian 'gay' movie, but it certainly could be the first where an interracial, same-sex relationship is implied.



Figure 43

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<sup>62</sup>Smith, Martin 'Martin Smith asks: Is *Mad Dog Morgan* Australia's first International Success', *Campaign*, Issue 13, September/October 1976

### *Ubu and Independent Film*

In response to some of the 'negative' representations emerging in the 1960s internationally and in the early 1970s in Australian feature films and the emergence of more diverse filmmaking practices, lesbian and gay independent filmmaking began to assert itself more openly. Independent filmmaking, although up until then, mostly heterosexual, had institutional support as a result of long battles that had been fought and won in the late 60s around government subsidies for filmmaking.<sup>63</sup> Ubu Independent film, which later transformed into the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, was an important precursor to the evolution of Queer independent filmmaking in Sydney, not only because it flaunted censorship and dealt openly with issues of sexuality, but because it helped establish a film funding system that would allow the development of independent and experimental film in Sydney.

Ubu, according to Peter Mudie, was 'resolutely heterosexual [and] it has been perhaps this aspect which has lead to a fairly firm revisionist body of opinion around Ubu's filmwork.'<sup>64</sup> At least one Queer film *The Sound of Mucus* (c 1965), however, was made by members of Ubu.

Toni Francis (Rendall at the time), who helped make the film, remembers that it was never meant for general release. She recalls that the film was made when Aggy Read and herself worked for Ubu Films and David Williams, who owned the Purple Onion at the time, lived next door. He approached them to produce something that was to be shown in the Purple Onion as part of a live gay review. Francis remembers:

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<sup>63</sup>Mudie, Peter *Sydney Underground Movies: UBU Films 1965 - 1970*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1997, pp 15-16

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p 18

*They decided to make this film which was meant to be a takeoff of The Sound of Music. We hired all these nun's outfits and off we went with all these crazy queens too, I think it may have been Hyde Park... And we had them running in and out - and I mean it was so funny because David Williams himself was quite a big guy and these people just looked extraordinary in these nun's costumes and habits - and we had them running into the ladies loo and then we'd cut and got them running out of the men's loo! So it was very basic and very silly and they were having a wonderful time... Everywhere we went people's eyes were just popping out on stalks. Aggy and me the archetypal hippies dragging along these bunch of gay nuns who were all huge. It was terribly funny. Someone should have been filming us filming them if you know what I mean.<sup>65</sup>*

Francis recalls that while Read was filming she was running behind him out of shot, telling them what to do. The film was only shot on a little super 8 camera, because of the screening facilities at the Purple Onion. Although the shooting of the movie took place without incident, one of the most disturbing events occurred after the filming. Francis remembers:

*We sent the film off to be processed and that's when Kodak rang back and said 'We are looking at the film and we have been in touch with the censor' - and it's obviously extremely different now - and they said it is now in the hands of the censor! Isn't it extraordinary that they had those sorts of powers, that it was really Kodak who were censoring? So we never got it back again... In those days the censorship was so strict, you had to be so careful... It was one of our major battles fighting the censors. Even if we wanted to show things locally, in our own little cinema, we had to get a censorship certificate.<sup>66</sup>*

Although Ubu may not have been totally Queer, the groundwork laid for experimental and independent film and the formation of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative as a result, makes it an important part of Queer Cinematic history in Australia.

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<sup>65</sup>Francis, Toni Interview, Sydney, 23 July 2004

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

### *The Sydney Film-Makers Co-op*

Ubu dissolved in 1970 but had already begun transforming into the Sydney Film-makers Co-op a few years earlier.<sup>67</sup> The Co-op was first officially formed by members of the Ubu film group in 1969, however, Mudie comments that the origins of the co-op have been somewhat difficult to situate. He argues that:

*As early as 1966, Ubu began calling itself 'a co-operative of Sydney filmmakers'. By August 1967, Ubu published its Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative catalogue, and by February 1968 their promotional material was prefaced with Ubu Films, the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative... In July 1969, Ubu held the formation meeting of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative Ltd.<sup>68</sup>*

The Filmmakers Co-op gathered a large contingent of lesbian, gay and Queer independent filmmakers because it actively encouraged the production and screening of 'minority' issues. Sydney Queer filmmakers had institutional support for the development of Queer film for the first time from this institution.

Gayle Lake, Director of the Sydney Film Festival from 1998-2004, worked for the Co-op in the early 1980s and suggested that lesbian and gay filmmaking in the Co-op and other places started very much as a political movement. Queer Cinematic practice at the Co-op was developed to assist in the larger transformation of social values, to assist in the recognition of unjust anti-Queer laws and to aid in their removal and ease social prejudice. She comments:

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<sup>67</sup>Maloney, Frank 'Introduction', *Sydney Filmmakers Co-Operative Reference Book 1983*, Sydney Filmmakers Co-Operative, Sydney, 1983, p vi

<sup>68</sup>Mudie, *op. cit.*, p 14

*[The Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative] was a co-operative of independent filmmakers...[and] [l]ooking at those years and the late seventies in Australia, women's rights [and] Aboriginal land rights were ... all coming into their own as political movements. Part of that also was... I guess the gay movement.<sup>69</sup>*

The Co-op attracted many people who were concerned with political and social activism and film's role in the process. Film was posited as instrumental for social change and cultural evolution and theories of marginalization, audience, film form, narrative, representation and counter-culture drove the ideological thrust of the institution. Nick Herd, a director of the Co-op wrote:

*The Films [in the Co-op] are not meant to be passively consumed like the products of the dominant cinema. They are meant to engage audiences both intellectually and emotionally. Some are meant to overturn filmic conventions and encourage new modes of perception. Others mean to present in a fictional mode the lives and aspirations of those ignored by dominant cinema.<sup>70</sup>*

The opportunities for alternative representations and exhibition which the Co-op provided, were extremely important in giving voice to groups that were silenced by dominant discourses. The Co-op encouraged cinematic dissidence and Lake suggests that 'there were a lot of lesbians and gays that worked there, because they were attracted to the politics of the place, freedom of speech [and] all of the political goals of the organisation.'<sup>71</sup>

Films by members, up to 550 by the mid-80s, were shown in the then Filmmakers Cinema in St. Peters Lane, Darlinghurst, which according to Lake, regularly fitted up to 120 people into its seventy seat space. The Co-op gave rise to some remarkable films and nurtured the careers of very prominent Australian film-makers and industry workers. Lake suggests:

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<sup>69</sup>Lake, Gayle Interview, Randwick, Sydney, 12 May 1998

<sup>70</sup>Herd, Nick 'Independent Cinema' in *Sydney Filmmakers Co-Operative Reference Book 1983*, Sydney Filmmakers Co-Operative, Sydney, 1983, p xi

<sup>71</sup>Lake, *op. cit.*

*The SFC... cinema in St. Peters Lane... in its own time, as a part of political history, independent political history, fringe political history in Sydney... was very important as a gathering place. The types of films that were distributed and exhibited through that organisation were very cutting edge and representative of I guess what you might call a minority voice, whether it be indigenous, women, gay.*<sup>72</sup>

Australian and New Zealand films in the Co-op's collection dealing with same-sex sexuality included amongst others Gillian Armstrong's *Satdee Night*, (1973), *Homosexuality: A Film for Discussion*, (Barbara Creed, 1975), Megan McMurchy's *Apartment* (1977), Jan Chapman's *Showtime* (1977), Robin Laurie and Margot Nash's *We Aim to Please*, (1977), Jeni Thornley's *Maidens*, (1978), Carla Pontiac's *Farewell to Charms* (1979), the One in Seven Collectives' *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofters*, produced by Digby Duncan in 1979, *Relating*, (Leonie Seebohm, 1980), *Foolish Things* (Peter Wells, 1981) and *Waiting Round Wynyard*, (Franco Di Chiera, 1983).

These films offered important critiques and a counter-balance to the homotragic and Queerphobic international and some New Australian Cinema films. They were structured as interventions of typical heterosexual films and challenged the formal, narrative structures of traditional filmmaking. Some of the films were screened in different ways to traditional films, where forums and discussions in addition to the presence of the filmmakers, offered new avenues for 'active' film consumption. Filmic structures such as the talking head sequences offered self-representation and social filmic critiques, crucial contributions to the often one-sided and prejudiced debates so clearly evident in many of the Queerphobic features.

The Co-op was a supportive and influential institution in the development of Queer filmmaking in Sydney and also Australia. In the 1998 Mardi Gras Queer Screen Film Festival, many of the Queer Co-op films were shown as part of a 20-year retrospective theme. The evolution of the visions of Queer people on the screen since the seventies were from shy and tentative poetics to more in your face

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

and on your lap politics. The Co-op unfortunately folded at the beginning of 1986. Some of the collection went to the AFI, which according to Lake in itself caused a great stir. It had played a vital role in the collection and creation of a lesbian, gay and Queer Cinematic Cultures in Australia.

### *The Women's Movement, Film and Consciousness Raising*

In Australia film, through support from infrastructure such as the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, formed part of the consciousness raising arms of not only Gay Liberation, but also Feminism and Lesbian Feminism. Lesbian filmmakers in particular developed new types of representations, new ways of discussing film in small gatherings and new ways of writing about film in community newsletters such as *Campink*. In addition, they organised Queer film evenings, mini film festivals and small private film screenings.

For lesbians this often took place within the larger framework of the Women's Movement. For instance, the Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG) formed in 1972 as a consequence of the Women's Movement and consequently developed new methods of self-representation and exhibition, such as women filmmakers accompanying their films to screening.<sup>73</sup> By 1974, several films such as *Women's Day 20c* (Margot Knox, Virginia Coventry, Kaye Martyn and Robynne Murphy, 1972) and *A Film for Discussion* (Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley, 1973)) had been produced by members.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Stott, Jennifer 'Independent Feminist Filmmaking and the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative' in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 118

<sup>74</sup> Alysén, Barbara 'Australian Women in Film' in Moran, Albert and O'Regan, Tom (eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985, p 307

The resulting women's film culture incorporated very different screening methods for these texts, especially small group screenings, accompanied by discussions. It has been argued, however, that over a certain period, some of these short films attracted as many viewers as some mainstream Australian feature films.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to general funding for filmmaking and festivals, the Government also established a special Women's Film Fund (WFF) in 1976. Anna Grieve comments: 'On 9 December 1976, sandwiched between Nuclear Waste at Maralinga and the Australian Canned Fruits Board, was a tiny parliamentary item entitled "Women in Australian Film Industry"'.<sup>76</sup> Funds held over from the International Women's Year due to the dismissal of Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister in 1975, initially intended for Germaine Greer to do a documentary series on human reproduction, became the backbone of the WFF. The WFF offered Australian women an opportunity to develop a body of films by women, some which dealt with same-sex sexuality.



Figure 44

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 307-308

<sup>76</sup> Grieve, Anna 'Big Mother/Little Sister: The Women's Film Fund' in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 74



Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert, who produced films such as *On Guard* (1983) funded by the WFF commented:

*We were both feminists, active in the Women's Liberation Movement before we became filmmakers...Feminism gave us the strength in ourselves and the encouragement to confront our feelings about technology (the mystique), a critique of the learning process and above all, a critique of the content of the mass media.*<sup>77</sup>

Representation around female same-sex relationships in Australia was often connected and a result of broader political platforms such as the Women's Movement, the WFF, Feminism and the emergence of film cultures for and by women.

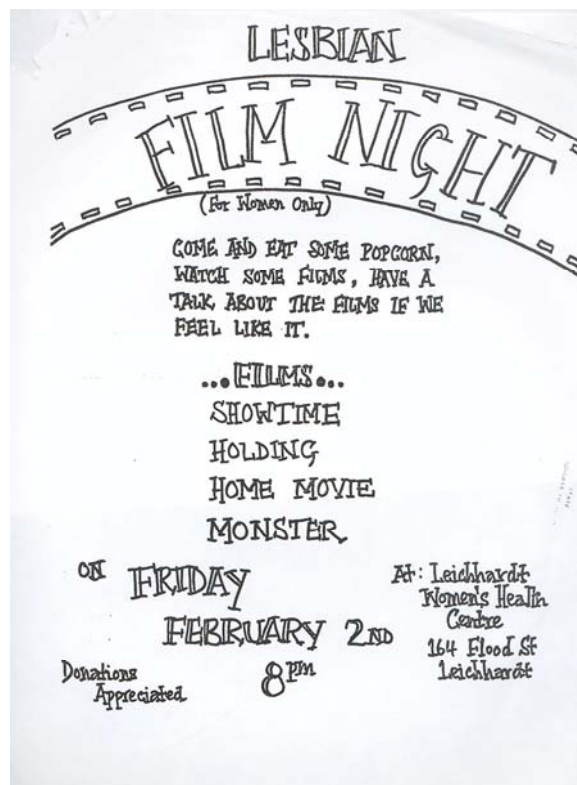


Figure 45

<sup>77</sup> Gibson, Sarah and Lambert, Susan Personal Statements in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 195

Film cultures for and by women were key features of the 1970s. Advertisements and articles in the Queer newsletters featuring films, in particular for women, are numerous. In 1977 the CAMP NSW newsletter advertised a series of women's film run by the Film-makers Co-op.<sup>78</sup> The Co-op was also starting a 'gay' film archive and looking to make some 'gay' films. One announcement for a women's only film night read: 'Our Film night is arranged for Sunday May 15 at 6.30. We'll be showing four fabulous films – *Black Battles*, about aborigines in Redfern, *Coming Out* - yes, you guessed it - a gay movie, Academy-Award-winning-Bruce-Petty's *Leisure* and *Timor- Isle of Fear/Isle of Hope*. Not bad value for \$2.50. There'll be discussions/cheese/raves/booze/cuddles/toilet stops between each movie.'<sup>79</sup>

Lake, commenting on her experience around the Co-op and its gendered politicisation at the time argues:

*I think there was a whole [extra] level of politicisation of women, of lesbians, through the Women's Movement and those broader women's issues than there was say of gay men - I am speaking of my experience in Sydney... It's only recently that things like racism in the [male] gay community has started to surface... the [male] gay community is such a middle-class, white community aspiring to the upper-class with plenty of money and a fabulous home and all those kinds of things. So in some sense... it was looked upon [that] these men didn't have to fight. I mean, had no interest in fighting for childcare or whatever else and taking on government in that respect. They were men and for those who chose, they were out and others chose to be in the closet.<sup>80</sup>*

It seems that women were far more politically active in this era in relation to using film as part of consciousness raising around gender and sexuality, than were men.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Camp NSW Newsletter, No 43, November 1977

<sup>79</sup>Camp NSW Newsletter, No 21, April, 1977

<sup>80</sup>Lake, *op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup>Camp News, No 9, 23 March 1977, pp 1, 3

## *The Gay Film Fund 1976-1980*

The Gay Film Fund is another key example of the energy that women brought to Gay Liberation through film. The Fund was established in 1976 and was set up by members of a group called the Film Collective. Digby Duncan, the co-ordinator, remembers:

*In 1975 I wrote a script for a short film with gay and lesbian characters reflecting their lives and the issues of the times. I was not successful in obtaining funding to make the film (not an unusual tale for a filmmaker), however my gay and lesbian colleagues and friends were outraged by this and decided that we would fund our own films by raising money in our community. A group of lesbians set up a collective (a fine relic of the 70's) and the Gay Film Fund was launched at a Sydney harbourfront BBQ in 1976. The event was so successful that another was held a month later and from there we decided to expand into film screenings.<sup>82</sup>*

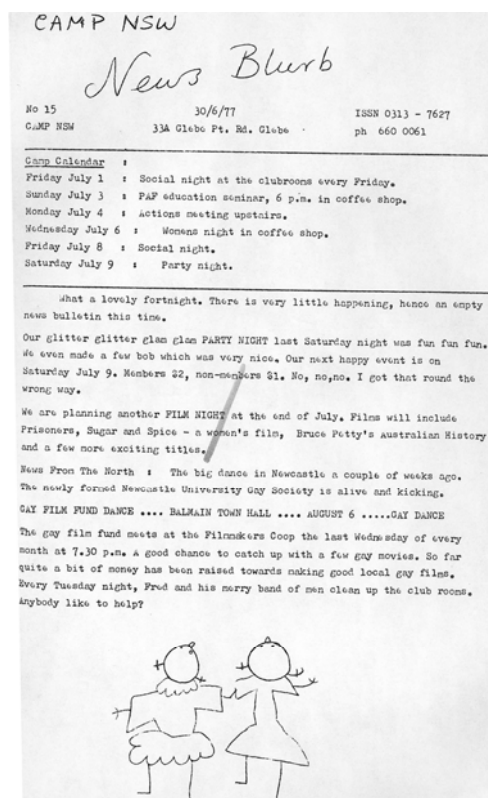


Figure 46

<sup>82</sup> Duncan, Digby E-mail correspondence, 3 March 2004

Advertisements in the gay press, running for up to six issues in *Campaign*, explained that '[t]he film unit of the Gay Film Fund is currently producing a compilation documentary film titled 'One in Seven'<sup>83</sup> and that footage taken from the Solidarity March [Mardi Gras] in 1978, from the Watters Gallery Homosexual exhibition - the first Queer group exhibition in Australia - and the 4th Homosexual conference in Sydney, was to be used for making a documentary on Australian gay history. The collective were asking for donations for the film, as at that stage they had only been recommended for a \$5500 grant from the Australian Film Institute (AFI). Most of the funds up to then had come from donations, from the barbeques, parties and from the then eight members' own pockets.

Only three members, Digby Duncan, Lee Simms and Wendy Freecloud were permanent, although another up to ten 'floating' members were variously involved. All the members were women, as no gay or straight men had joined the group. The energy and commitment of the Women's Film Movement starting in the late 60s and early 70s with initiative such as the Women's Film Fund seems to have continued in projects like the Gay Film Fund.<sup>84</sup>

The screenings and fundraisers also acted as a mobilizing site, giving access to Queer films for a broad range of people. Duncan comments:

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<sup>83</sup> *Campaign*, No 36, 1978, p 41. The advertisement also appeared in No 36, 37, 38 and 39.

<sup>84</sup> Thornley, Jeni 'Past, Present and Future: The Women's Film Fund' in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 61

*By tracking down all the gay and lesbian films we knew of and holding monthly screenings and discussions, we examined our own images on screen. While many who came to the screenings were activists, well-versed in the art of challenging traditional social attitudes and values, many people came for entertainment and socialising. This mixture worked well and the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative in St. Peter's Lane, Darlinghurst provided an intimate venue which encouraged varied viewpoints and lively interaction. We all agreed that we got a raw deal in the mainstream cinema and media at that time and that our attitudes, opinions and lifestyles were mainly neglected in the cinema, despite the fact that many gays and lesbians worked in the film industry.<sup>85</sup>*

The Gay Film Fund also ran dances in 1977 and 1978 to raise funds and to create social opportunities. The dances were held at Balmain and Petersham Town Halls and featured such bands as *Wasted Daze*, *Wendy Saddington*, *The Faye Lewis Band* and *Stiletto* from Melbourne.<sup>86</sup> Meeting on the last Wednesday of each month at the Filmmakers Co-op at 7:30 pm to 'catch up' on some gay films also kept members active and helped to keep the fundraiser rolling.<sup>87</sup> They advertised not just in *Campaign* but also in the CAMP Ink newsletters sent out to NSW members with one of the first film nights held on 29 June 1977, at the same time the Stone Wall Riots were commemorated.<sup>88</sup>

Through the fundraisers from 1977 through to 1978 organisers made sufficient money to rent equipment. Over the next few months, the collective also managed to get \$10 000 from the Australian Film Commission, an earlier grant application having failed.<sup>89</sup> At the Gay Film Festival held at the Paris Theatre on Wentworth Avenue, opposite Hyde Park, in Sydney in May 1978, a benefit screening for the Gay Film Fund was also held and included films such as *Journey Among Women*

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<sup>85</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> *Camp News Bulletin*, No 15, 30 June 1977, p 1

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Cee, Debbie 'One in Seven', *Campaign*, No 37, 1978, p 42

(Tom Cowen), *Love* (Alan Ingram), *Apartments* (Megan McMurchy) and *Home Movie* (Jan Oxenborg, USA).

What was to happen in the next few months was to change Queer Australian lives forever. Duncan vividly remembers the following period and states: 'Then came the debacle of the first Mardi Gras (June 1978) and the production of the documentary *Witches & Faggots, Dykes & Poofers*. Funds accumulated in the Gay Film Fund went straight into the production of this film.'<sup>90</sup> Present at and filming the arrests, Duncan's priceless footage was incorporated into the film, and became part of the historical marking of this turbulent time.



Figure 47

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<sup>90</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*

*Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers* was finished in 1979 and released a year later, with great critical acclaim and containing a much broader platform on issues of discrimination than previously planned.<sup>91</sup> The hard work of the Gay Film Fund members resulted in the production of a very important Australian Queer film. It was (and continues to be) screened regularly at Queer Film Festivals in Australia and abroad.<sup>92</sup>

### *The Beginning of Gay and Lesbian/Queer Film Festivals*

The early history of Gay and Lesbian and Queer Film Festivals in Sydney, often relying on institutional support from bodies such as the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, ideological support from CAMP Inc., Gay Liberation and Radical Lesbians and products from groups such as the Gay Film Fund are more patchy than that of the institutions and liberation movements themselves. From this research, it seems that lesbian, gay and Queer Festivals and other cultural programs became more prominent, organized and consistent only after the lifting of some of the major male anti-same sex sexuality laws in 1984. Traditionally men have had more financial autonomy than women and the lifting of these laws may have opened up a social and judicial space which allowed gay men in particular to assert their rights without fearing prosecution or loss of jobs.

### *The First Gay Film Festival*

A Queer Film Festival genealogy does exist prior to 1984, however, as a result of the political changes set in motion by Queer people in the early 1970s. In March 1976,

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<sup>91</sup>Sargent, Dave 'Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers', *Campaign*, Issue 54, 1980, p 5. The film was screened alongside *Farewell to Charms* and *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts*.

<sup>92</sup> *A Queer Body of Film*, Mardi Gras Film Festival Program, 1998, p 50. In 1998, *WFDP* was screened at the Mardi Gras Film Festival as part of the 20 year anniversary screenings of the first Mardi Gras parade. *WFDP* was also screened internationally as recently as 2003 at the exhibition *Outlines: Lesbian and Gay Liberation in the 1970s*, November 2002 - March 2003, National Library Gallery, 58-78 Molesworth Street, Wellington, New Zealand, [www.laganz.org.nz](http://www.laganz.org.nz) Accessed 5 January 2005

the Filmmakers Cinema screened a series of films in a session titled *Program on Sexuality*. Crea Tarret's *Coming Out* (1972), Gillian Armstrong's *Satdee Night* (1973), Paul Bugdens and David Perry's *Adam* (1975), Connie Gleeson's *Holding* (1970) and Lloyd Reckords' *Dream* were screened.<sup>93</sup>

The first 'gay' film festival in Sydney, however, occurred a few months later in June that year, two years before the popularly reported *Images of Gays*, which was held at the Paris Cinema in 1978 and up to recently thought of as the first 'gay' film festival in Sydney.<sup>94</sup>

The 1976 event was titled the *Festival of Gay Films* and held at the Filmmakers Cinema in Darlinghurst, as part of a Sydney Filmmakers Co-op initiative. Peter Langford, the then editor of *Campaign*, expressed his wishes that the film festival would tour to other cities.<sup>95</sup>

Films that were shown that June included both Australian and international films. The Australian films were *Adam*, (Paul Bugden, 1975), *Satdee Night*, (Gillian Armstrong, 1973) and *Pride and Snide*, (1973) a 'contrast in attitudes to gay liberation in Adelaide.'<sup>96</sup> International films, amongst others, included again *Coming Out*, (Crea Tarrant, UK 1972), *Holding*, (Constance Beeson, USA 1970) in addition to *Sweetfeed* and *Finnish Frustrations*. Martin Smit commented that '[f]or many cinemagoers [the films] will be too avant garde... [but that] the two [sic] Australian movies and particular *Adam*, are of world standard, as far as the avant garde genre are concerned and clearly indicate that we here can produce movies of significance and originality.'<sup>97</sup> Bill Brooks, a participant in that first festival recalls:

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<sup>93</sup>'March Program', *Filmnews*, Vol 8, No 13, March 1976. The dates for their screening were 18, 21 and 25-28 March 1976.

<sup>94</sup>This contradicts Stephen Dunne in 'Moving Images', *20 Years of (R)evolution: 1998 Mardi Gras Festival Guide*, 1998 and Gavin Harris in *It's a Riot: Sydney's First Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*.

<sup>95</sup>Langford, Peter *Campaign*, Issue 6, February 1976, p 6

<sup>96</sup>Smith, Martin 'Aussie Gay Pics', *Campaign*, Issue 10, June 1976, p 33

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, p 33



*I remember [the 1976 Gay Film Festival] well as it was the first time I got picked up. It was in a small room with 2 or 3 rows of seats and the rest of the audience sat or lay on the floor in front of the screen - rather like watching TV in someone's living room... During the screening I found my knee touching the guy next to me - he didn't move his leg and gradually I got more and more confident that he was enjoying it - he asked me out the next night and after a drink at the Cricketer's Arms in Foveaux Street we went back to his place for sex, which was totally natural for me and a liberating experience. My girlfriend wasn't as understanding about this as she had been about the sex I'd had with the guy in the room next door at my university college, so I suddenly found myself 'out'!<sup>98</sup>*

What is increasingly significant about this film festival is that it was not only the first gay film festival in Sydney or in Australia, but possibly the first gay film festival in the world. The oldest Lesbian and Gay/Queer Film Festival up to now it has been suggested, is *The San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival*, the largest event of its kind globally.<sup>99</sup> The festival started in 1977 and according to San Francisco's Frameline historians, 'launched the world's first gay film festival.'<sup>100</sup>

The first gay film festival in Sydney, however, as can be seen from this archival research, actually occurred a year before the popularly reported *Gay Film Festival of Super-8 films* in San Francisco of 1977. The 1976 *Festival of Gay Films*, held at the Filmmakers Cinema in Darlinghurst, Sydney, was to eventually lead into the development of Queer Screen in the 90s, one of the largest Queer Film Festival globally. Sydney Australia, it would seem, can claim to have had the first gay film festival in the world.

Melbourne soon followed with its own gay film festival titled *A Festival of Gay Films* in 1977, held at the Union Theatre at Melbourne University in August of that

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<sup>98</sup> Brooks, Bill E-mail correspondence, 22 April 2004. In response to the article 'First Gay Film Festival', *Sydney Star Observer* Thursday 22 April 2004, p 12, based on research for this thesis.

<sup>99</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> *Frameline Film Festival*, San Francisco, [www.frameline.org](http://www.frameline.org) Accessed 23 April 2003

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

year.<sup>101</sup> A film festival at the Paris Theatre in Sydney in November 1977, titled *Gay Film Festival*, was also advertised in *Campaign*, with Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* to have premiered on 12 November. The fact that you could hold your lovers hand in a gay friendly Cinema was lauded as a big plus for the event.<sup>102</sup>

### *The Word is Out*

The third, rather than the first, Sydney Gay Film Festival, therefore, was in May 1978 at the Paris Theatre and titled *Images of Gays*.<sup>103</sup> It was the same year that 53 of the thousand or so lesbian, gay and Queer activists who marched in commemoration of the Stonewall Riots were arrested in Sydney, heralding the beginning of what has become the biggest night time Queer celebration and civil rights parade on the planet – the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The *Images of Gays* Film Festival took place just a few weeks before the march.

As previously mentioned, the film *The Word is Out*, was one of the major films screened at *Images of Gays*. This film, of all the films shown, is credited by many to have played a large part as a catalyst in the formation of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Lee Franklin commenting on the emotions of people during the screening of *The Word is Out* at the film festival suggested:

*It was an amazing human experience: a theatre chock-a-block full of gay men and women hooting, laughing, cheering and crying. It was a communal wave of human emotion, anger, joy, compassion and sorrow. More than anything it was a mass sensation of pride. Pride at being human, pride at being gay. Pride at being human and gay.*<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>'Festival of Gay Films', *Campaign*, Issue 22, 1977, p 44. The Festival included films such as *Eloise and Chloe*, *Theresa and Isabelle*, *Female Trouble*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, *Lot and Sodom*, *Les Bitches*, *Flesh*, *Lonesome Cowboys* and *A Bigger Splash* plus supporting shorts. Tickets were a mere \$1.50 concession, \$2 full

<sup>102</sup>'Film Festival at the Paris Theatre for November', *Campaign*, No 25, 1977, pp 35, 41

<sup>103</sup>Dunne, *op. cit.*, p 55

<sup>104</sup>Galbraith, Larry 'Our lives, ourselves. Our memories...' *Sydney Star Observer*, 8 February, 1991, p 29

The recently formed Gay Solidarity Group took heart from the crowds reaction to the film and decided to include a night time 'parade and fiesta' as part of their contribution to International Solidarity Day. Gavin Harris, writing about this history in an anniversary issues for the 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras comments:

*Hundreds of people stayed back to discuss the [The Word is Out's] politics and, inspired by scenes of the campy American parades, Ron Austin, a CAMP activist, discussed his idea for a night-time "apolitical street party" with Lance Gowland, Kym Skinner and Jim Walker. They took the idea to the CAMP's Action Group, where Margaret McMann dubbed it a "mardi gras"*

<sup>105</sup>

The origin and mythology of much of Queer Cinematic Culture in Australia can be found in this type of liberation politics, driven by the need for larger social and judicial reform. The creation of the 'first' gay film festival, therefore, must be seen in relation to other political events and the need for social and judicial mobilisation at the time. The gay activist, Dennis Altman, pointed out the political ramifications of having visible Queer representation when he suggested of this 'first' Queer Film Festival:

*It is my belief that a successful film festival is one of the more important activities the gay movement can undertake at this stage... It is... the idea of stressing the existence of a homosexual cinema that seems to upset puritans. For the festival is essentially a celebration and to celebrate homosexuality is something that our moral guardians cannot abide.*<sup>106</sup>

The reason that this film festival stands out as a particularly memorable event which has been incorrectly credited as being the 'first' Queer Film Festival is its link to the political arrests of that year in relation to the development of Mardi

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<sup>105</sup>Harris, *op. cit.*

<sup>106</sup>Altman, Dennis 'Gay Film Festivals - The Importance of Images: Dennis Altman previews the coming Australian film festivals', *Campaign*, No 32, 1978, p 19

Gras. The first arrests in 1973, just like the first Gay Film Festival in 1976, did not garner as much attention and consequently, as the anthropologist Greg Denning suggests of many significant cultural markers, there is often a distinct difference between what 'really' happened and what 'actually' happened.

What *really* happened, he suggests, is part of the mythologising mechanism around an event leading to its status as a cultural marker and what *actually* happened is what the archival evidence points to. Denning writes: 'I do not care so much about what really happened. About what actually happened I do'.<sup>107</sup>

As a cultural historian of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia, however, I care about both. The fall-out from the arrests, consequent actions to assist those arrested and protests in support of them, spawned a new, urgent activism that needed its own narratives.<sup>108</sup> The last few years of the 1970s saw the culmination of years of political actions into a critical mass that propelled Queer activism and film making with great energy into the 1980s. Part of this energy came from the mythologizing narratives of 'what really happened'.

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<sup>107</sup>Denning, Greg 'The theatricality of observing and being observed: Eighteenth-century Europe "discovers" the 18th century "Pacific"' in Schwartz, Stuart B (ed.), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p 455

<sup>108</sup> Johnston, Craig 'Gay rights demonstration' first published in Honi Soi, 11 July 1978, in *a Sydney gaze: the making of gay liberation*, Schiltron Press, Sydney, 1999, p 26. Johnston, as part of the Gay Solidarity Group who organized the event, writing about the emerging campaign at the time commented that the group demanded the dropping of charges against those arrested on June 24-26; the repeal of all anti-homosexual laws; the ending of police harassment and victimization of lesbians and male homosexuals; the ending of discrimination against lesbians and homosexuals in employment, especially teaching; and enactment of a charter of rights which includes sexual preference to protect the democratic rights of lesbians and male homosexuals.

## A Decade of Grief: Queer Australian Cinema in the 1980s

Australian film historian Barrett Hodsdon suggests that Australian film in the 1980s saw the consolidation 'of a previous immature film industry into a self important production center.'<sup>109</sup> Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures followed the same suite, consolidating and increasing film production and screening opportunities and building on the achievements that had energized the movement in the 1970s.

The 1980s in Australia was a time of enormous change for Queer people. Historic anti-discrimination legislation introduced by the NSW Parliament in 1982,<sup>110</sup> the onslaught of AIDS as early as 1983,<sup>111</sup> reforms in the anti-sodomy laws in 1984 and the emergence of an Australian multiculturalism<sup>112</sup> impacted directly on Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures. The Mardi Gras parade evolved into a much more celebratory event and its attendant cultural activities saw the return of lesbian and gay coalitionism<sup>113</sup> and an increasing awareness of other, internal differences.<sup>114</sup>

Despite some of the positive judicial and cultural shifts, activists such as Graig Johnson remembers the 1980s as bitter, tragic years. By the mid-80s, more than 5,700 Australians had died of AIDS with 80% of those men exposed to the virus through

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<sup>109</sup> Hodsdon, *op. cit.*, p 36

<sup>110</sup> Johnston, Craig 'Introduction', *a Sydney gaze: the making of gay liberation*, Schiltron Press, Sydney, 1999, p 192

<sup>111</sup> Wotherspoon, *op. cit.*, p 222. The first case of AIDS in Australia, in Sydney, was reported in March 1983.

<sup>112</sup> Johnston, 'Introduction', *op. cit.*, p v. Johnson suggests: 'If in the 1970s the greatest ethnic influence on the gay liberation movement was that of Afro-Americans with their concept of self-determination, pride and self-help... today [1984] the greatest ethnic influence on the gay movement is that of non-Anglo minorities with their concept of multi-culturalism, ethnic rituals and community-based lobbying... Today's lesbian and gay movements construct separate communities and use their relative separation from the wider society as a basis for ethnic honour and mobilization.'

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

homosexual sex.<sup>115</sup> To him and many others who experienced the losses of this era, it was 'a decade of greed [and] a decade for grief.'<sup>116</sup>

### *Queer Film Festivals, Pride and Mardi Gras*

One of the key markers of Queer Cinematic Culture in Sydney in the 1980s was the consolidation of various 'gay' film festivals, exhibiting mostly international texts, but also continuing to support locally made Australian Queer films. Their history is inevitably linked to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and Pride, as they evolved in conjunction with and often as a result of the political and social changes brought about by the latter. These festivals gave audiences access to international and local films and filmmakers and continued to foster the activism that had been established in the 70s.

The first gay film festival of the 1980s occurred in June 1980, at the same time as Mardi Gras, the Stonewall celebrations and Gay Pride Week.<sup>117</sup> Several Queer films were shown as part of this Festival titled *Sexuality in Film*, which was organized by the Feminist Film Workers and Sydney Women's Film Group at the Filmmakers Co-op.<sup>118</sup>

A year later, however, as a result of Mardi Gras' increased popularity, the parade and most of its associated events, except the film festival, moved to the summer. Wotherspoon comments that 'it was only in 1981, when the time was altered to its current summer setting of February, that [Mardi Gras] became far more of a party, a mass celebration by the gay community of its identity and achievements.'<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Campaign*, No 53, May 1980, p 31

<sup>118</sup> *Campaign*, No 54, June 1980, p 31. The Australian film *Farewell to Charms* (Carla Pontiac) and a US film *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts*, (Jan Oxenburg) were shown.

<sup>119</sup> Wotherspoon, *op. cit.*, p 209

It is interesting in the light of Mardi Gras moving to February that year, that the gay film festival was still scheduled for the June period. Linking film and representation directly to politics and the global gay liberation platform of Stonewall, was perhaps still seen as the overriding reason for the festival.<sup>120</sup>

By 1982, however, a gay film festival had been programmed for February. Dave Sargent, director of the Filmmakers Co-op at the time, curated an AFI film-program which included many Queer classics such as *Mädchen in Uniform* and *Boys in the Band*.<sup>121</sup> The emergence of a broader, more substantial gay and lesbian cultural festival in conjunction with Mardi Gras, endeavoring to include film, also took stronger hold that year.

Commenting on the *Our Lives, Ourselves* cultural festival organized for 1983 in conjunction with the Mardi Gras, Larry Galbraith suggested that '[We] felt that' we could benefit from some sort of cultural and political and social event. The Mardi Gras was starting to take off as a summer event and we felt there was room for a festival of events to coincide with Mardi Gras'.<sup>122</sup>

This first gay cultural festival, although smaller than originally intended, nevertheless kick-started the beginning of the Mardi Gras festivals that were to grow significantly over the next few years.<sup>123</sup> Though there was no organized film festival for *Our Lives, Ourselves* that year, a free preview of *The Clinic*, directed by David Stevens, was screened.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Sydney Star*, Vol 2, No 24, 1981, p 3. The film festival of 1981 was again held at the Filmmakers Cinema in St. Peters lane and films which were shown had women's only sessions, with films such as *Near the Big Chakra* and Jan Chapman's *Showtime*. Richard Turner's *Squeeze* (1980) and Rosa von Praunheim's *Army of Lovers or Revolt of the Perverts* (1979) were also shown to mixed audiences along with several other previously exhibited Australian and overseas films.

<sup>121</sup> Dunne, *op. cit.*, p 55

<sup>122</sup> Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p 29

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *The Star*, Vol 4, No 13, January 1983, pp 1-2. *The Clinic*, written by Greg Millen, a doctor at a Crown Street medical practice, examined the experiences of people with STD's and employed a

### *Gay Male Law Reform and Annual Queer Film Festivals*

The emerging significance of the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras throughout Australia became obvious in 1984, when the first television film *We'll Dance if We Want To*, (Richard Turner, 1984) was made of the parade.<sup>125</sup> It was at this time also that long overdue judicial reform was to take place.

In 1984, after years of activism, lobbying and protests, the repeal of the anti-sodomy laws in NSW finally brought a form of 'equality' for homosexual men in this state with the existing laws on heterosexual acts and lesbian acts.<sup>126</sup> Some discrepancies remained, however, with the age of consent for gay sex 18 and for heterosexual and lesbian sex 16. In addition, having consensual sex with males aged 16 and 17 incurred a higher penalty - 10 years imprisonment - than for rape - 7 years.<sup>127</sup>

These changes appeared to have had a significant impact on the evolution of Queer Cinematic Cultures in Sydney. A stronger and more visible Queer Film Festival Culture immediately emerged post 1984 as a result of the support of the Mardi Gras Festival, and perhaps because of a gradual sense of security developing with the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation and for gay men as a result of the repeal of the anti-sodomy laws. The financial support that government institutions

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great deal of humour to discuss the various problems occurring at VD clinics. Village Roadshow gave the preview as part of the festival.

<sup>125</sup>*The Star*, Vol 4, No 15, February 1984, p 15

<sup>126</sup>*The Star*, Vol 5, No 22, May 1984, p 2

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p 2. An analysis of the law by *The Star* reads:

Consenting sexual acts - age of consent:

-Homosexual intercourse is defined as putting a penis into either the anus or mouth of another male

-If the other person is under ten years - penalty life

-If the other person is over 10 years but under 18 years - 10 years

-If the other person is under 18 and the accused is a teacher, father or stepfather - 14 years

-If the other person is an idiot or imbecile regardless of their age - 5 years

-'An act of gross indecency' is not defined by the Crimes Act, but it is presumed to cover sexual acts other than those included in 'homosexual intercourse' eg mutual masturbation

-If the other person is under 18 years - 2 years



such as the AFI gave the gay film festivals post law-reform, also impacted on the quality and size of the festivals that were to emerge.

The first festival organized post law-reform was the first film event associated with and supported by Mardi Gras and the Australian Film Institute (AFI).<sup>128</sup> Franco Di Chiera curated this Festival titled the *Gay Film Festival* at the Chauvel in 1985 and included movies by Kenneth Anger, Fassbinder's *Querelle* and Richard Turner's *The Clinic*.<sup>129</sup> The Drag Queen Dorris Fish 'opened the Festival in true Fish style, arriving in a white Cadillac escorted by two leather clad motor cyclists.'<sup>130</sup>

Despite the fanfare and the build-up to the event, not everyone thought that this first Mardi Gras Film Festival was a success. The 'gayness' of several of the films were questioned, with critic Jeff Britton saving his praise only for the Australian Queer films screened. Commenting on these sessions, he wrote: 'I particularly enjoyed the two series entitled Australian Retrospectives. Indeed we have come a long way since the turbulent encounters with the police [in 1978].'<sup>131</sup>

The *Gay Film Week*, as the event was titled by 1986, continued to grow in popularity and strength over the next few years, supported by Mardi Gras, the AFI, on occasion the Womens' Film Account and indirectly the AFC and NSW

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<sup>128</sup>*The Star Observer*, Vol 6, No 16, February 1985, pp 12-16. The film festival ran from the 16-17 February.

<sup>129</sup>Dunne, *op. cit.*, p 55. A festival with similar films organised by the AFI is also mentioned in *The Star Observer*, Vol 6, No 14, 10 January, 1985, p 7

<sup>130</sup>*The Star Observer*, Vol 6, No 14, 10 January, 1985, p 7

<sup>131</sup> Britton, Jeff 'Still catching my breath from Mardi Gras', *The Star*, No 112, 4 April 1985, p 37. The Australian Retrospective Part 1 session screened Megan McMurchy's *Apartments* (1977), Carla Pontiac's *Farewell to Charms* (1979), *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofers* (Digby Duncan, 1979), *Buckeye and Pinto*, *Waiting Round Wynyard*, (Franco Di Chiero, 1983), *Man into Woman* and *The Clinic* (David Stevens, 1983). The Australian Retrospective Part 2 screened *Morris Loves Jack* (Sonia Hoffman), *Satdee Night*, (Gillian Armstrong, 1973), *Xos, a cry for help*, *Homosexuality: A Film for Discussion*, (Barbara Creed, 1975), *Adam* (Paul Bugden, 1975), *Elia Ratz and Squeeze*, (Richard Turner, 1979).

Ministry for the Arts through their support of the Chauvel Cinema and AFI exhibition programs.<sup>132</sup>

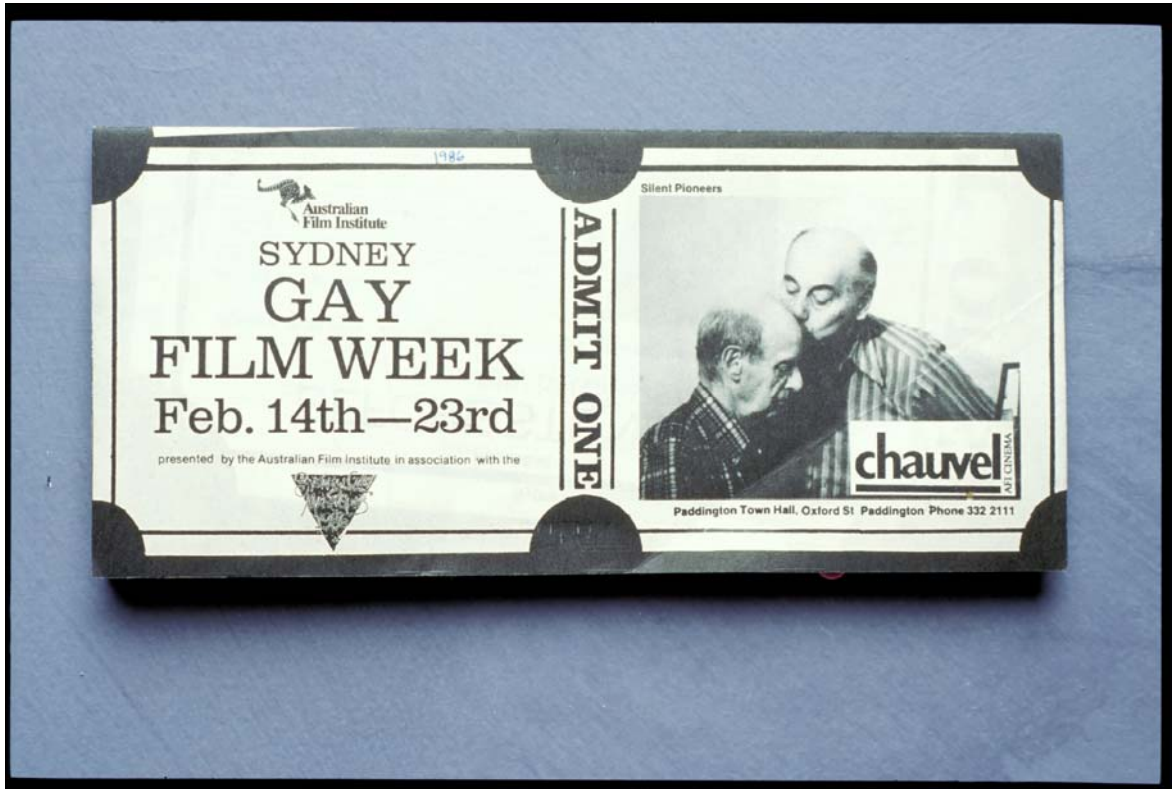


Figure 48

The 1986 Film Festival was opened by Vito Russo, the author of the *Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, and he was also invited to open the Melbourne Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, which had shifted to summer that year.<sup>133</sup> Russo was in Sydney to give a lecture presentation of his book involving slides, clips and commentary and his presence was so popular and inspiring that he was to be part of the *Gay Film Week* again in 1988.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Information printed on the *Gay Film Week* programs, 1986-1989.

<sup>133</sup> *The Star Observer*, January 1986, p 12 and *The Star Observer*, June 1985, p 20. The 1985 Melbourne Queer Film Festival was still during the Stonewall period, titled Stonewall Film Festival (June 23 - June 24).

<sup>134</sup> *Gay Film Week* flyer, 1988

### *Queer Australian Films in the 1980s*

Very few men, gay or straight, engaged in the groundbreaking cultural shifts in representation of Queer lives on film that took place during the 1970s.<sup>135</sup> Whereas Queer Australian Films made by women dominated Queer filmmaking in that decade, however, emerging Queer films made by men was a major feature of the 1980s.

There were still significant numbers of Queer films made by women in the 1980s such as *Relating*, (Leonie Seebohm, 1980), *Flesh on Glass* (Anne Turner, 1981), *On Guard* (Susan Lambert, 1983), *Even Cowboys* (Noellie Taylor, 1985), *Farewell To Charms*, (Carla Pontiac, 1985) *Life on Earth as I Know It* (Penny McDonald, 1989), *Can't You Take a Joke* (Viki Dun, 1989) and documentaries such as *Spot the Lesbian* (Kippy East, 1985), *AIDS: Questions and Answers* (Eve Ash, 1987) and *Safe Sex: Here we Come*, (Eve Ash, 1987).

In contrast, however, there are almost twice as many Queer films by men during this period, including *My Survival as a Deviant* (Toby Zoates, 1980), *A Hard God*, (William Fitzwater, 1981), *Rebel Rebel* (Stephen Bennet, 1982), *Breaking Through* (Steve Aujard, 1982), *Waiting Round Wynyard* (Franco Di Chiera, 1983), *The Clinic* (David Stevens, 1983), *Nasty* (Franco Di Chiera, 1984), *La Scala, Lo Scalone* (Stairs and Staircases, Franco Di Chiero, 1984), *Well Dance if We Want To*, (Richard Turner, 1984), *Undercover* (David Stevens, 1984), *Sleepin' Round* (Michael Rogowski, 1985), *Le Corps Image* (Stephen Cummins, 1986), *Soufflé* (Andrew Sharp, 1986), *Soft Targets* (Martin Daley, 1986), *Out Snappin'* (Anthony Babicci, Panos Kouros, Eddy Hackenberg, 1986), *Poetry for an Englishman* (Daley Martin, 1987), *Everlasting Secret Family* (Michael Thornhill,

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<sup>135</sup> Queer Australian films made by women in that decade include, amongst others, *Satdee Night*, (Gillian Armstrong, 1973), *Homosexuality: A Film for Discussion*, (Barbara Creed, 1975), Megan McMurchy's *Apartments* (1977), Jan Chapman's *Showtime* (1977), Robin Laurie and Margot Nash's *We Aim to Please*, (1977), *Morris Loves Jack* (Sonia Hoffman) and *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers* (Digby Duncan, 1979). Australian films about Queer issues made by men only include such films such as *The Set*, (Roger Ward, 1970) and *Adam* (Paul Bugden, 1975).

1988), *True Faith*, (Lawrence Johnston, 1988), *Night Out* (Lawrence Johnston, 1989), *Equinox* (Robert Murphy, 1989), *Moment 21* (Richard Caon, 1989) and *Elevation* (Stephen Cummins, 1989). In addition, documentaries such as *AIDS* (George Pugh, 1985), *Living with AIDS* (Shayne Mooney, 1989), and *Understanding Sexuality*, (Bob Huber, 1986) deal with issues of HIV/AIDS and its impact on people in the 1980s.

Perhaps one of the most obvious reasons for the proliferation of Queer filmmaking by men in Australia in this decade, was the emergence of HIV/AIDS.

### *HIV/AIDS*

A significant number of Queer films and documentaries screened and/or made in the 1980s was about HIV/AIDS.<sup>136</sup> Roger Hallas, commenting on a similar body of Queer experimental film and video on HIV/AIDS in America at the time, suggests the epidemic played a major role in Queer visual activism, with practitioners developing radical new genre mixes to get the message of the unfolding tragedy across into the media. Commenting in retrospect in the late 1990s, he suggests that although Queer experimental films and videos continues to be made about HIV/AIDS, the historical circumstances that demanded such radical rethinking, however, was particular to the specific era of the 1980s and no longer was as urgent or evident.

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<sup>136</sup> *Sydney Star Observer*, 25 January 1991, p 20. By the 1990s, international films on AIDS made a significant component of Australian Queer Film Festivals. In the 1991 International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Sydney, for example, *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (USA, Robert Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 1989) opened the festival, with proceeds going to the Quilt Project. 1992 *Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Program* notes. At the 1992 International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Peter Adair's *Absolutely Positive* (US, 1990) opened the festival with proceeds going to ACON. Other films dealing with HIV/AIDS in that festival included *Relax* (UK, Christopher Newby, 1991), *Mother Mother* (unknown), *Diana's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Upfront* (USA, Ellen Spiro, 1990), *Aids Babies, Living and Dying with AIDS*, (Swiss, Claudia Aclin, 1990), *Over Our Dead Bodies*, (UK, Stuart Marshall, 1991), *Strip Jack Naked* (UK, Ron Peck, 1991) and *Voices from the Front*, (USA, Maria Maggenti, 1990). There was also a forum at that year's festival on AIDS support groups and their needs.

Activist burnout, the relative success of combination therapies and the deaths of many filmmakers, he suggested, all played their part in the eventual passing of this critical moment of Queer visual activism.<sup>137</sup> In the 1980s in Australia, however, before activist fatigue and the death of filmmakers such as Stephen Cummins, HIV/AIDS was a major player in the production of Queer films.

### *Coming Out*

HIV/AIDS, however, was not the only driving forces behind Queer filmmaking in the 1980s. Continued activism around law reform and social change in reaction to the arrests in 1978, also played a major part in the development of Queer Cinematic practices. People were still discriminated against simply because they were Queer and 'coming out', advocated as one strategy towards visibility and recognition, was a difficult, if not impossible, concept for many.

One of the key Queer filmmakers emerging in the 1980s whose films deals with the tensions of that time, was Franco De Chiero. In 1982 Di Chiero produced a 13 minute, 16mm colour film shot around Wynyard Station in the Sydney CBD titled *Waiting Round Wynyard*. Di Chiero remembers that it was an exciting time as he found himself among the yet unknown future stars of the film industry including Jane Campion, Jocelyn Moorhouse and P J Hogan. He had just relocated from Perth and found himself in a Sydney buzzing with gay life and activism.

Di Chiero developed *Waiting Round Wynyard* to point out the inequalities between heterosexuals and homosexuals, and to articulate in film the politics of Queer life and representation of the time. The film is top and tailed with scenes of Michael, a young closeted gay man, who is watching a gay protest march outside Hoyts Cinema complex on George Street, with a huge billboard for *Making Love* in the background. Di Chiero suggests:

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<sup>137</sup> Hallas, Roger 'The Resistant Corpus: Queer Experimental Film and Video and the AIDS Pandemic', *Millennium Film Journal*, No 41, Fall 2003, p 60

*By the time I'd arrived in Sydney... there was a thriving gay community and while Sydney's exciting Golden Mile came alive to Donna Summer and Hollywood's sanitized attempt at gay life in the feature Making Love, Sydney gays were still reeling from massive arrests in the first Gay Mardi Gras in 1978. All this formed the backdrop to the coming out story, which was to become Waiting Round Wynyard*<sup>138</sup>

One of the most interesting things about the film was the process of editing the film. Di Chiero had originally planned to have a non-linear script, with flash forwards and flash backs with various visual associations between different times and scenarios. He suggests that this originally intended, didactic approach was possibly inspired by his gay activist background and a 1970s environment where Women's Liberation and Lesbian Separatist politics had enormous impact on film culture. The final edit, however, was not as originally planned. Di Chiero remembers:

*The intended structure ... was not to be. Certainly, after the film was shot, the editor and I assembled uncut scenes according to script order – including all the flash forwards and flashbacks. But the School's head of editing at the time, Ulla Ryghe, who had edited several of Ingmar Bergman's films including Persona and The Shame, suggested the performances were so strong it would be a disappointment to fragment and weaken them with this device... Who was I to argue with someone who'd edited for one of the world's greatest directors?* <sup>139</sup>

The end result is much a more traditional structure where Michael, the young man, meets the older Flight Attendant and discovers aspects of his own sexuality. Di Chiero comments on the final result:

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<sup>138</sup> Di Chiero, Franco E-mail correspondence, 11 May 2003

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

*I still wonder to this very day what might have been had I realised my gay political view of the world on screen as originally intended. Would the flashing device that had been so fundamental to the ideas I wanted to convey, have resulted in a film which captured something more of the times? Would it have had a stronger resonance? Would it have provided a greater insight into the contradictions and dilemmas faced by a young gay man?... Whatever the answer, I do know the film touched a cord.<sup>140</sup>*

For Di Chiero, it was a personal story, a record of what he had lived and experienced. Although a bit embarrassed by the film's 'naivety', twenty years since it was made, he accepts it is part of Australian Queer history. As a microcosm of the major debates occurring at the time, this film articulates some of the key issues faced by Queer people who were active in the 1980s.

### ***Feminist Filmmaking and Women's Films***

Although women did not feature as dominantly in Queer film production in the 1980s as men, they produced a significant number of Queer films, in addition to creating broader based texts as part of a larger Australian Filmic Culture. As well as working in the industry in general, they also formed separate organizations to assist women filmmakers.



Figure 49

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

The Feminist Filmworkers (FFW), one such organization, formed in early 1978 as an offshoot of the Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG).<sup>141</sup> Although the SWFG began 'as a logical extension of feminist access to other media... [where] film was seen as yet another means to communicate the feminist message',<sup>142</sup> the FFW was formed by a few members of the SWFG because of a 'dissatisfaction with the informal/disintegrating nature of the SWFG and [to make] a conscious effort to deal with a changing political perspective according to which *woman* does not necessarily equal *feminist*.'<sup>143</sup> The films they were interested in had to raise feminist issues and not just included in programs because the major creative roles in the making of the films were carried out by women.<sup>144</sup>

One of the first lesbian films produced by members of the SWFG, straddling the feminist/women's film divide, was Sarah Gibson and Susan Lamberts *On Guard* (1983). The film examined issues of women's work, reproduction and sexuality. Self-representation by women of their own sexuality and desire, however, was still very controversial in Australia at the time. The lesbian sex scenes received significant attention from the mainstream press with headings such as 'Steamy lesbian love scenes too hot to handle' common and the filmmakers were forced to ban publication of all stills from the scene.<sup>145</sup>

It is not really a surprise then, given the mainstream press' reaction to lesbian sexuality and the general conditions of women's oppression, that women's and 'Women Only' screenings of films were still popular in the gay film festivals that were organised in the 1980s. There were women's sessions during, for example, the *Gay Week* celebrations of 1983, and several screenings of films made by women for

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<sup>141</sup> Stott, *op. cit.*, p 118

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p 119

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Thornley, *op. cit.*, p 7

<sup>145</sup> Bunbury, Stephanie 'Everything is not Roses: The Press and Women's Independent Film' in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 238



women only at the Sydney Gay Center in Holt Street, Surry Hills.<sup>146</sup> There were also women only film exhibitions at the Gay Center with films on addiction such as *We all have our Reasons* and *Looking in the Fridge for Feelings*<sup>147</sup> and an evening of lesbian films at the Liverpool Women's Health Center for the *International Day for Lesbian and Gay Male Freedom*.<sup>148</sup>

The majority of these films were advertised as 'Women's Films' as opposed to Feminist Films and screenings restricted to female patrons only. As Jennifer Stott suggests in relation to film by women held by the Filmmakers Co-op 'the screening of women's films acted as an essential sign of the women's movement, *here and now* and provided rare opportunities for women not located in the WLM [Women's Liberation Movement] to see films about work, the past, women and unions, sexuality, incest, abortion, body image, relationships, families etc... The category "women's film" worked to promote both the similarities and differences between films and suggested new ways of programming.'<sup>149</sup> Whereas naming a session Feminist Films may have deterred some women from participating, the title Women's Films acted as a more encompassing sign for a diverse range of constituents.

Screening practices developed by women in the feminist and women's film movements created access opportunities, raised consciousness and offered mobilization opportunities for women of all sexualities. Just as Black Consciousness in South Africa advocated development of self-esteem and autonomy first in segregated, self determined environments, these sessions were for women to experience their own cultures and achievement free from harassment from men, both Queer and non-Queer. The need for the Queer community to organise

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<sup>146</sup>*The Star*, Vol 4, No 12, January 1983, p 20 and No 18, April 1983, p 9. In January the *Ladies Room* was screened for women only, in February *WFDP* and *The Selling of the Female Image* and in April *Babies and Banners* and *Home Movies* were exhibited.

<sup>147</sup>*The Star*, Vol 4, No 23, June 1983, p 15

<sup>148</sup>*The Star*, Vol 4, No 21, June 1984, p 1

<sup>149</sup>Stott, *op. cit.*, pp 122-123

autonomously from the heterosexual community is also reflected in this subdivision of the then 'gay' community, which had to further take into consideration the needs of different groups within its own ranks.

### *Experimental Aesthetics and Ideology*

Experimental aesthetics and sexual minority ideologies are theorised by filmmaker Jim Hubbard as having significant elements in common. He comments that both avant-garde film and gay consciousness are created in a world that wants homogenous sexuality and a narrow aesthetic defined through the dominant media and that they therefore have common representational challenges. Hubbard suggests:

*The [representational] experimental process mirrors, in many ways, the process of understanding a gay identity [as] both demand an endless re-imagination of the self and the world in order to envision and create what the mainstream believes should not and must not exist.*<sup>150</sup>

This aesthetic/ideological hybridity, however, did not always co-existed comfortably in Australia. Many Queer Australian films were socially radical in terms of their ideology around sexuality, but not necessarily progressive aesthetically.

Some of the early beginnings of Queer experimental shorts in Australia did have experimental modes of representation, such as Armstrong's *Satdee Night* (1973), but most such as *WFDP* were visually quite conservative. Di Chiero's comments on how his vision of a more disjunctured *Waiting Round Wynyard* was rejected, may even point to a broader film culture in Australia that was incapable of understanding particular Queer visual 'sensibilities'. Having to conform to particular expectations around documentary formats insisting on visibility above all

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<sup>150</sup> Hubbard, Jim 'Introduction: A short, Personal History of Lesbian and Gay Experimental Cinema', *Millennium Film Journal*, No 41, Chelsea, Michigan, Fall 2003, p 10

else, or having to use visual languages set up by 'experts' who did not understand Queer visual idiosyncrasies, could have stunted a more experimental exploration of early Queer film.

By the late 1980s, however, in addition to the *Gay Film Week* festivals, more experimental Queer Cinematic Cultures were emerging. A cutting edge Queer film exhibition titled *Bent*, in one such example. *Bent* was part of the *SPLASH* Sydney Film and Video Event in April 1988, and organized and curated by one of Australia's most recognised Queer experimental filmmakers, Stephen Cummins.

*Bent* was a session of six short films that were selected not just because of the bent of the filmmakers, 'but also for the style of the films themselves.'<sup>151</sup> The shorts screened in *Bent* were experimental socially *and* visually and included international films such as *Illegal Tender* (Paul Bettell, 1986) a stream of consciousness piece titled *Miracle of the Rose* (Cerith Wyn Evans, 1984), a collage piece about Jean Genet titled *Epiphany* and *Alfalfa* (Richard Kwietniowski, 1987), about language and gay culture. Two John Greyson pieces were curated, one titled *The ADS Epidemic* (Acquired Dread of Sex, 1987) and *A Moffie Called Simon* (1986).<sup>152</sup> Some of Cummins' own films such as *Elevation* (1989) were also screened.<sup>153</sup>



Figure 50

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<sup>151</sup> "'Bent" to make a Splash', *Sydney Star Observer*, 15 April 1988, p 16

<sup>152</sup> It was the second time this South African made Queer film screened in Australia. The first was in the 1988 Gay Film Week.

<sup>153</sup> "'Bent" to make a Splash', *Sydney Star Observer*, *op. cit.*, p 16

An experimental format or 'style', as Third Cinema theorist Teshome Gabriel suggests, does not necessarily belong to a particular ideology, but can assist in disseminating a message. Commenting on the role of style in revolutionary cinema, Gabriel argues:

*Style is not reserved for a specific ideology. But style can help us 'squeeze' out a film's ideological undercurrents. In its proper use, style can serve as a 'key' to understanding ideology.*<sup>154</sup>

In addition to their content, reception and screening, experimental Queer films' styles, such as those evident in the films mentioned above, can link content to an ideological base. As Hubbard suggests, experimental aesthetic in Queer films offer Queer people the tools to re-imagine themselves in a mainstream that constantly tries to thrust representations onto them.

Thanks to the work done by Cummins and his legacy through the Stephen Cummins Bequest, an award established after his death of AIDS in 1994, there has been a vital impetus for new, avant-garde Australian, Queer films that has only strengthened over the years.<sup>155</sup> The Bequest's support of infrastructure such as the *My Queer Career* competition managed by Queer Screen, has been enormously significant in creating a diverse Queer Australian Cinematic Culture. Cummins' vision has resulted in the emergence of hundreds of new, often experimental Queer films that now inhabit and thrive in a contemporary, Australian visual landscape.

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<sup>154</sup> Gabriel, Teshome, *Third Cinema in the Third World: Aesthetics of Liberation*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1982, p 41

<sup>155</sup> 'Film-maker's oeuvre had its own resonance', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday 25 August 1994, p 28

### *A Pink List?*

Although after 1984 male homosexual sex was no longer illegal if you were 16 and female or 18 and male and Queer filmmakers were continuing to assert their visions of life in Australia, social acceptance continued to lag behind judicial reform. One such form of social discrimination was the barriers in place for openly Queer actors, which could prevent access to work within the film industry.

Tony Sheldon, a well known actor of gay and straight roles, claimed in 1989 that a 'Pink List' banning lesbian and gay actors or those associated with them, was allegedly held by some administrators of film and television dramas. Many gay actors and directors apparently spoke privately about the issue, but few were willing to be public about their concerns. Sheldon stated:

*It is well known that for the past 20 years certain casting agencies have kept a pink list of people they know are gay or suspect are gay... If you play more than one gay role... you don't work for those people... I didn't know all that stuff about the pink list until a few years into my career... If you play a gay part, it's like you are asking for trouble.<sup>156</sup>*

The existence of the list, according to a spokesperson from the Anti-Discrimination Board, would have been hard to prove, unless someone who had witnessed discrimination came forward. Such a list and actions around discrimination if proven, however, would have been in 'clear breach of the law'.<sup>157</sup> Greg Shears, the producer of a popular Australian TV series, *GP*, echoed Tony's comments the following year.

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<sup>156</sup>'Pink List Bans Gay TV Actors', *Sydney Star Observer*, No 108, Friday June 1989, pp 1-2

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, p 1

*I can think of a number of employees in this industry who will not employ directors, designers who are gay. It is a bizarrely and fairly homophobic industry... I am continuously amazed by the gay backlash you find in film and television. There is some public perception that those areas are more liberated and are more accepting and I'm not quite prepared to argue that this is the case.*<sup>158</sup>

It is not hard to imagine the existence of such a list, as it would not have been illegal at the time of strong anti-Queer laws and could very well have been carried through from the time of law reform. If such a list existed (and continued after anti-discrimination laws were assented to) it would have had and continued to have devastating consequences for Queer actors' visibility and their ability to admit to their sexuality publicly and on screen. Sheldon concluded:

*If some casting directors decide people they perceive as gay aren't part of an acceptable image, it is part of a process of holding back acceptance. The Pink list is part of a net of hypocrisy in which many gay actors become ensnared*<sup>159</sup>

The 'Pink list' is perhaps a unique signifier of the 1980s as a decade, where radical shifts in the law took place without equivalent social reform. Even if an actual list as claimed by Sheldon, did not exist, discussion of the fears around exclusion and discrimination in the discursive milieu certainly did. Queer people could now live without fear of being imprisoned simply for being themselves and could produce images of themselves for themselves with institutional support, yet still had to contend with other, more subtle forms of discrimination such as exclusion and hidden prejudices. The need to assess and counter these oppressions and to engage with discrimination outside of and within the Queer communities, was to be the *leitmotif* of the 1990s.

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<sup>158</sup>Galbraith, Larry 'Greg Shears: Presenting positive gay images', *Sydney Star Observer*, 1 June 1990, p 17

<sup>159</sup>'Pink List Bans Gay TV Actors', *Sydney Star Observer*, *op. cit.*, p 1

## Burning Down the Celluloid Closet: Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures from the 1990s Onward

*In 1994 Australia's Celluloid closet burst into quite unexpected, and spectacularly colourful, flames... One of the most popular films of the year was The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Stephan Elliot); and together with The Sum of Us (Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling), this hugely visible and successful film began to rewrite the sexuality of 'Australia' and radically alter the circulation of this elusive quality in an international context.<sup>160</sup>*

Alan McKee



Figure 51

Queer Australian Cinematic Culture exploded with tremendous energy into the 1990s, with the size, range and number of Australian Queer Film Festivals and Queer Films produced increasing exponentially. In Sydney the emergence of *Queer Screen*, in Melbourne the *Melbourne Queer Film and Video Festival*, in Perth the *Out the*

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<sup>160</sup> McKee, Alan 'How to tell the difference between a stereotype and a positive image: putting Priscilla, queen of the desert into history', *Screening the Past*, Peter Hughes (ed.), La Trobe University, Issue 9, March 2000, [www.latrobe.edu.au](http://www.latrobe.edu.au) Accessed 25 June 2004

Way, WA Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, in Brisbane the *Brisbane Queer Film Festival*, *Film Feast* in Adelaide and Queer film screenings in Darwin in the Northern Territory and Hobart, Tasmania<sup>161</sup> were just some of the new developments that created the energy for this new Australian Queer Cinematic moment.

The creation of this new Queer Cinematic infrastructure and the range of new films created, I suggest was fuelled in part by an increase in funding of Queer Australian films (see Chapter 4), through a rise in shorts and documentaries in the industry in general<sup>162</sup> and as a result of Australia's adoption in 1989 of multiculturalism as a national cultural policy.<sup>163</sup> This policy provided for the first time an official civic definition of Australia, which acknowledged the diverse make up of the Australian people. One of the ways in which this new cultural diversity was registered, was through gay and lesbian films.<sup>164</sup>

Whereas it was possibly to make a rough list of Queer Australian films in the 1970s and 1980's, it is an almost impossible task from the 1990s onwards. With the advent in Sydney of the *My Queer Career* competition in 1994 and the *QueerDOC* documentary festival in 1998, more than 300 Queer shorts and documentaries alone had been screened by 2004.<sup>165</sup> This does not include higher budget shorts, emerging feature films, or the screening of Queer films outside major Queer Film Festivals.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> 'News in Bief -Queer films screened', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 6 April 1995, p 4 and 'Tasmania win...', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 8 May 1997, p 12. Despite government treats, Tasmanian police took no action during the 1995 inaugural *Hobart Queer Film and Video Festival* which screened eight films banned by the State Attorney General. Organisers described the event as a huge success and suggested the Attorney General lacked 'the courage of his convictions'. By 1997, Tasmania finally passed a reform bill on gay and lesbian rights.

<sup>162</sup> Hodsdon, *op. cit.*, p 38

<sup>163</sup> O'Regan, Tom *Australian National Cinema*, *op. cit.*, p 23

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p 21

<sup>165</sup> This figure was acquired by counting the number of MQC entrants listed in the Queer Screen program guides from 1994 -2004.

<sup>166</sup> Hodsdon, *op. cit.*, p 38



The arrival of feature films dealing openly with Queer sexualities was one of the first markers of this decade. Major Queer films such as *Dallas Doll* (Ann Turner, 1993), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Dessert* (Stephan Elliot, 1994), *The Sum of Us* (Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling, 1994) and *Head On* (Ana Kokkinos, 1998), with serious funding behind them, were released into the mainstream and embraced both in Australia and abroad.



Figure 52

The second marker of this decade was the creation, primarily through shorts and documentaries, of multidimensional film cultures dealing with sexuality, race, gender and ethnicity in combination with and connected to each other. This cultural diversity, part of a broader Australian multi-cultural cinematic evolution, was produced not only for a mainstream, but catered for internal differences within the Queer communities themselves. With infrastructure such as Sydney's Queer Screen, representation of internal diversity was not only facilitated through programs such as *My Queer Career* and *QueerDOC*, but transmitted to other national and international film festivals. The golden age of Queer Australian Cinematic Culture had arrived.

### *The Emergence of Queer Screen*

The emergence of supportive infrastructure in Sydney such as Queer Screen must be seen within the context of the *Gay Film Week* Festivals that continued to expand into more encompassing and representative events post-law reform until 1989.<sup>167</sup> Each year these festivals supported numerous international and Australian Queer films, many of which would never have been seen outside of these events.

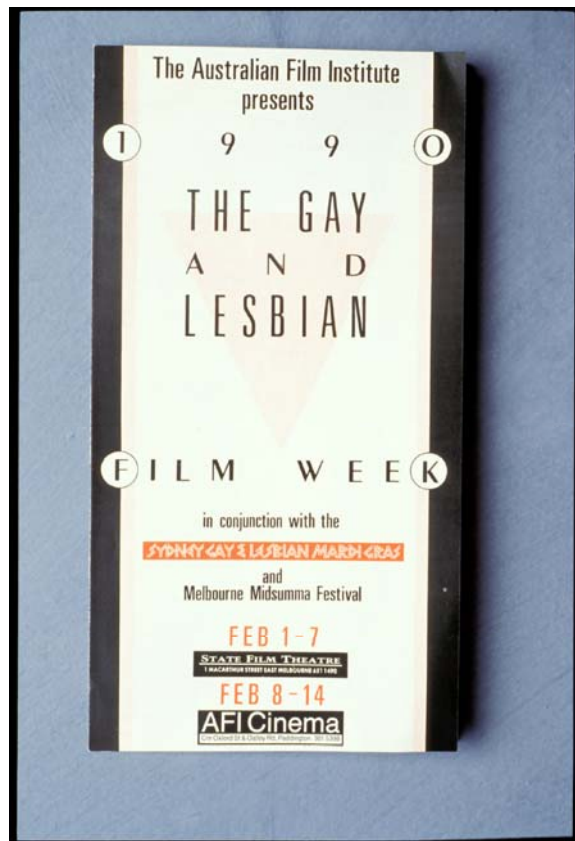


Figure 53

In 1990 the *Gay Film Week* changed its name to the *Gay and Lesbian Film Week* in response to other institutions such as the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras adopting a more gender inclusive title. The renewed gay and lesbian coalitionism established far more inclusive and representative institutions.

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<sup>167</sup>*Gay Film Week* Festival Flyers, 1987, 1988, 1989, *Gay and Lesbian Film Week* Festival Flyer, 1990

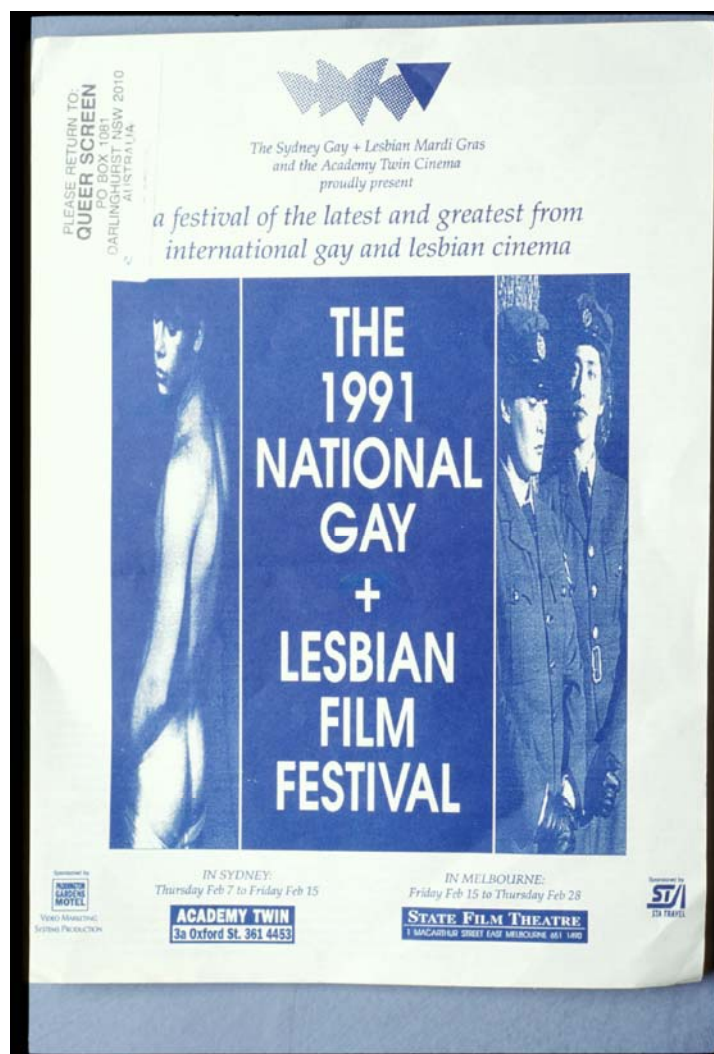


Figure 54

By 1991 and 1992 the *Gay and Lesbian Film Week* went a step further and changed its title to the *National Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*.<sup>168</sup> With the continued support of the Mardi Gras and the AFI, it grew to also incorporate regions outside of Sydney.<sup>169</sup>

The 1993 Festival, however, was localized again, with the new *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* programmed at the Academy Twin in February that year. A dispute between the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* and Academy management

<sup>168</sup> *National Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* flyers, 1991 and 1992

<sup>169</sup> 'Gay and lesbian flicks for all capitals in new year - from Bugs to Genet', *Filmnews*, December/January 1990/1991, Vol 20, No 11, p 2

with Mardi Gras that year, however, was to forever change the Queer Cinematic landscape in Australia.

According to Mardi Gras, the disagreement between itself and the Academy and a subsequent call for a boycott was about issues of taste, profit and community ownership. The *Sydney Star Observer* noted that 'Mardi Gras claimed the Academy Twin Cinema [was] trying to "appropriate" the festival from the gay and lesbian community.'<sup>170</sup>

Mardi Gras president Susan Harben and Russel Thompson were afraid that giving over the Festival to a commercial company would see the gay and lesbian community lose out to commercial pressures, with only mainstream and stereotypical films screened.<sup>171</sup>

Many Queer film goers, however, were enraged by Mardi Gras' perscriptiveness in what constituted lesbian and gay cinema. This 'speaking for' the community became a sore point early on in the debate with one of the film festival's curators, David McDiarmid commenting: 'I don't think Mardi Gras has the right to claim to speak for the community in matters of cultural output, cultural significance, cultural issues. I am a queer artist. Mardi Gras on this issue is not speaking for me. And I don't want them speaking for me.'<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>'Film festival in deadlock', *Sydney Star Observer*, 30 October 1992, p 3. The relationship between the Academy Twin and Mardi Gras further broke down after Mardi Gras accused the Academy Twin of not honouring their contract for the 1992 festival. Under the 1992 contract 25% of profits were to be paid back to the community through Mardi Gras, but apparently the costs accrued was \$130 000 and Mardi Gras received no money. Gerry Hilton, the manager of the Academy Twin found the claim that Mardi Gras was 'not satisfied' with the said amount 'in light of the fact that a Mardi Gras auditor inspected our accounts and was unable to identify a single discrepancy... extraordinary'.

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup>'Art wasn't meant to be easy', *Sydney Star Observer*, 13 November 1992, p 17

The matter was thankfully resolved and Mardi Gras came on-board for not one but two Queer Film Festival in 1993.<sup>173</sup> The February Festival Director, Gillian Minervini suggested this issue was much like other issues for which the Queer community had fought, commenting 'It is our choice to decide who we want to fuck with and it is our choice to decide whether we are going to see a film or not.'<sup>174</sup>

As a consequence of the debates with Mardi Gras, in February that same year a film organisation called *Queer Screen* was formed - a collective of film writers, producers and curators. They were separate from the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* screened earlier in the year and organized an alternative Queer Film Festival for September, coming together 'to affect a change in film culture in Australia through the development and promotion of a dynamic queer film culture.'<sup>175</sup>

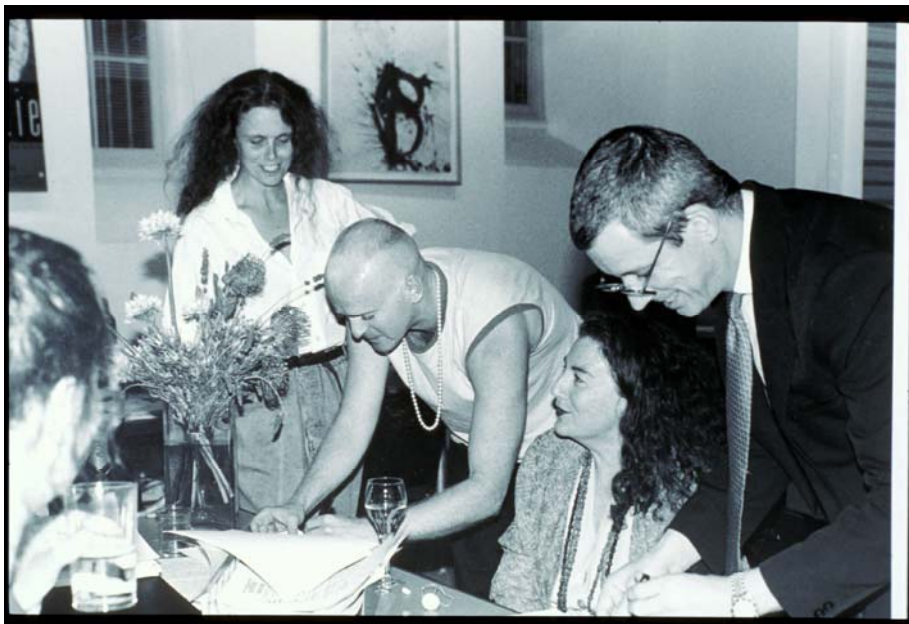


Figure 55

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<sup>173</sup>Film festivities', *Sydney Star Observer*, 29 January 1993, p 19

<sup>174</sup>'Art wasn't meant to be easy', *Sydney Star Observer*, *op. cit.*, p 17

<sup>175</sup>Robinson, Denise. In the introduction of the *First International Queer Film and Video Festival* Program, September 1993

That September, with \$100,000 in funds from Mardi Gras, the first *Sydney International Queer Film and Video Festival* was held at the AFI Cinema. This festival's Director, Denise Robinson suggested that the organisers wanted to respond to things as they occurred and participate in and develop on what already exists in Queer film culture. She believed that they could 'affect a queer film culture in Australia as opposed to [just a] celebration... which is a way of acknowledging that queer film cultures have to be produced, they're not just there to be found.'<sup>176</sup>

The inclusion of race into issues of Queer Cinema also became fundamental to the way Queer Screen perceived itself, where identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender were connected to other identities. Robinson argued in relation to linking Queer to issues of race that 'Queer is a word like any other word. It is how we mobilise it, what we do with it'.<sup>177</sup>

Queer Screen, established to run the festival, was not just going to screen films, but be an organisation that would facilitate critical discourse around Queer film and develop the capacity to be involved in exhibition, distribution, production, analysis and funding of Queer film. Events held, such as interventions and forums, were to be part of its mandate.<sup>178</sup>

Queer Screen's next event, a mini-festival, in February 1994, was organised by Simon Hunt and Leonie Knight, again at the AFI Cinema, to assist in recouping some of the costs incurred by the festival in September 1993. It was very well received, so well in fact, that Queer Screen has hosted the major Queer Film Festival for Mardi Gras in this February timeslot ever since.

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<sup>176</sup>Decent, Campion 'Queer Screen-changing the parameters', *Sydney Star Observer*, 3 September 1993, p 15

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup>*Ibid.* A forum on race and identity was organised during the September festival, in particular around Aboriginality and Aboriginal filmmakers.



### *Queer Australian Features*

Infrastructure such as Queer Screen predominantly offered exhibition space for Queer films that traditionally would not been taken up by the mainstream. The emergence of Queer Australian features in the 1990s, however, and their consequent mainstream support, marked a startling coming of age for Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures.<sup>179</sup>



Figure 56

For the first time in Australian history, major ‘positive’ Australian feature films with central Queer characters were produced and screened in mainstream cinemas. Not only were these films hugely successful nationally, but they also crossed into international domains. So successful in fact was *Priscilla*, that hand in hand with films such as *Strictly Ballroom* (Baz Luhrmann, 1993) and *Muriel’s Wedding* (P J

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<sup>179</sup> One film not discussed by McKee is Ann Turner’s *Dallas Doll* (1993), which was produced prior to *Priscilla* and *The Sum of Us*. *Dallas Doll* has a bisexual character, Dallas Adair, played by Sandra Bernhard.

Hogan, 1995), it came to signify part of an Australian 'national cinema' in Hollywood<sup>180</sup> and assisted in yet another revival of the Australia film industry.

Needles to say, because of the historical lack of Queer Australian features, both *Priscilla* and *The Sum of Us* were subject to substantial analysis. One consistent critique of *Priscilla* was its stereotyping and representation of race and gender. *The Sum of Us* on the other hand was routinely critiqued for being too assimilationist. Michael Cootes, in a typical of reviews of the time commented:

*Priscilla looks a tad culturally patronizing in roping in some Aboriginals to throw a corroboree gratefully interrupted by a drag routine. More truthful than Priscilla about uncertainties and vicissitudes plaguing human relationships, Sum gets called too blokish and so a bit off the mark.*<sup>181</sup>

McKee comments, however, that it is not necessary to accept these reductive categories in order to critically engage with these films. Texts such as *Priscilla*, he suggests, can be seen as both the best and worst representation of gay men in Australia. McKee continued:

*[Priscilla] celebrates difference and promotes sameness. It is assimilatory and it shows freakish distinction. It is all of these and more. In 1990s Australia, it proved to be a prominent cultural item in its attempts to insist on similarity and difference as suitable terms for conceptualising a homosexual identity.*<sup>182</sup>

McKee also suggested that *The Sum of Us*, inviting similarly divergent interpretations, can in one instance represent a gayness similar to straightness where similarity to a norm is seen as a good thing, and at other times be interpreted as an

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<sup>180</sup> Yue, Audrey 'Asian-Australian Cinema, Asian-Australian Modernity', *Journal of Australian Studies*, University of Queensland Press, June 2000, p 191

<sup>181</sup> Coote, Michael *Sydney Star Observer*, February 1995

<sup>182</sup> McKee, *op. cit.*



ineffectual film geared towards a flattening, heterocentric assimilation.<sup>183</sup> What becomes clear is that in both films a range of 'positive' and 'negative' interpretations remain possible, which could be used to inform the discursive milieux of Queer Cinematic Culture. They should not simply be dismissed because of perceived or real flaws in their make-up.

As a result of *The Sum of Us* and *Priscilla*, further critique around Queer feature filmmaking in Australia quickly emerged. In June 1995, as part of the Sydney Film Festival, a forum titled *Less than the Sum of Us: Representations of Homosexuality on the Australian Screen* was organised by the Australian Center for Lesbian and Gay Research to examine the emergence of these new Australian Queer features and to find ways of increasing diverse representation. The panel invited speakers, amongst others, Professor Liz Ashburn, Gillian Minervini, Martine Coucke, Con Anemogiannis and Simon Hunt to discuss issues around Queer Filmmaking.<sup>184</sup>

Hunt, reflecting on the forum in an article titled *World Without Homos*, suggested that the enormous cost associated with filmmaking was one of the biggest challenges to a diverse range of Queer representations.<sup>185</sup> In terms of the various mediums, anecdotal evidence from within the funding bodies also seemed to suggest that a large number of gay and lesbian themed short film scripts, as opposed to feature films scripts, were being received, perhaps due to the international success of local shorts such as Hunt and Cummins' own collaborative *Resonance*. The fact remained that features film scripts were not as plentiful and that lesbian visibility and diversity in all mediums was still an issue.<sup>186</sup>

Arguing for the development of rounded gay and lesbian characters on screen, not just attendant servants to heterosexuality, Hunt suggested that 'only when the

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> 'Film Forum', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 15 June 1995, p 4

<sup>185</sup> Hunt, Simon 'World without Homos', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 29 June 1995, p 4

<sup>186</sup> Lupino, Lucy 'Less than the sum of us', *Filmnews*, Vol 25, Issue 5, July 1995, p 12

screen reflects the actual number of non-heterosexuals in this country can a character's sexuality have the choice of being either central or incidental. Queer people, according to Hunt, needed to 'shake the screen's world without homos [by shaking] the industry itself'.<sup>187</sup>

Within the wake of *Priscilla* and *The Sum of Us* and despite the fears of the forum participants, other Queer Australian features, quickly emerged. Major Queer feature films such as Richard Turner's *Violet's Visit* (1995), Emma-Kate Croghan's *Love and Other Catastrophes* (1996), Ana Kokkinos' *Head On* (1998) and Tony Ayers' *Walking on Water* (2002) were soon added to the growing number of Queer Australian features.<sup>188</sup> For the first time in Australian history, Queer issues were placed centrally within a broader Australian feature film Culture and brought Australian Queer agendas openly into the mainstream of an Australian national cinema. An incredible evolution through years of silence and invisibility had finally occurred.

### *Double Trouble: Queer Australian Cinematic Diversity*

Although Queer Theory had evolved in the 1990s specifically to complicate the mono-cultural outcomes of gay and lesbian cultural practices of previous decades and Queer Screen was also formed to complicate gay and lesbian filmic representations, the new Queer Australian features and international *New Queer Cinema*<sup>189</sup> emerging in the 90s, initially missed the boat in terms of cultural difference.<sup>190</sup> Although hugely significant as part of a broader recognition of cultural diversity in Australia, revealing 'a tolerant national subject and a society able to

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<sup>187</sup> Hunt, 'World without Homos', *op. cit.*, p 4

<sup>188</sup> *Walking On Water* received the Teddy Award for Best Gay and Lesbian Themed Feature Film at Berlin Film Festival 2002.

<sup>189</sup> Munoz, Jose Esteban 'Dead white: notes on the whiteness of the new queer cinema', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 4, No 1, Duke University Press, Durham 1998, p 127-138

<sup>190</sup> Ana Kokkinos' *Head On* (1998) is one notable exception.

value difference',<sup>191</sup> in themselves they were not fully engaged with internal difference.

Whereas these early Queer features were predominantly white, however, many Queer documentaries and shorts produced in this decade were more representative of internal cultural Queer difference. They explored issues of race, sexuality and ethnicity in a multidimensional fashion, rather than as separate entities of difference. It is within Queer documentary filmmaking and shorts, supported later on in the 1990s through events such as Queer Screen's *My Queer Career* and *QueerDOC*, that the recognition of cultural difference was expanded to include internal Queer cultural difference.

*My Queer Career* was an initiative of the 1994 Mardi Gras Film Festival, which is still hugely popular and one of the best supported areas of Queer Screen.<sup>192</sup> The works have had an enormous range and style, from Indigenous films such as Ruth Carrs' *Mimi Pulka*, (1994), to Asian Australian representations such as Andrew Soo's *Lui Awaiting Spring*, (1999) to camp comedies such as *Retro Sheilas in: Space Aliens Are Tooling Our Sheilas*, (Juliet Johns, 1996) and animations such as *Uncle* (1996), *Cousins* (1998) and *Brother* (1999), precursors of the animator Adam B. Elliot's Academy Award winning *Harvie Crumpet* (2004).

*QueerDoc*, another Queer Screen initiative, was initiated in 1998 and was the first Queer documentary festival in the world. This festival was programmed as a October event, to repeat documentaries that people may have missed during the main festival, and also to program additional films that could not be screened in the February timeslot. Diversity within the Queer communities was a major feature of the Queer documentaries screened at this festival. This genre, more than

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<sup>191</sup> O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, *op. cit.*, p 21

<sup>192</sup> *My Queer Career* was given a boost in 1994 through the Stephen Cummins Bequest. This bequest has ensured that the prize money, plus film industry support for winning shorts in *My Queer Career* is one of the biggest in Australia and New Zealand for any shorts competition.

any other Queer film medium, offered significant representation of internal community difference.

Some of the Australian documentaries screened at the Mardi Gras Film Festival and QueerDOC from the 1990s onward, include amongst others, *Sexing the Label* (Anna Broinowski, 1997), *Out in the Bush* (George Willison, 1997), Reno Dal's *Voices* (1997) which features five interviews with Sydney based Aboriginal gay men, *Toxic Queen*, (Fiona Cunningham Reid, 1997), *Mary's Place* (Melissa Lee, 1998), *The Man in the Irony Mask*, (Paul Andrew, 1998), *Alias* (Kim Farrant, 1998), *Troughman* (Kellie Henneberry, 1997), *Black Sheep*, about Aboriginal lesbian identities, (Lou Glover 1999) *Paradise Bent*, Pacific Islander Queer communities, (Heather Croall, 1999), *Outing Gay Hate* (George Willison, 2000), *Secret Women's Business* (Melissa Kyu-Jung Lee, 1999) and *Dykes and Tykes* (Christina Devine, 2000).

Prior to supportive structures such as *My Queer Career* and *QueerDOC*, however, Queer films showing internal diversity had already begun to emerge. Chinese-Australian filmmaker Tony Ayers in conjunction with the UK's Channel 4 was one of the first filmmakers to explore thematics of internal Queer difference when in 1991 he produced a film titled *Double Trouble*, the first ever documentary on Australian Aboriginal Queer people and their experience of multidimensional oppression. *Double Trouble* was an interview style documentary, looking at the lives of several Queer Aboriginal people. *Sista Girls* (transgender Aboriginal people), gay and lesbian and *Blak Kweer* participants in the film illustrated how issues of race was as important, if not more important, to them than their sexuality.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup>Andrew, Brook and Rea 'Blak Babe(z) and Kweer Kat(z)', *Twenty Years of Revolution*, 1998 *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival Guide*, Sydney, 1998, p 61. Aboriginal Queer people altered the term Queer to Kweer in a similar fashion to the way they changed Black into Blak. Kweer artists Rea and Brook Andrew commented: 'What's it like to be both Blak and Kweer?... If the body is Blak and the sexuality is Kweer, does one cancel out the other?... Australian cultural life is full of images that present the Blak body as exotic and fetishised - an object of desire. The Blak man (well hung)



Figure 57

Many participants expressed their allegiances first to their Aboriginal communities and secondly to their sexuality, confirming that issues of race were often privileged over sexuality for survival. As discussed in Chapter 1, whereas race privileged Queer Australians could base their identity almost solely around their sexuality, in film and in life, Aboriginal people had double or depending on their gender, triple the trouble to contend with.

In light of these significant differences within the Queer communities, the impact of broader, national debates around race and ethnicity on Queer film, amongst others, has to be taken into account when analyzing representations of difference within Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures.

When, for instance on 3 June 1992 the High Court in *Mabo and Others v. Queensland* recognised for the first time in Australia's history, that Native Title was a part of Australian land law, that the concept of *Terra Nullius* was false, Queer Aboriginal people were directly affected.<sup>194</sup> The screening at the 1993 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival of *Terra Nullius* (1992), a short film directed by Anne Pratan, which talks about the denial of Aboriginal rights, meant that Queer issues were not separated from debates on race. Other films about Aboriginal Queer people produced were also screened consequently at Queer Film Festivals including *Voices*,

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the black woman (lascivious). All those dark eyes staring at us wantonly, but whom is wanting whom?'

<sup>194</sup> *Mabo*, Parliamentary Library, 2003, [www.aplh.gov.au](http://www.aplh.gov.au) Accessed 6 November 2003

(Reno Dal, 1997) and *Black Sheep* (Lou Glover, 1999). Queer Aboriginal people's sexual identities were not separate to their racial identities and this multidimensional reality was acknowledged by Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures.

The rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in the mid-1990s, with its own race and sexuality privileged philosophies and the emergence of conservative forces in Federal politics, also forced Queer communities to address issues of difference more forcibly within their own culture, including film.<sup>195</sup> The Australian Council for Gay and Lesbian Rights (ACGLR) spokesperson Jennifer Wilson commented in 1997 that '[The Federal Government] is toeing the line with the whole of what One Nation is all about, in that we don't want blacks in the country, and we don't want any faggots and queers either'.<sup>196</sup> New cinematic representations were needed to counter these multi-dimensional oppressive forces.



Figure 58

In response to this climate of political turmoil and ideological conservatism, Queer Australian filmmakers such as Tony Ayers and Melissa Lee began to produce films addressing a range of issues in relation to ethnicity, race and sexuality. In the wake

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<sup>195</sup> Pauline Hanson was the founder of the One Nation Party and came into prominence in 1996. Originally based in Ipswich, Queensland, Ms Hanson was the Federal member for Oxley between 1996 and 1998.

<sup>196</sup> Bolger, Brendan 'Homosexuals hit by immigration cuts', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 29 May 1997, p7

of One Nation Lee, a Korean-Australian filmmaker, directed *Mary's Place* (1997) a documentary on a lesbian mother from a migrant background and Ayers, in addition to *Double Trouble* produced *China Dolls* (1997) and *Sadness* (1999), about gay Asian Australians. Ayers commenting on his filmmaking suggests:

*China Dolls [1997] comes from the contradiction I felt about being gay and Chinese, in Australia... I don't respond to a lot of queer work [where] the assumption is that we are all one world, all one community and we all think the same thoughts – or that we should.*<sup>197</sup>



Figure 59

Just as Apartheid affected Queer representations of different Queer communities in South Africa, so too did the national issues of Australia affect the existence and push for diverse, heterognotic representation of Queer Australian communities. Issues of race and ethnicity in relation to Queer Australians in light of, amongst others, Mabo and One Nation, saw some remarkable Queer films on race and sexuality emerge from the 1990s onward.

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<sup>197</sup> Ayers, Tony Interviewed by Tim Hunter in 'Graceful Ayers', *Outrage*, Satellite Media Group, Darlinghurst, December 1999, p 36-40

## Towards the Future: New Mardi Gras

*Queer Screen Limited recorded a loss for the 2002/2003 financial year, with a "tight festival" now promised for 2004. "While we're still going to have a broad range of gay and lesbian films, we're going to have to make sure that costs are kept very tightly in control," newly elected Queer Screen president Robert Judd told Sydney Star Observer... The report blames the loss on a decrease in ticket sales following the 2002 Gay Games as well as uncertainty from audiences after the collapse of the now defunct Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG).<sup>198</sup>*

In September 2002 the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras was dissolved and New Mardi Gras formed with substantial debt owing to creditors.<sup>199</sup> Queer Screen had received significant funding from Mardi Gras, providing an estimated \$500,000 over 10 years. This funding arrangement ended when old Mardi Gras collapsed.

The president of Queer Screen at the time, Pip Newling, suggested that Queer Screen was going to be run as a separate entity and would survive without Mardi Gras funding. Changes envisaged included the outsourcing of sponsorship-raising to a professional company and looking for new accommodation.

Queer Screen thankfully survived the loss of Mardi Gras funding and continued its support for Queer filmmaking in Sydney and Australia. It held successful film festivals in 2003, 2004 and 2005 and in conjunction with events such as *My Queer Career* and *QueerDOC*, continues to be a key player in the exhibition and support of Queer films in Australia. The Queer community's support of these events, however, remains crucial to the sustainability and evolution of home-grown, diverse, Australian Queer films.

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<sup>198</sup> Benzie, Tim 'Queer Screen survives \$57,000 loss', *Sydney Star Observer*, Issue 689, 20 November 2003

<sup>199</sup> Mills, David 'The second coming of New Mardi Gras', *Sydney Star Observer*, Issue 689, 20 November 2003



## Conclusion

I began this chapter by examining Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures in relation to Australian cinema in general. Taking into account the positioning of Australian cinema as a 'quasi-object' and 'unprincipled assemblage' by Australian film theorists such as Tom O'Regan and Robert Dodsdon, I suggest Queer Australian Cinematic Culture is also a system of intersecting discourses which functions as a 'quasi-object'.

I then reclaimed some early Australian silent films directed by women such as *Sunshine Sally* (1922, Lawson Harris and Yvonne Pavis) and *Jewelled Nights* (1926, Louise Lovely) to uncover a strong presence of sexuality and gender performativity. Australian women filmmakers, active early on in the film industry, in particular challenged the roles assigned to them in the still patriarchal, post-Federation Australia of the time.

The subsequent emergence of sound films in the 1930s such as *Rangle River* (1936, Clarence Badger), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938, Ken G Hall) and *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940, Charles Chauvel) reveal several sissy characters and homosocial viewing positions that can be Queered from a contemporary perspective. I suggest the screening of some of these films at recent Queer film festivals have given Australian audiences a whole new range of important Queer cinematic signposts.

I discovered, however, that it was not until the 1970s that openly Queer films for and/or by Queer people emerged, with productions such as *The Set* (1970, Frank Britton). The critical mass created by these emerging new Queer films saw another significant global first in this decade, with the world's first gay film festival, *Festival of Gay Films* held in Sydney in June 1976. Two years later, the screening of *The Word is Out*, an American civil rights documentary at another gay film festival, *Images of Gays*, was also a catalyst for the first Gay Mardi Gras March of 1978.

I suggest that Queer Australian cinema in the 1970s impacted significantly on the creation of a socially mobilised, political body of activists who contributed to major social and juridical changes in coming decades. Supportive film industry structures such as the Australian Film Commission (AFC); UBU Film; the Women's Film Fund (WFF); the Gay Film Fund; and the Sydney Film-makers Co-operative, were all instrumental in the development and nurturing of these early lesbian/gay/Queer images.

The consolidation of these cultures in the 1980s, in part as a result of HIV/AIDS and their exponential expansion in the 1990s, saw an Australian Queer Cinematic Culture emerge from the dark days of censorship and repression into a golden age of Queer Cinematic visibility. Maintaining these gains will be the next major challenge.

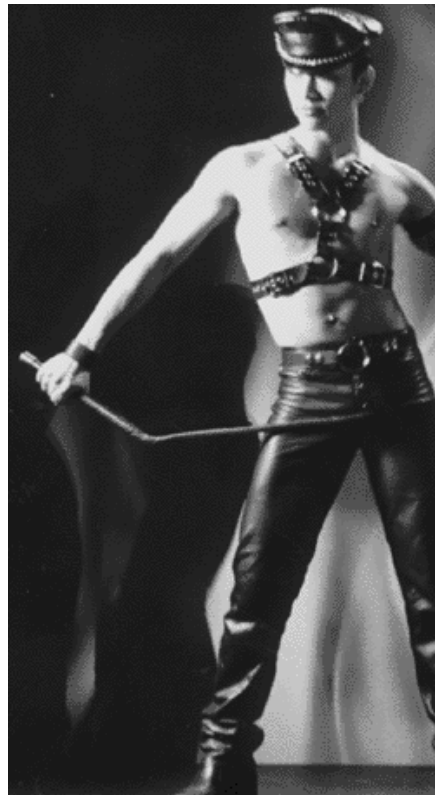


Figure 60

## Chapter 4

### Institutional and Policy Contexts for the Development of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia

#### The Truth of the Matter

We must not kiss in the garden  
We must not sing in the street  
We must not jump with a joyous shout  
When a long lost friend we meet.  
We must not race by the sea-shore  
We must not sit on the sand  
We must not laugh on a New Year Night  
For this is the Wowsers' land.

*The Song of the Heathen*, Henry Lawson, 1911



It is rare to have analyses of Queer Cinematic Cultures and even rarer still to have analyses of Queer Cinematic Cultures outside that of Euro-America. This chapter offers a unique comparison of two Queer Cinematic Cultures of the 'South', revealing specific socio-political histories that have created successful local, yet globally significant cultures.

There is a degree of repetition in this chapter, as it sets out to analyse some of the material discussed earlier. However, without this comparative contrast, the development of South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures may have seemed universal or even inevitable, rather than dependant on a range of culturally specific influences.

Comparative analyses for this South-South Queer cinematic project are divided into two sections. Section one examines censorship and film industry structures that have affected the emergence of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia, including anti-Queer laws and the impact of institutional and private funding on film production. A brief historical contextualisation reveals debilitating suppression and lack of support for early Queer cinema in both nations, which has seen a remarkable transformation in recent years.

Section two examines some unique comparative similarities and difference I have observed between the Queer cinemas of both countries as a result of different institutional and policy contexts. Comparatives include Queer cinema's role in activism and consciousness raising; Queer cinematic hybridity through transfers and mimicry; emerging South African-Australian cross-cultural exchanges; and the shared race privileges of both film cultures.

Lastly and leading into Chapter 5, the emergence of a 'revolutionary' Queer film in Australia and a 'revolutionary' Queer film festival in South Africa is posited. With their origins firmly imbedded in activism, this revolutionary drive has been and continues to be a key focus of the Queer Cinematic Cultures of both nations.

### **The Impact of Censorship and Local Film Industries on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia**

Anti-Queer censorship laws and the structures of the local film industries have been instrumental in the initial lack off and later development of the Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia. A broader juridical and structural analysis of these institutional influences reveals an often debilitating history of suppression, censorship and lack of support for early Queer cinema in both nations.

As can be seen from the current, vibrant Queer Cinematic Cultures that have formed in both nations, however, these historical, anti-Queer movements did not succeed in their bid for Queer cultural genocide. Despite their efforts, a remarkable transformation from Queer invisibility to broad, mainstream participation has taken place in the last 100 or so years since the emergence of film as a global medium. This thesis is in part a celebration of these achievements.

### ***Censorship of Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia***

*The official reasons offered in defense of censorship... hide a deeper insidious objective - that of reinforcement of the dominant ideology in order to control reflections and interpretations of social experience.<sup>1</sup>*

Keyan Tomaselli

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<sup>1</sup>Tomaselli, Keyan 'Ideology and Censorship in South African Film', *Critical Arts: A Journal for Media Studies - Special Issue: Censorship in South Africa*, Vol 1 No 2, June 1980, p 1

*We must abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an increased sexual repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but... a deployment quite different from the law.*<sup>2</sup>

Michel Foucault

One of the biggest factors that initially inhibited the emergence of contemporary Queer Cinematic Cultures in both South Africa and Australia, was censorship. Only after significant changes occurred to anti-Queer censorship laws in both nations, were major Queer Cinematic Cultures able to fully emerge.

Tomaselli suggests that censorship, although parading as a moral, social tool, often simply upholds prevailing class structures and repressions, uncritically supporting the dominant ideology of a country. Foucault, however, reminds us that the existence of this repression does not always stop counter-representations from emerging, but can create new modes of cultural production in opposition to these forces. Queer cinematic cultures in both nations have been the result of sometimes fraught movements between these two dialectic forces.

#### *Early Cinematic Censorship in South Africa*

Censorship of films in South Africa started early on in the 1900s. The first stirrings occurred on 14 February 1898, when objections were raised by the Cape Press about the 'blasphemous' content of Meliés' *The Temptation of St Anthony*.<sup>3</sup> The sight of several charming ladies appearing to a hapless St. Anthony in an attempt to seduce him, was just a bit too much for the local guardians of morality.

Moving pictures in general, however, managed to remain untouched in terms of censorship until 1910, when an 'actuality' film about a boxer-of-color, Jack Johnson,

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault, Michel *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, Penguin Books, London, 1990, p 49

<sup>3</sup>Gutsche, Thelma *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895 - 1940*, Howard Timmins, Capetown, 1972, p 283

shown defeating a white man named Jeffries, was banned.<sup>4</sup> The ban was imposed in light of race riots occurring in America, where hundreds of people were killed and thousands injured following screenings of the film. As well as South Africa, the Canadian government banned the film and there were movements in Australia and New Zealand also to stop it from being exhibited.<sup>5</sup> Racial tension was prevalent already early on in the history of South African and other colonial cinemas.

Several other films were soon questioned because of their 'vulgarity and suggestiveness' and by 1912, the Cape Provincial Ordinance No. 10 empowered municipal council's to, amongst other things, 'control bioscopes ... and the pictures exhibited, and prohibit... such as may be considered indecent, offensive, or improper or otherwise objectionable'.<sup>6</sup>

By 1917, the Cinematograph Film Ordinance in the Cape prohibited films depicting such things as 'improper impersonation of the King; irreverent treatment of death; Nude Figures;... Vampire Women, the Drug Habit, White Slave Traffic;... and pugilistic encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans'.<sup>7</sup> In 1930 the provincial administrators suggested censorship belonged in the Central Government's domain and the *Entertainment (Censorship) Act*, very similar to the

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p 108

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p 287

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* It also allowed them to censor images that were 'calculated to produce pernicious effect on morals or to exercise an evil or dangerous influence on the minds of the audience or any section or portion thereof or likely to cause a breach of the peace.'

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 293-194. Other prohibitions included excessively passionate love scenes; scenes purporting to illustrate 'night life'; scenes containing reference to controversial international politics; scenes representing antagonistic relations of Capital and Labour; scenes tending to disparage public characters or to create public harm; materialization of the conventional figure of Christ; scenes holding up the Kings uniform to ridicule and contempt; scenes calculated to give offence to religious convictions or the feelings of any section of the public; and scenes calculated to bring any section of the public into ridicule or contempt.

Ordinances, came into force.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Merrett, commenting on censorship in South Africa, particularly in the latter period, suggests:

*The closed minds of South African society between the World Wars is revealed in the Entertainment Censorship Act... At the top of the [censorship] list, significantly, were impersonation of the King and ridicule of the military...A narrow-minded, self-satisfied and closed society lurked behind these provisions... Understandably, asking of hard questions about uncomfortable subjects was not encouraged in such a racist, colonial society.*<sup>9</sup>

#### *Early Cinematic Censorship in Australia*

Censorship of films in Australia also began early on in the century, with the introduction of regulations prohibiting the screening of 'objectionable pictures' in NSW in 1912, adding to other clauses already in the 'governing halls and theatre regulations'.<sup>10</sup> By 1917 a Commonwealth Censorship board was formed with a censorship code that allowed a film to be banned which in the opinion of the board was:

- (a) blasphemous, indecent or obscene;
- (b) likely to be injurious to morality, or encourage or incite to crime; or
- (c) likely to be offensive to any Ally of Great Britain; or
- (d) depic[ting] any matter, the exhibition of which, in the opinion of the board is undesirable in the public interest.<sup>11</sup>

One of the first pictures banned by the Chief Secretary on recommendation of the NSW Inspector General was *The Robbery at the Old Brunswick Bank*,<sup>12</sup> a film that, it

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p 299. This law, enacted in 1931, was similar in content to the Ordinances, except for a few additions, including the banning of scenes showing the intermingling of Europeans and non-Europeans. In addition, scenes containing 'Vampire Women' were no longer targeted, making vampire women's lives on celluloid, one hopes, a little bit more secure.

<sup>9</sup> Merrett, Christopher *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994, p 10

<sup>10</sup>Gott, Robert and Linden, Richard *Cut It Out: Censorship in Australia*, CIS Publishers, Carlton, 1994, p 24

<sup>11</sup>Bertrand, Ina *Film Censorship in Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1978, p 47



was argued, would encourage crime because it showed a robbery and other criminal activity.<sup>13</sup> Whereas issues of racial anxiety was clearly evident in South African censorship at the time, in Australia the threat of bushrangers, which would suggest a particular ideology around class, was the first major issue addressed.

Numerous changes have subsequently taken place, including the introduction of State Censorship boards in 1917; the banning of all horror films in 1948 (enforced until 1968); and the introduction in 1968 of special status for film festivals to screen films that would not ordinarily pass the strict censorship rulings to a limited audience (excluding blatantly pornographic material).<sup>14</sup> In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the Hays Code, a self regulatory set of censorship rules adhered to by the American film industry from 1930 to the late 1960s, excluded, amongst other things, the showing of 'sexual perversion' and ensured that many images coming in from overseas into both South Africa and Australia had already been censored.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Gott and Linden, op. cit., p 26. In 1919, in NSW an addition to the Theatres and Public Halls Act 1908 included these criteria for the banning of films:

- (i) scenes suggestive of immorality or indecency
- (ii) scenes suggestive of debauchery, low habits of life, or other scenes such as would have a demoralising effect on young minds
- (iii) executions, murders and other revolting scenes
- (iv) successful crime such as bushranging, robberies, or other acts of lawlessness which might be reasonably considered as having an injurious influence on youthful minds
- (v) indelicate sexual (including marital) relations, or sexual exposition of eugenic doctrines
- (vi) scenes laid in houses of ill-fame, views of prostitutes, or the procuration of prostitution of young girls

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p 24

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p 25

<sup>15</sup> Russo, Vito 'Frightening the Horses: Out of the closets and into the shadows', *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Harper and Row, New York, 1987, p 126

### *Easing of Censorship in Australia*

In 1971 some of the most significant changes in Australian censorship laws occurred, after years of pressure from activists, who argued that Australian film restrictions limited the social functions of the arts. The Minister of Customs, Donn Chip, introduced the 'R' rating that year, which allowed films to be screened uncut to adult audiences who wished to see them.<sup>16</sup> Although this did not mean that films were not scrutinized or censored, there was at least now an avenue for screening 'controversial' films and the possibility for arguing a case against banning. In 1981, for example, the film *Pixote* (Hector Babanco) was banned but released on appeal.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 61

<sup>16</sup>Gott and Linden, *op. cit.*, p 29

<sup>17</sup>Kaufman, Tina 'Censorship Resurgent', *Cinema Papers*, February 1996, p 56

Censorship did not target many Queer films in the 1970s and 1980s. The release in 1976 of the 'positive' and openly same-sex, international Queer film *A Very Natural Thing* was seen as a significant turning point in Queer visibility in Australia,<sup>18</sup> but was only shown for one week due to poor attendances.<sup>19</sup> Some also argued that limited advertising was the problem, as a TV commercial about the film had been banned by the Broadcasting Commission Board.<sup>20</sup>

*The Clinic* was another rare example of Queer censorship in television in 1985. *The Star Observer* reported:

*After months of wrangling with the Film Censorship Board over cuts to David Steven's M-rated film The Clinic, Channel 7 is to screen the controversial 1983 hit in Sydney next week with an AO rating... The cuts requested and finally agreed to include a blurring of a close-up of a band aided penis ... [and] humorous references [to] gay anal sex (though heterosexual anal humor remains)... Betina Arndt writing in the December issue of Playboy said one censor board member is apparently very squeamish about gay sex and had insisted that all references to gay sex had to go.<sup>21</sup>*

The film was eventually passed with these minor cuts.

#### *Increasing Censorship in South Africa*

In contrast to Australia, South Africa in these decades had very restrictive censorship. By the early 1960s, the *Entertainment (Censorship) Act* established in the 1930s, was replaced by the *Publications and Entertainment Act, No 26 of 1963*, which also established the Publications Control board.<sup>22</sup> The substance of the new Act,

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<sup>18</sup>Kramer, Clinton 'Gay movies come to Australia at last', *Campaign*, Issue 8, April 1976, p 36

<sup>19</sup>Roberts, Ashley " 'A Very Natural Thing' TV commercial banned", *Campaign*, Issue 9, May 1976, p 4

<sup>20</sup>'Banned in Banana Land', *Campaign*, Issue 13, September/October 1976, p 2. In October of that year, the film was banned in Queensland in addition to an Australian film titled *Fantasm*, which featured some same-sex sexuality

<sup>21</sup> 'VD Clinic Movie in Censorship Wrangle', *The Star Observer*, No 17, Friday 13 December, 1985, p1

<sup>22</sup> *Statutes of the Republic of South Africa - Censorship*, Service Issue 32, 1997, *Publications and Entertainment Act, No 26 of 1963*, p 5

apart from a few new restrictions such as the banning of films which propagated or promoted communism as defined in the *Suppression of Communism Act, 1950*, was very similar in substance to the previous Act.<sup>23</sup>

The first censorship rulings explicitly against same-sex sexuality and other Queer sexual practices were in Schedule 1 of the *Indecent or Obscene Photographic Matter Act, No 37 of 1967*. Under this Schedule, indecent or obscene material included photographic matter or any part thereof depicting, displaying, exhibiting, manifesting, portraying or representing sexual intercourse, licentiousness, lust, homosexuality, Lesbianism (sic), masturbation, sexual assault, rape, sodomy, masochism, sadism, sexual bestiality, or anything of a like nature.<sup>24</sup>

The release of 'censored' films to specific groups, such as film festival audiences, was later allowed under the *Publications Act, No 42 of 1974*, which stated that:

(3) The directorate may... exempt [from prohibition of publication of a film not approved by a committee] any particular film or any particular class of film or any film intended for exhibition to a particular category of persons or under any particular circumstances.<sup>25</sup>

Because of laws such as these, and subsequent changes insisting on the recognition of a 'Christian view of life',<sup>26</sup> international and South African made films in the 1960s and 1970s, were restricted by severe censorship, which ensured that few

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Statutes of the Republic of South Africa - Censorship*, Service Issue 32, 1997, *Indecent or Obscene Photographic Matter Act, No 37 of 1967*, pp 51-57. This act was amended in 1983, with the insertion of the definition 'cinematograph film'.

<sup>25</sup> *Statutes of the Republic of South Africa - Censorship*, Service Issue 32, 1997, *Publication Act, No 42 of 1974*, Chapter III, Films, p 83

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p 65. It is stated in this Act that: 'In the application of this Act the constant endeavour of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian view of life shall be recognized.' It is not hard to imagine anti-Queer sentiments propagated by Christianity in South Africa translating through to film, as indeed was the case in 1991, with the banning of a gay safe-sex video. (see later on in this chapter)

images of Queer people were seen publicly. Botha suggests in relation to South African cinema that as a result of strong censorship, no subversive, alternative views of South Africa as a whole received funding and Queer films, especially those that had sex scenes, were heavily cut or banned.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Censorship Liberalisation in South Africa?*

The 1980s in South Africa saw a liberalisation of sorts in terms of censorship and Queer sexuality, with one of the first international Queer feature films, *Making Love* (1982, Arthur Hiller) released with 'minimum cuts'.<sup>28</sup> As Tomaselli points out, however, the conditional relaxing of censorship around such issues as nudity and sex were peripheral to other, much more endemic censorship. He commented in the early 1980s that just 'because recent Directorate of Publications judgments place less emphasis on nudity, sex or the use of four letter words, this does not necessarily indicate a more enlightened approach to censorship, but rather an adjusting cybernetic system of control'.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed a few years later, from July 1985 to February 1990, there was a State of Emergency declared by the white minority government in South Africa and the Foreign Correspondents Associations argued that 'the South African Emergency censorship was the toughest experienced anywhere in the world.' Most of the censorship was directed at the press and political groups, but the *Publications Act on Film* affected television broadcasting and film screenings.<sup>30</sup>

The easing on sexual censorship was, in any case, limited. A completely relaxed censorship for Queer sexuality, as opposed to heterosexuality, was not to occur until

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<sup>27</sup>Botha, Martin Interview, Capetown, 2 February 1999

<sup>28</sup>'Getting it Together', *Johannesburg Star*, 1 June 1982, p unknown

<sup>29</sup> Tomaselli 'Ideology and Censorship in South African Film', *op. cit.*, p 10

<sup>30</sup> Merrett, *op. cit.*, pp 17, 115

much later in the 1990s. Films such as, amongst others, *Cruising*<sup>31</sup> and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*<sup>32</sup> were banned and *De Vierde Man* (The Fourth Man)<sup>33</sup> and *Making Love*<sup>34</sup> censored and cut.



Figure 62

By the end of 1987 the film *Maurice* (1987, James Ivory), released into the mainstream without any censorship cuts, was seen as a censorship litmus test. The censorship board found it suitable for adult entertainment, passing it with an age restriction of 2 to 19. The acceptance of explicit nude scenes between men marked this film as a breakthrough,<sup>35</sup> as an uncensored release usually applied only to film festivals and one off screenings. Soon after, a local South African Queer film, Helena Noguira's *Quest for Love* (1988), was also released without censorship restrictions.

Interesting censorship implications, however, arose for another of the newly emerging Queer South African films of this period. *The Soldier* (1988) was partly

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<sup>31</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> Tomaselli 'Ideology and Censorship in South African Film', *op. cit.*, p 8

<sup>33</sup>"'Fourth Man' not to be missed", *Exit*, May 1986

<sup>34</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> 'Breakthrough in censorship', *Exit*, December 1987, p 7

shot in the Wits Auditorium with other footage secretly filmed in the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. *The Soldier* could not be processed in South Africa because of censorship fears and one of the directors, Matthew Krouse, recalls that they had to smuggle the 8mm negative out of South Africa to London, where unfortunately the laboratory burnt down (see Chapter 2).<sup>36</sup>

The filmmakers believed that this Queer film would most probably have been confiscated if processed in South Africa because of the illegally filmed footage of the Voortrekker Monument and sexual imagery. The State of Emergency and the general censorship climate around politically sensitive films in this period was still too severe.

One of the most public censorship issues in relation to Queer films, however, did not occur during the State of Emergency, but in the early 1990s, when a rather tame Queer safe sex video titled *Safer Sex 1 – For Gay Men and Men Who Have Sex With Men*, was produced by Reel Communications in Capetown.<sup>37</sup> The video had scenes of implied sexual activity between men, including close ups of stimulated fellatio, anal sex and mutual masturbation. The Publications Board argued that the video ‘undoubtedly transgress[ed] the tolerance level of the reasonable South African viewer who will regard the sex-scenes as obscene and offensive.’<sup>38</sup>

The Queer newspaper, *Esteem* was so outraged that it published the following add to garner support: ‘Protest Government Censorship and win cash! We... are tired of immoral censorship laws enforced by narrow-minded bigots. The banning of the

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<sup>36</sup> Krouse, Matthew Interview, Johannesburg, 16 December 1998

<sup>37</sup> ‘Safer Sex Video Banned by government to Protect “Reasonable South Africans”’, *Esteem*, Vol 1, Issue 3, January 1993, p 1

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p 1

safe sex video is the last straw. Write them you protest letter and send a copy to us. The writer of the best letter will receive R50... as a token of appreciation.’<sup>39</sup>

An appeal to have the ban overturned failed with the board stating that ‘it is significant to note that both the New and Old Testament of the Bible condemn “loose” sexual relationships, fornication and the practice of homosexuality (sic).’<sup>40</sup> Biblical morality and homophobia ensured the ban was sustained and a video that could have saved numerous lives through safe sex education did not get released in South Africa.

Filmmaker Jack Lewis suggests that the video should simply just have been distributed without taking government views into account. He commented that ‘[the director] Jeff van Reenen... got in trouble with the censors and he thought himself much persecuted because of this video. They didn't want him to show it... But I think it was about how he went about it. If he just did it and be damned it would have been fine.’<sup>41</sup>

It seems that subversion of the state apparatus in that period was not only thought of as possible but often the only option. When beholden to a police state such as South Africa was in this period, the only action sometimes was direct subversion. This ability for South African's to contemplate open subversion was perhaps itself pointing to change in the air, politically and socially.

#### *Post-Apartheid South Africa*

The post-Apartheid government initially continued with censorship of Queer films, but the Appeal board had developed into a more liberal body by this stage. Films such as *Kids* (1995) by Larry Clark, containing ‘lesbianism, sex orgies and frequent

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> ‘F\*\*\* Off and Die, Appeals Board Tells Gays’, *Esteem*, Vol 1, Issue 6, March 1993, p 1

<sup>41</sup> Lewis, Jack Interview, Muizenberg, 2 February 1999



shots of teenagers doped into oblivion', for example, was initially banned in 1996.<sup>42</sup> However, the Appeal Board passed the film in October that same year.<sup>43</sup> It also decided to overturn a ban on Queer filmmaker Greg Araki's *The Doom Generation*, (1995) insisting on only two cuts that had 'vulgar references' to Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

Censorship of films, Queer and non-Queer, dramatically altered in 1997 when the *Films and Publications Act. No 65, Schedule 1* came into law.<sup>45</sup> It only had provision for censoring images under its most severe rating, XX, under age sex (18 years), explicit, violent, sexual conduct and bestiality.<sup>46</sup>

The danger that the enforcement of censorship was still with government officials, rather than the courts, was seen by Magreet de Lange as problematic, as she argued government officials were closer to the political process than the legal profession.<sup>47</sup> But the outgoing chief censor of 17 years, Dr Braam Coetzee, commented that 'the days when we decide what the public wants are over. I can't see the same kind of government involvement. The censorship board will [now] be mainly an advisory one.'<sup>48</sup> No Queer films have been banned, censored or cut since in South Africa.

#### *Return to the Wowzers Land*

The general direction of censorship in Australia in the 1990s initially seemed towards further liberalisation, but ended up going in almost the opposite direction to that of South Africa. Whereas South African censorship laws were increasingly liberalised and Queer images given unencumbered public access, in Australia censorship of Queer images actually increased for the first time since the 1970s.

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<sup>42</sup> Gebhardt, Max 'Censors trash "crude" movie', *Mail and Guardian*, 13 September 1996

<sup>43</sup> Worsdale, Andrew 'Controversial film passed uncut', *Mail and Guardian*, 25 October 1996

<sup>44</sup> Gebhardt, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> *The Films and Publications Act, 1996 (Act 65 of 1996)*, became fully operative on 1 June 1998, replacing the *Publications Act, 1974*.

<sup>46</sup> *Statutes of the Republic of South Africa - Censorship*, Service Issue 32, 1997, *Films and Publications Act. No 65 of 1996, Schedule 1*, p 181

<sup>47</sup> Thiel, Gustav 'Censor of 17 years now opposes state', *Mail and Guardian*, 4 July 1997

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Initially in 1993, after 17 years of being banned, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo* was released with a proviso that it would not have the right to go to video. *The Star Observer* reported:

*The queer filmmaker, Pier Paolo Pasolini died in 1975 after being deliberately run over by a rent boy. He'd just completed his last film, a piece so violent, sexual, confronting and amazing that the not very enlightened Australian censors saw fit to ban it for 17 years. It was finally passed just a few days ago and will premiere during the [1993 Gay and Lesbian Film] festival on Tuesday 16 February... Were not allowed to tell you the name of the film, but its a major work from one of the premier artists of cinema.*<sup>49</sup>



Figure 63

The distributor's manager commented that 'it is an important, non-exploitive statement against fascism or any government, institution or body having absolute power over people.'<sup>50</sup> This reprieve, unfortunately, was not to last. By 1998, *Salo* was again banned, supposedly because of the questions of age of the actors, who had to 'appear' to be 18 or over. David Marr, commenting on this censorship backflip suggested:

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<sup>49</sup>'The film that dare not speak its name', *Sydney Star Observer*, January 29, 1993, p 19

<sup>50</sup> Jillett, Neil Quoting Cerrone, John in 'The Unbanning of Salò', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday 27 April 1993, p 23

*The release of Salo in 1993, fueled a movement which has transformed the mood and machinery of censorship in this country... The name Salo tolls like a bell through parliamentary debate... The [initial] release of Salo, said [conservative] Senator John Tierney, 'point to the nub of what I still wrong in the censorship area'.<sup>51</sup>*

After what had seemed like a period of liberalization in the early 1990s, the later years of this decade saw the re-emergence of a very contested and reactive censorship culture. In particular, gay and lesbian activists suggested that Queer films had a particular censorial history during this period.<sup>52</sup> For example in 1995, just prior to the rebanning of *Salo*, the Australian Film Censorship Board banned *Tras El Cristal (In a Glass Cage*, Augustin Villarong, 1986), which for the first film since *Pixote* was not allowed to be shown at a film festival in Australia.<sup>53</sup> The festival just happened to be the 1995 Mardi Gras Film Festival.

Film festivals since the 1970s traditionally had special censorship concessions for screening films to a select audience, but the Board did not only turn down an appeal, described parts of the film as 'indecent', 'gratuitous' and 'exploitative', but also seized the preview cassette of the film and refused to return it to Queer Screen. Even *Pixote*, the last film banned (13 years previously), was eventually released after a successful appeal and went on to win the judges Best Film at the Sydney Film Festival that year.<sup>54</sup>

Festival Director Jeff Mitchell, film director Pedro Almodovar and Directors from the Berlin, London, Montreal, San Sebastian and Brussels Film Festivals all sent letters saying that *In a Glass Cage* explored the complexity of fascism, had screened

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<sup>51</sup> Marr, David 'Art vs. innocence', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 25 May, 1998, p 15

<sup>52</sup> Hunt, Simon 'Rumper Stumper', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 23 January 1997, p 19

<sup>53</sup> Hunt, Simon 'Festival film banned', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 9 February 1995, p 5. *In a Glass Cage* is the story of Klaus, a former Nazi doctor now in an iron lung, who escapes to Spain after WWII. As a Nazi he experimented and sexually tortured young boys and the movie contains scenes of implied torture and abuse.

<sup>54</sup> Hunt 'Festival film banned', *op. cit.*, p 5

all over the world in festivals and was a valid analysis of these dangerous social formations. Despite their support, the film was not released again. Queer Screen appealed and lost, the first time ever for a film at a festival since the introduction of the film festival exemptions.

For the Mardi Gras Film Festival that year a forum titled the *Censorship Forum* was convened to discuss issues of censorship in response to the banning of *In a Glass Cage*.<sup>55</sup> The panel consisted of Cath Phillips who had been previously jailed for one of her Queer art works, Richard Perram who had curated an exhibition on censorship, David Haines, the ex-Deputy Chief censor and a previous director of the Sydney Film Festival, Rod Webb. The forum was held to discuss the impact on Australian society in light of the increasing censorship.

To add injury to insult, in 1995 the Office of Film and Literature Classification wanted to amend the classification system to include homosexuality in the list of adult themes and to make certain adult videos illegal. Simon Hunt, a gay filmmaker and activist submitted a petition to Jacqueline Rodwell at the OFLC [Office of Film and Literature Classification] arguing that the list of 'adult themes' which included homosexuality, suicide, crime corruption, marital problems, drug and alcohol dependency be amended to remove homosexuality.<sup>56</sup> On 1 January 1996, the new Classification Act of 1995 was assented to, thanks in part to the work of Hunt, without homosexuality mentioned as an 'adult theme'.<sup>57</sup> The OFLC could offer no explanation as to why they initially wanted to list homosexuality in the

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<sup>55</sup> Hunt, Simon 'Fire and Desire', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 23 February 1995, p 52

<sup>56</sup> Widdicombe, Ben 'Film rating protest', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 14 December 1995, p 7

<sup>57</sup> Kaufman, *op. cit.*, p 56. The Act read:

- a) Adults should be able to read, hear and see what they want;
- b) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;
- c) everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive; and
- d) the need to take account of community concerns about:
  - i) depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence; and
  - ii) the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner

adult themes, although they claimed there was no discrimination when classifying 'Sexual References'.

In 1997 the second film in three years, again with gay sexual content, was refused classification. *Hustler White* (Bruce La Bruce) a film with Tony Ward, a male prostitute in LA, which contains a scene where a gay man is cut with a razor blade for pleasure, was deemed to contain an 'offensive fetish' and seen as too 'sexually explicit'.<sup>58</sup> After the last ban in 1995 of *Tras El Cristal* it seemed on the surface that excessive, anti-Queer censorship was on the rise.<sup>59</sup> Australian Distribution's Mark Spratt commented that similar scenes between heterosexuals in films such as *Maitresse* (Barbet Schroeder, 1976) and *What I Have Written* (John Hughs, 1995), had not incurred censorship.<sup>60</sup>

The increase of censorship from the mid-1990s onward heralded a more conservative attitude to films on a bipartisan level. David Marr, a member of the Watch on Censorship Committee wrote at that time that 'Six [films] have been, in the new terminology, "refused classification" in the last couple of years... Fifty-nine videos have been banned in that time... Now every film festival in this country faces censorship again'.<sup>61</sup>

Mark Woods, the Australian reporter in the Asia Pacific bureau for *Variety* also added his voice to the view that the Federal Government was prone to enforcing more conservative views, arguing:

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<sup>58</sup> Widdicombe, Ben 'Hustler film banned', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 16 January 1997, p 4

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* Mark Spratt and others such as Hunt pointed out that the OFLC guidelines stated 'Adults in a free society should as far as possible be allowed to see what they wish, and creative artists, including filmmakers, to depict what they please without fear of intervention from the state'. Further adding to difficulties was the fact that to launch an appeal cost \$1000. Spratt commented 'One or two years ago I would have had no hesitation in submitting this film [*Hustler White* ], uncut, for classification... but since then [Federal] Government's changed and [film classifiers] are more concerned about criticism from conservative ministers.'

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Marr, David 'Beware the new age of censorship', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday, 4 December 1996, p 12

*Adding to the controversy of the Cage ban was the fact that it was the first film in a festival to have registration refused since the legendary tussles in the mid-70s between censors and the Sydney Film Festival, prompting outcry from respected film critics...Even [chief censor John] Dickie has conceded that his board "is a bit tougher now than we were in 1988... [but] ministers have made it clear they do not want Australia to be in the same situation as the 1960s, when you could see films in Europe and America that you could not get in Australia." Key distributors and exhibitors remain unconvinced.<sup>62</sup>*



Figure 64

By the 2000 films such as *Baise-Moi* (Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, 2000) and *Romance* (Catherine Breiliet, 1999) had also been banned and Australia continued forward into its journey of increased censorship. Only by 2004, was there some light at the end of the censorship tunnel, with films such as *Irreversible* (Gaspar Noe, 2002)<sup>63</sup> and *Anatomy of Hell* (Catherine Breiliet, 2004), containing real sex cleared by the censors.

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<sup>62</sup> Woods, Mark 'The cutting edge of censorship', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday February 13 1997, p 18. Woods actually suggested the Port Arthur massacre in Tasmania in 1996 provided the impetus for the sudden increase in censorship. Martin Bryant, convicted for mass murders at Port Arthur, had purportedly had numerous sexually explicit videos. Soon after the massacre, the communications minister Senator Richard Alston recommended all TV sets be fitted with a V-chip which could block out specific classifications; that the possession of illegal videos rather than the supply of illegal videos should be a criminal offense; that the censorship boards should be appointed for a maximum of two years not three as members get 'de-sensitised'; and the implementation of Community Advisory Panels (CAPs), whilst not overriding the censors decisions, would have a say in whether they agree with the decisions.

<sup>63</sup> 'Censor refuse to ban graphic French film', *The Age*, 1 July 2004. 'Australia's film censors yesterday declined to ban the controversial French film *Irreversible*, despite a complaint by federal Attorney-General Philip Ruddock.'

### *Local Film Industries and their Effect on Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia*

Although censorship inhibited the production and screenings of openly Queer films for several decades after film as a medium was born, some Queer images did emerge. As film is one of the more expensive art forms, openly Queer images produced initially may not have been as numerous as non-Queer films, but as Foucault argues, repression, rather than always prohibiting dissident sexualities, sometimes produces subversive forms of representations.

In this section, an analysis is made of the impact of the film industry structures and subsidies on Queer Cinematic Cultures in both nations. The initial lack of support, but later inclusion of Queer cinema as part a broader national cinema, is a startling shift that occurred in both South Africa and Australia.

#### *Subsidising Cinematic Cultures*

*Aims underlying the application of subsidy systems vary from country to country though in all cases subsidies are found where economic impedances prevent income from equaling the cost of production. In some capitalist economies subsidies assist the producer to ignore the logic of the market place, which normally exert a strong influence on the quantity, quality and nature of the films made. In others, it is designed to stimulate a viable industry from which a subsidy can eventually be drawn.*<sup>64</sup>

Tomaselli, commenting on the subsidy systems employed by nations such as South Africa, suggests that the link between subsidies and the economic viability of film is crucial when considering the possibility of national cinemas. Tom O'Regan also suggests that Australian cinema is what it is today, because of the ongoing governmental assistance since 1969.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Tomaselli, Keyan *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Films*, Routledge, London, 1988, pp 29-30

<sup>65</sup>O'Regan, Tom *Australian National Cinema*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p 46

The need to be free of certain socio-economic expectations, to allow for critical commentary on broader social issues are also reasons for subsidies within certain capitalist systems. Within such subsidy systems, it seems logical that different structures would influence the size and quality of marginal/experimental and as a result, Queer film production within national cinemas.

### *Film Subsidies in South Africa*

The South African film industry began receiving government subsidies as early as 1956. In particular, the new white Afrikaans language group, wanting to assert their cultural presence after the 1948 National Party victories, saw a substantial increase in film funding directed to films dealing with their issues. The subsidy was introduced by the National Party Government in 1956<sup>66</sup> after years of debate, already initiated early on in the 1940s. Dr H Rompel, one of the first to write about Afrikaans cinema and the problems it faced with regards to finance, suggested in his book *Die Bioskoop in Diens van die Volk* (*The Cinema in Service of the Nation*) that:

*'n Volkseie Afrikaanse rolprentwese kan nie uitsluitend op die vertoning van ingevoerde rolprente opgebou word nie. Daar moet ook geproduseer word: inheemse prente wat die Afrikaanse gees en land asem, prente wat geheel en al ons eie is... En hier [is] onmiddellik die probleem van afset voor... Daar is natuurlik in ons land 'n sterk neiging om vir enige onderneming soos hierdie, om staatsteun te kom aanklop. Daar word dan nou ook vrylik van sulke aansoeke na die oorlog gepraat. Dit kan egter nie oor die hoof gesien word dat staatsteun en staatskontrole in ons land baie maklik 'n tweesnydende swaard kan word.*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Tomaselli, *op, cit.*, p 32

<sup>67</sup> Rompel, H *Die Bioskoop in Diens van die Volk*, Part II, Nasionale Pers Beperk, Bloemfontein, Kaapstad and Port Elizabeth, 1942, pp 49, 66



*An Afrikaans film industry cannot only be built on the exhibition of imported films. Production must take place: indigenous films that breath the Afrikaans spirit and land, images that are completely our own... And here immediately lies the problem... There is in our land a strong motion to ask for state help in this regard. There is even free talk of such assistance after the war. However, it is not difficult to see that state assistance and state control in our land can easily become a two edged sword.*

Rompel, ironically, was against subsidies and instead advocated for lower budget films and less pay for film workers. The Motion Picture Producers Association (MPPA), however, under the management of a British director Bladon Peake with an Afrikaans chairman, Jamie Uys, was soon established and received the first film subsidy grant.<sup>68</sup>

Tomaselli, commenting on the development and failure of this subsidy system for the South African film industry suggests that:

*[A]lthough the mechanisms underlying the state subsidy scheme have been frequently reviewed since its inception in 1956, the validity of the system in its present form continues to be questioned... Comparisons have been made with Australia's attainment of international recognition while South African cinema continues in relative obscurity.<sup>69</sup>*

The lack of critical, international recognition of South African film occurred despite the fact that South Africa introduced film subsidies fifteen years earlier than Australia and saw the resurgence of a local film industry that blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s. Botha suggests that the ideological limitations behind the subsidy system such as its racially exclusive, Afrikaans language and feature film focus were the main problems facing the film industry at the time. He comments:

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<sup>68</sup>Tomaselli, *op, cit.*, p 33. The money was gathered through an entertainment tax, where a certain amount of each ticket was put towards the subsidy. The payout for that first year, which had a maximum cap of R20,000 was only R6000.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p 31

*Die doel, doelbewus, [sedert die instelling van 'n Regeringsubsidie skema in 1956] was om 'n bedryf oorspronklik vir wit-mense te skep. Afrikaans sprekende wit mense. En die subsidie skema was veral so gemanipuleer in die jare sestig om Afrikaanstalige films vir wit mense te bevorder. Daardie stadium was daar ook geen pogings werklik aangewend om kortfilms te subsidieer nie.<sup>70</sup>*

*The purpose, purposefully, of the Government Subsidy Scheme in 1956 was to establish an industry for whites. Afrikaans speaking whites. And the subsidy system was particularly manipulated in the '60s to assist in the development of Afrikaans language films for whites. At that stage, there also was no real push to subsidise short films.*

In addition, the introduction of Black African film subsidies did not occur until the mid 1970s and support for experimental films not offered until the mid-1990s.

#### *Film Subsidies in Australia*

In Australia, as in South Africa, voices arguing for support of a film industry had been loud and consistent for many years before significant government intervention in the late 1960s. Australia had been at the forefront of filmmaking at the start of the century and this legacy had increasingly been lost.<sup>71</sup> Sylvia Lawson would comment in the period before government support:

*The Australian film industry is not only the least productive in the world; it is also, in a sense, the most written about. In other countries locally oriented film comment is about actual films; here it is always about the industry, or rather, non-industry, because until the industry properly exists, there will be no Australian films for discussion.<sup>72</sup>*

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<sup>70</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> Vasey, Ruth 'The World-Wide Spread of Cinema' in Nowell-Smith, Geofrey (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Oxford University Press, London, 1996, p 53. From the first actuality footage of 1896 of the ferry at Manly in Sydney and the horse races in Melbourne and the Salvation Army funded *Soldiers of the Cross* in 1900, to the worlds first feature film in 1906, *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, Australia had been at the forefront of film-making internationally.

<sup>72</sup>Lawson, Sylvia, 'Australian Film, 1969' in O'Regan, Tom and Moran, Albert (eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985, p 175

The lack of local representations and the perceived lack of a national film industry, resulted in extensive lobbying for government support of the arts and for an Australian film industry as a whole by the 1960s. With the establishment of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1967, further recommendations for a film industry was accepted in 1969 and included the establishment in 1970 of:

- a national film and television school;
- a film and television fund;
- an overseas film and television marketing board; and
- an experimental fund for low budget productions with a television outlet for experimental films and programs.<sup>73</sup>

The Interim Report of the Film Committee for the Australian Council for the Arts in 1969 suggested that a funding category for experimental film and television was important as it would 'offer practical help and encouragement to young directorial and writing talent... [and] isolate those individuals with conspicuous talent.'<sup>74</sup> The proposal was accepted and the first assistance towards experimental and non-commercial films occurred one year later, with \$100 000 was put aside for the new fund.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Emerging South African Funding Problems*

In South Africa, such an experimental fund was never realized, despite attempts to have it included in the subsidy structure. The film subsidy scheme went through several changes, including more funding towards Afrikaans films (55%) in 1969<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> 'The Beginning of Film Production', *Australian Film and Television Overview*, Australian Film Commission, 1998, p 4. The television outlet did not occur at that time.

<sup>74</sup> Interim Report of the Film Committee, Australian Council for the Arts, 1969 in O'Regan, Tom and Moran, Albert (eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985, p 174

<sup>75</sup> Grace, Helen "'The Public want features!' - the (creative?) underdevelopment of Australian independent film since the 1960s", *Filmnews*, November/December 1982, p 6

<sup>76</sup> Tomaselli, *op. cit.*, p 35

and a new program in 1973, known as the B-scheme.<sup>77</sup>, which gave subsidy to a film if the lead actor and 75% of the cast were black South Africans and 75% of the dialogue was in a recognised black South African language.<sup>78</sup> By 1979, the Feature Film Producers Association of South Africa (FFPA) approached the government in an attempt to introduce a better subsidy system. Three kinds of films, all which needed a continuation of subsidy, were suggested, including:

- films for overseas and local markets;
- films for local markets only;
- non-commercial or art films that would receive subsidy if they could obtain distribution, commercial or otherwise (important in hindsight for Queer film culture).<sup>79</sup>

Botha, Van Aswegen<sup>80</sup> and Tomaselli,<sup>81</sup> viewed the creative space that the last proposal would have opened up, as potentially the most vibrant and stimulating aspect of a film industry that would have allowed filmmakers to experiment and create diverse views. Queer views in addition to black views and women's views, barring censorship, would have had a much better chance of being represented.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Botha, Martin and Van Aswegen, *Adri Images of South Africa: the rise of the alternative film*, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1992, p 23

<sup>78</sup>Tomaselli, *op. cit.*, pp 36, 40, 57. Tomaselli points out that these quotas have not been an issue since 1981. The funding for 'black' films were also less than the subsidies for English and Afrikaans films - initially a cap of R45 000 increased in 1977 to R70 000 compared to a maximum of R300 000 for Afrikaans films and 10% less for English films in 1977. However, as Tomaselli points out, most of the 'black' films were produced by whites and the first film by a black director, Simon Sabela, (one of only a handful), who produced *u-Deliwe* in 1974, funded by Heyns films, was a company later exposed as a front for the Department of Information, in an attempt to distribute propaganda about the homelands and the Apartheid scheme. Many 'blacksploitation' films by whites did not engage with the realities of black people and propagated stereotypes and myths.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p 39

<sup>80</sup>Botha and Van Aswegen, *op cit.*, p 17

<sup>81</sup> Tomaselli, *op. cit.*, p 39

<sup>82</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.* Botha sees the film industry that resulted as a stilted, marginalising structure that could not imagine, never mind sustain, visions of difference. He suggests that '[m]ens moet dit eintlik sien as 'n totale marginalisering, nie net gay mense nie maar ook vir swart mense. Ook van

Unfortunately, the subsidy for art or non-commercial films did not get off the ground and South Africa missed out on an enormous opportunity to investigate itself on a deeper and more socially relevant level. It also missed the opportunity to prepare young filmmakers for different visions and social realities, including Queer realities.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Emerging Australian Queer Films in the 1970s and 1980s*

It is not really surprising, given the conservative nature of both societies prior to the 1960s and the censorship and funding climate in both nations that no major, openly Queer films as understood from a contemporary point of view, were produced. In Australia by the late 1960s, however, things were about to change dramatically.

In contrast to the lack of diverse images in South Africa, marginal voices including Queer films were emerging with greater force thanks to various funding schemes and institutional support. The first openly Queer Australian film was a feature titled *The Set* (1970), costing \$120 000 and produced with money raised through the ANZ bank and a millionaire miner known as Mr. Arthur Mawson.<sup>84</sup> This film was years ahead of its time and appeared seemingly out of the blue, with Australians having to wait another two decades for another such substantial Queer feature.

*The Set* is unique in that it fell outside the new film funding structures and film institutions that were emerging in Australia at the time. Similarly to *Quest for Love* in South Africa, *The Set* has to be seen less in the context of a local Queer film culture and more connected to international Queer film productions that had started in Europe and America in the 1960. Their emergence from within this historical context

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*vrouens*.' [One must actually see it as a total marginalisation, not just of gay people, but also black people. Also of women.]

<sup>83</sup>Botha and Van Aswegen, *op cit.*, p 27. In a 1989 subsidy revision, a C scheme for non-commercial or art films and a scheme for television films was again suggested, but failed to be initiated.

<sup>84</sup>Ward, Roger E-mail correspondence 17 July 2004

places them on an international Queer film platform and explains, to a degree, their sudden appearance in cultures without indigenous Queer film histories.

A Queer film presence, however, was fast establishing itself in Australia. By the end of the 1970s, in addition to *The Set*, another four Queer shorts and two Queer documentaries had been produced. The first was an experimental film by the director Gillian Armstrong, a then student at the only recently established Australian Film and Television School (AFTS).

*Satdee Night* (1973) as the film was titled, is a quirky story about a young gay man, who, hoping to pick up on a Saturday night out, dutifully tidies his room before going out to a gay dance party. Unfortunately he becomes completely intoxicated and wakes up the next morning, not with someone from the party, but under one of the tables in the now deserted dance hall. The ordinary hopes and dreams of this sensitive young man is in stark contrast to the often 'negative' gay stereotypes that had passed as Queer representations on screen up until then.

The next short Queer film *Adam* (Paul Bugden, 1975) was also about a young gay man and focused on his unfulfilling relationship with an older gay man. This short film was funded through the Experimental Film and Television Fund and was the first time that institutional support, outside that of the AFTS, was given to a Queer Australian film.<sup>85</sup> This short movie was screened at numerous Queer film festivals over the years, as part of the then emerging representation of Queer Australian stories on film.

*Homosexuality: A Film for Discussion* (1975), directed by Barbara Creed, soon added to the by now growing list of Queer themed Australian films. Creed had also applied for and received money from the Experimental Film Fund (under \$5000) and as she

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<sup>85</sup> Jackson, Claire and Tapp, Peter *Bent Lens: A World Guide to Gay and Lesbian Film*, Australian Catalogue Company, Melbourne, 1997, p 37

was teaching cinema studies in Melbourne at the time, was able to use the film and editing equipment of the University for free.<sup>86</sup> Without much previous experience, but having access to institutional support, Creed created the film in an attempt to make visible some of the Queer histories that had been ignored up until then. In 2004, Creed was considering applying for funds to interview the same people who had participated in the film, to measure how much things had changed in the last few decades from their point of view.

Another Queer documentary hot on the heels of *A Film for Discussion*, was Digby Duncan's *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofters* (1979). Duncan received \$10,000 from the Australian Film Commission (AFC)<sup>87</sup> after having up until then only been recommended for a \$5500 grant from the Australian Film Industry (AFI).<sup>88</sup> These funds had become available when the AFC replaced the Australian Film Development Commission (AFDC) in 1975.<sup>89</sup> The group, known as the One-in-Seven-Collective, also raised a substantial amount of money for the production through donations, barbeques, film nights, parties and from the eight members' own pockets (see Chapter3).

The last two Queer short films of the decade was Sonia Hoffman's *Morris Loves Jack* (1978) and Megan McMurchy's *Apartments*. Hoffman produced her film, a short movie about Morris, an out of work, would be actor with homosexual tendencies, also at the AFTS.<sup>90</sup> McMurchy also produced and directed *Apartments* with a minimal budget and institutional support. McMurchy commented:

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<sup>86</sup> Creed, Barbara In conversation, Canberra, 30 June 2004

<sup>87</sup> Cee, Debbie 'One in Seven', *Campaign*, No 37, 1978, p 42

<sup>88</sup> The Australian Council of Film Societies founded the Australian Film Institute (AFI) in 1958. [www.screen sound.gov.au](http://www.screen sound.gov.au)

<sup>89</sup> Grace 'The Public want features!', *op. cit.*, p 6. A year later the Creative Development Branch was also formed, which supported much of the low budget, independent film productions, the Australian Film Institute, the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, Open Channel Television, *Filmnews* and *Cinema Papers*.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson and Tapp, *op. cit.*, p 222

*I made Apartments without funding from anywhere (i.e. paid for it myself) with the support of a crew comprising women filmmakers I'd met on a 3-month filmmaking course for women run by the AFTS (as it was then) in 1978. We all worked on each other's films for free. I used a Steenbeck belonging to UTS, where I was working at the time, to cut the film myself. I can't remember where we got the camera equipment - possibly borrowed from the School. I think the only things I had to pay for were the stock, the developing and printing and the sound mix.<sup>91</sup>*

The AFTS and educational institutions such as Melbourne University and the University of Technology in combination with the Experimental Film Fund as established as a result of the Interim Report of the Film Committee for the Australian Council for the Arts, offered vital support for the production of early alternative Queer images. The Experimental Film Fund in particular seemed to have played a significant role in the production of Queer images so early on in Australia's Queer liberation histories, something glaringly absent in South Africa at the time.

#### *Queer Film Funding in the 1980s in Australia*

Beginning with film such as *On Guard* in the early 1980s, with support from the Women's Film Fund, a dramatic increase in Queer filmmaking was to take place in this decade.<sup>92</sup> By 1989, more than thirty-four Queer films had been produced. Gayle Lake, programmer for the 1998 Queer Screen Mardi Gras Film Festival would comment:

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<sup>91</sup> McMurchy, Megan E-mail correspondence, 24 September 2004

<sup>92</sup> Grieve, Anna 'Big Mother/Little Sister: The Women's Film Fund' in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 74. In addition to general funding for filmmaking, the Government established a special Women's Film Fund (WFF) in 1976. Funds held over as a result of the dismissal of Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister in 1975, targeted for International Women's Year and meant to go to Germaine Greer for a documentary, became the backbone of the WFF. One of the films funded by the WFF that explored women's sexuality was Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert's *On Guard* (1983).



*The last twenty years or so have seen enormous growth in Australian Queer filmmaking, mirroring if not surpassing the growth in mainstream Australian films. This is hardly surprising when the talent that has produced some of our finest queer shorts has gone on to make some of Australia's greatest films... some of our greatest queer films [originate] from the early careers of filmmakers such as Gillian Armstrong, Jan Chapman, Anne Turner [and] Megan McMurchy.*<sup>93</sup>

It is not possible within the scope of this research to examine funding for every Queer film in this period. Only a few key films are commented on to give an indication of where support came from for the production of Queer images in this decade and to observe the substantial changes in the amount of funding received. *On Guard* for instance, had a budget of \$142 000 from the WFF, compared to the often hand-to-mouth productions of the 1970s.<sup>94</sup>

Support for Queer films also continued to come from within the Australian, Victorian and Swinburne Film, Television and Radio Schools. Franco di Chiera's *Waiting 'Round Wynyard* (1982), *Nasty* (1984) and *La Scala, Lo Scalone* (1984)<sup>95</sup> as well as Penny McDonalds *Life on Earth as I know It* (1989)<sup>96</sup> were made at AFTRS, Andrew Sharpe's *Soufflé* (1986) and Lawrence Johnston's *Night Out* (1989) were produced at Swinburne<sup>97</sup> with Vicki Dun's *Can't You Take a Joke?* (1989) made at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) School of Film and Television.<sup>98</sup> The access these schools and institutions offered was instrumental in the development of Queer Cinematic Cultures.

Further indirect government support was given to documentaries such as *AIDS* (George Pugh, 1985) and *Living with AIDS* (Shayne Mooney, 1989), produced by

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<sup>93</sup> Lake, Gayle 'Australian queer shorts', 1998 *Mardi Gras Film Festival Program*, p 19

<sup>94</sup> Gibson, Sarah and Lambert, Susan Personal Statements in Blonski, Annette, Creed Barbara and Freiburg, Freda (eds.), *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1987, p 198

<sup>95</sup> Di Chiero, Franco E-mail correspondence, 11 May 2003

<sup>96</sup> Jackson and Tapp, *op. cit.*, p 196

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 291, 229

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p 81

the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) respectively.<sup>99</sup> An increase in the number of Queer images produced by other independent production companies, due to tax changes to the film industry in 1980, also occurred.<sup>100</sup> The Amendment of the Income Tax Assessment Act introduced to the film industry Section 10 BA and provided for a 150 per cent tax deduction on eligible expenditure incurred directly in the production of qualifying Australian films in the year expenditure was incurred.<sup>101</sup>

This incentive allowed for the production of some important Queer Australian films. Independent production companies such as Eve Ashe's *Seven Dimensions*, for instance, produced *AIDS Questions and Answers* (1987) and *Safe Sex: Here we Come* (1987).<sup>102</sup> David Steven's *The Clinic* (1983) and *Undercover* (1984) were produced by independent production companies such as *The Film House*, *Generations Films* and *Palm Beach Pictures*.<sup>103</sup> *Dangerous to Know* produced Daley Martin's *Poetry for an Englishman* (1987) and *Maliba-* and *Nerika Enterprises* produced *Understanding Sexuality* (Bob Huber, 1986).<sup>104</sup>

In 1988, the Australian Film Finance Corporation was established and replaced the Division 10BA tax concessions as the primary funding facility for assisting Australian film and television production, in effect becoming a 'state film bank'.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 40, 199

<sup>100</sup> Hodsdon, Barrett *Straight Roads and Crossed Lines: The Quest for Film Culture in Australia*, Bernt Porridge Group, Shenton Park, Western Australia, 2001, p 45. Hodsdon comments that '[although] viewed as a measure to foster an investment base for commercial filmmaking, it actually meant that a large number of films were made at government expense with little chance of commercial viability. Hence the bulk of 10BA tax concessions films were made on the basis of government induced investment with little consideration for the real commercial currency or even cultural validity of these projects.'

<sup>101</sup> *Historical Timeline*, [www.screenound.gov.au](http://www.screenound.gov.au), Accessed 10 September 2001

<sup>102</sup> *Seven Dimensions Company Profile*, [www.7dimensions.com.au](http://www.7dimensions.com.au) Accessed 5 January 2004

<sup>103</sup> Jackson and Tapp, *op. cit.*, pp 91, 321

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 253, 321

<sup>105</sup> Hodsdon, *op. cit.*, p 49

Over the next few years the FFC was to play a major role in the emergence of successful Queer Australian films.

*South African Queer Films Emerging in the late 1980s*

Although there was a huge increase in Queer films produced in Australia from the 1970s through to the 1980s, openly Queer South African images only began appearing in the mid-1980s. Non-Queer political films funded by international organizations such as the Solidarity Movement and non-government organizations, expressing resistance to the Apartheid Government, arrived as a major force earlier in the decade and although many of these political films picked up censorship problems or were banned, room at least had been created for a diversification of views.

Botha suggests that some of the short fiction and non-fiction anti-Apartheid films in the early 1980s were the pre-cursors to other marginal films that appeared by the mid-1980s, such as those looking at sexuality. He comments:

*Gepaardgaande met daardie films is ander temas meer en meer begin ontleed soos gay en lesbian issues. Out in Africa van Melanie Chait byvoorbeeld... So die temas het meer en meer gediversifiseerd geraak van... anti-apartheid films, kort films, tot goed wat nou baie meer kyk na marginaliteit in sy totaliteit. Dit wissel nou van 'n film soos Pavement Aristocrats... oor die homeless van Kaapstad tot by oral histories van gay mense van Jack Lewis... Vir my op die oomblik vervul gayfilms 'n klein aspect daarvan.<sup>106</sup>*

*Together with those films other themes were beginning to be analysed - such as gay and lesbian issues. Out in Africa by Melanie Chait for instance... So the themes became more and more diversified... anti-Apartheid films, short films to films that examine marginality completely. It ranges now from films such as Pavement Aristocrats... about the homeless in Capetown to oral histories of gay people by Jack Lewis... For me at the moment gay films play a small role in this.*

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<sup>106</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

By the mid-1980s the first of a number of openly Queer films about South Africa appeared, including a Canadian production titled *A Moffie Called Simon*, (John Greyson, 1986). At around the same time, a local film of Andrew Wordsdale and Matthew Krouse, *De Voortrekkers* was shot. *De Voortrekkers* was secretly filmed with government funding as an insert in a larger film, *Shot Down*. (1986, Andrew Wordsdale). The clandestine use of this funding allowed for subversive images to be produced.

Soon to follow was Melanie Chait's documentary *Out in South Africa* (1988) the first South African born filmmaker using overseas funding to make a documentary film about Queer South African activists such as Simon Nkoli and Ivan Toms. The film that appeared next, however, appeared completely left of field.

The country's first, full length, lesbian, feature film *Quest for Love* (Helena Nogueira) was released in 1988 and featured two of South Africa's most prominent Afrikaner actors, Sandra Prinsloo and Jana Cilliers (see Chapter 2). The film was produced with Vision International and Elegant Film as co-production companies using the funding and tax structures that existed in the late 1980s.<sup>107</sup> Wordsdale comments on these tax incentive:

*[In] the 1980s ... tax-breaks [boosted] the industry [and saw taxpayers] spend more than R400-million.. making straight-to-video dirges... But the 1980s [also] saw some major breakthroughs for South African cinema with the rise of many alternative films made either on a shoe-string budget or with the fill-up of a government tax-break.<sup>108</sup>*

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<sup>107</sup>Prinsloo, Jeanne and Tomaselli, Keyan 'Third Cinema in South Africa' in Blignaut, Johan and Botha Martin (eds.), *Movies, Moguls, Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979-1991*, Showdata, Capetown, 1992, p 331. Singh also found alternative, private funding for the sexually transgressive *Quest for Love* and many anti-Apartheid films such as Darrell Roodt's *Place of Weeping*, (1986) *The Stick*, (1987) *Jobman* (1989) and *To the Death* (1991).

<sup>108</sup>Wordsdale, Andrew 'From Silence to Subterfuge', *Mail and Guardian*, 23 December 1999, [www.mg.com.za](http://www.mg.com.za) Accessed 30 January 2005

In addition, a loophole in Section 11 (bis) of the Income Tax Act, saw further funds flow into the industry, allowing films such as *Quest for Love* to be produced.

The short Queer film *The Soldier* directed by Matthew Krouse was the next off the rank. Krouse was involved with *Shot Down* and the *De Voortrekkers* and *The Soldier* was an evolution in terms of the representation of sexuality from elements already present in the previous films.

*The Soldier* is an interesting example of how non-government funding in the late eighties assisted in the diversification of Queer views in relation to Queer film. The filmmakers managed to get a R10,000 grant from a patron of the arts, Mary Slack, who was a relative of the Oppenheimers. After she saw the rushes, she gave the filmmakers the funds to complete the film in South Africa.

They shot the film at Wits and at the Voortrekker Monument and managed to smuggle the negative out of the country, to be blown up from 8mm to 16 mm in London. In London, unfortunately, the laboratory burned down and the film was destroyed. However, one slash-negative remained in the country and Krouse at the time of the interview intended to edit another version of the film.<sup>109</sup>

Non-government funding for films such as *The Soldier* and *Quest for Love* and foreign government and non-government support for films such as *A Moffie Called Simon* and *Out in Africa* was essential for the creation of the first Queer films in South Africa. Unlike Australia, no legitimate direct or indirect government funding was offered, other than tax break schemes, to support emerging local Queer film cultures in the 1980s. South Africa also did not have film schools or funding structures that could indirectly and subversively have supported emerging Queer filmmakers and their projects.

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<sup>109</sup>Krouse, Interview, *op. cit.*

### *Queer Australian Films from the 1990s Onwards*

In the 1990s in Australia, Queer film production increased dramatically. As with the previous decade, it is impossible within the scope of this thesis to examine each of the Queer films produced. By 2004 more than 300 Queer Australian shorts and documentaries alone had been produced.<sup>110</sup>

This section focuses on two unique characteristics of post-1990 Queer Australian Cinematic Cultures - the emergence of Queer feature films and major Queer documentaries. The presence of the FFC in addition to the AFI and other state film funding bodies, were key supporters of these Australian Queer film productions.

The first Queer feature produced in the 1990s was Anne Turners' *Dallas Doll* (1993), starring the actor Sandra Bernhard. The Film Finance Corporation gave \$2,816,787 towards production and the Australian Film Commission \$128,370, which included development, script and travel funding.<sup>111</sup>



Figure 65

<sup>110</sup> This figure was acquired by counting the number of MQC entrants listed in the Queer Screen program guides from 1994 -2004.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.* Only figures from government funding are available. Some non-government funding may have been kept confidential.

Soon after two other Queer features, Stephen Eliot's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) and Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling's *The Sum of Us* (1994) were produced. *Priscilla* received \$1,388,550 from Film Finance Corporation, \$6,000 from the NSW Film and Television Office and a travel grant of \$7,000 from the Australian Film Commission. *The Sum of Us* received \$3,011,938 in equity investment from the Film Finance Corporation.<sup>112</sup>

In 1998, the highly acclaimed *Head On*, a film directed by Ana Kokkinos, received \$2,284,988 from the Film Finance Corporation and \$150,000 from Film Victoria. Kokkinos' film, about Ari, a young gay Greek-Australian, was recognised internationally as a remarkable film.



Figure 66

In addition to feature films, major Queer documentaries such as Tony Ayers' *Sadness* (1999), a Film Australia National Interest Program with executive producers Franco di Chiera and Megan McMurchy, was made on a budget of about \$ 350,000. *Sadness* featured a well known Chinese-Australian artist, William Yang, who through slide shows and solo narratives, told the stories of his Chinese-Australian family and his gay friends, many of whom had died of AIDS. It had a pre-sale to SBS and included the costs of stylised studio dramatisations.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*



Figure 67

What becomes obvious when examining funding changes from the 1960s onwards in Australia, is the dramatic increase in resources for Queer films. From homegrown productions such as Ken Garrahy's super 8 films in the 1960s; to small government funded documentaries such as *Homosexuality: A Film for Discussion* for less than \$5000; and the Gay Film Fund's \$10,000 from the AFC in the 1970s; to *On Guard's* \$142 000 from the Women's Film Fund in the 1980s; funding for Queer film was on the increase. By the 1990s *Dallas Doll*, *Priscilla* and *The Sum of Us* and *Head On* were receiving several million dollars from the FFC. A huge shift in financial support had occurred.

In addition, the films' critical and box office successes also marked a shift in the acceptance of Queer images in the mainstream. Years of Queer cinematic activism and Queer film infrastructure development finally saw the emergence of a broad range of Queer films products in Australia, which included shorts, short documentaries, major documentaries and features films.



*Queer South African Films from the 1990s Onwards*

The 1990s in South Africa also saw an exponential increase in Queer film production. Early on the decade, two Queer shorts, *Gay Life is Best* (Zackie Achmat, 1991) and *More Than a Feeling*, (Daniel Vusi Ntsoseng, 1993) were produced as low budget, alternative documentaries, with *More Than a Feeling*, Vusi's first project after enrolling in FAWO (Film Allied Workers Organisation).<sup>114</sup> Filmmaker Luiz de Barros also made the short *Pretty Boys After Dark* in 1992, shot on a home camcorder and edited on a friend's editing suite.<sup>115</sup>

When the Interim constitution came into force in 1994, a range of new Queer films I have termed *Skeef Cinema Entja*, were produced (see Chapter 2). In 1994 *Clubbing* (Luiz de Barros, 1994) was produced with private funds in addition to a film by Barbara Hammer with international funding, *Out in South Africa*, (Barbara Hammer, 1994).

All the short films by de Barros were self funded and purchased by M-Net for broadcast. They were extremely low budget and made with the assistance of his friends in the local film and television industry. A reforming South African Television industry and independent producers also played a vital role in the support and screening of these new, emerging Queer films.<sup>116</sup>

In 1995/96 an Interim Film Fund was allocated by the government to encourage diverse views in South Africa. Botha comments:

*[Met] die Interim Film Fund van die Departement Kuns en Kultuur, is daar 'n poging... om deur middel van kortfilms en draaiboekontwikkeling van kortfilms, sekere van die gemarginaliseerde stemme in die bedryf in te kry.*<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>*Southern African Film Festival'93 Catalogue*, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1-7 October 1993, p 39

<sup>115</sup>De Barros, Luiz E-mail correspondence, 24 January 2000

<sup>116</sup>Shepperson, Arnold *South African Television: From Activism to Affirmation after 1994*, Durban, South Africa, 1997, [www.und.ac.za](http://www.und.ac.za) Accessed 31 January 2005

<sup>117</sup>Botha, Interview, *op. cit.*

*With the Interim Film Fund from the Department of Art and Culture, there is an attempt... with the development of short films and script development, to bring into the industry some of the marginal voices.*

In addition, as part of the *Out in Africa* film festival film in 1995, the short films *Signs*, (1995) and *Vula Ucano* (1995) were made with group participation, lead by Queer filmmakers John Greyson and Catherine Saalfeld and supported by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.<sup>118</sup>

*Hot Legs* by Luiz de Barros and another local director, Stephen Jennings's short film *The Dress*, were also produced in 1995.<sup>119</sup> *Hot Legs* was de Barros' most expensive short film production at the time with a total budget of R14 000. It was financed on credit cards and through a fund raising evening at a gay bar in Johannesburg, in an attempt to involve the gay community in the project. De Barros suggests of this period and the lack of funding that:

*Before 1996 there was no government funding of queer film and almost no funding of any other film except through corrupt tax shelter deals which were used to finance B grade US action movies for the Asian video market.*<sup>120</sup>

The first Queer films with substantial government support post-1996 soon arrived. In 1997 Jack Lewis produced *Dragging at the Roots* with the assistance of SABC3 at a cost of R70 000. In 1998 *Sando to Samantha*, (1998) was produced with the assistance of the Levi Foundation (R15 000), the Department of Health (R12,000,00) and other small grants worth R15,000.<sup>121</sup> Private sponsorship, an increase in government funding and the acceptance and encouragement of alternative visions of South Africa by the South African government and television services, combined to see Queer films produced for the first time in South Africa's history.

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<sup>118</sup>*Out in Africa* Film Festival Committee Report, 1995, p 9

<sup>119</sup>*The Dress* was made with private funds.

<sup>120</sup>De Barros, E-mail correspondence, *op. cit.*

<sup>121</sup>Lewis, Jack E-mail correspondence, Monday 27 November 2000

In 1998 *The Man who Drove with Mandela* was produced with the first funding a pre-sale to SABC. Gevisser and Schiller also received R100 000 from the Film Fund of the Department of Arts, Culture Science and Technology and a small completion grant from Nedcor Arts Trust and BASA (Business and Arts South Africa). The total budget of the film was \$US250 000, the vast bulk of which came from abroad including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the US; Channel 4; the BFI and the London Production Fund in the UK; and public broadcasting channels in Holland and Belgium.<sup>122</sup>

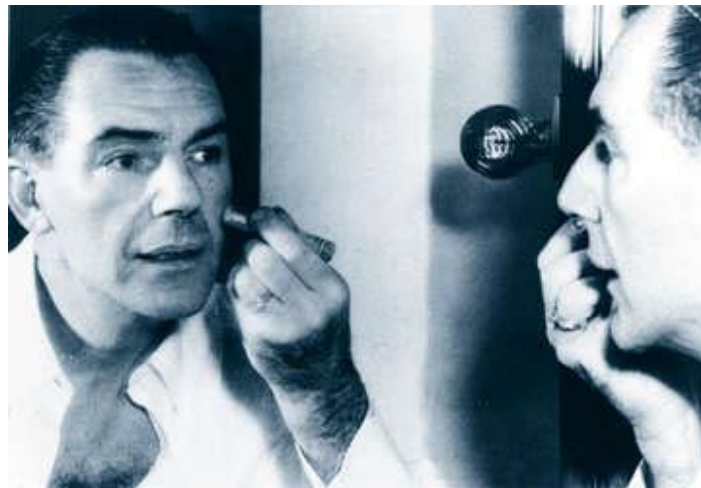


Figure 68

Gevisser made two comments about funding South African films:

1. *I think what is important about the SA funding is that it came first, and that it showed that we were taken seriously enough in our own country. This was something of a magnet to other funders.*
2. *We could never have made the film, on that budget, without international funders. It would have been a far more modest film, just for television, if we had not been able to raise finance abroad. The moral: films that are only funded in SA tend to only stay in SA.*<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Gevisser, Mark E-mail correspondence, 18 January 2000

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

*Apostles of Civilised Vice* (1999), a seminal history of South African lesbian and gay lives directed by Jack Lewis and Zachie Achmat was completed in 1999 with SABC 3 and SABC Education funding of R750 000.<sup>124</sup> Again, alternative South African visions and histories supported by Government organisations dramatically increased the output of Queer films in South Africa.

The most recent and critically acclaimed South African Queer feature film is *Proteus*, a co-production between South Africa and Canada, with financing from the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), Telefilm Canada and several Canadian broadcasters. It was directed by John Greyson and Jack Lewis and produced by Steven Markovitz and Platon Trakoshis from *Big World Cinema*. The shoot for *Proteus* lasted 18 days and was shot entirely in Capetown on Pal-D Beta<sup>125</sup> with a budget of \$US300,000 and an additional \$150,000 in deferrals and donations. Greyson commented that it was a 'small budget' film.<sup>126</sup>



Figure 69

Similar to Australia, a remarkable increase in funding towards Queer filmmaking took place. From the homemade super 8 films of Ernst Thorpe; to activist films and videos in the 1980s; through to major documentaries and feature films in the 1990s and 2000s, an incredible, positive shift in government and independent support had occurred.

<sup>124</sup>Lewis, E-mail correspondence, *op. cit.*

<sup>125</sup>Kotwal, Kaizaad 'An Interview with John Greyson', *Film Journal*, Issue 6, August 2003, [www.thefilmjournal.com](http://www.thefilmjournal.com) Accessed 15 March 2005

<sup>126</sup> indieWIRE 'Interview with *Proteus*' John Greyson', [www.filmmaker.co.za](http://www.filmmaker.co.za) Accessed 15 March 2005

### *Future Funding Opportunities*

One of the key differences between South Africa and Australia, even though South Africa<sup>127</sup> has almost twice the population of Australia<sup>128</sup> is that Australia spends a substantially larger amount of money supporting film and film production.

The Australian Government, including State and Federal agencies, the ABC and SBS, invested A\$81.4 million in the local film industry for Australian productions in 2002-03. In addition, industry and private investors contributed A\$147.6 million, with another A\$41.4 million from foreign investors. In 2002-03, 80 feature films and television drama programs were made with a total production value of A\$737 million, of which A\$513 million was spent in Australia. The Australian Government also provided direct support to training and industry development/ investment agencies at a total of A\$133.3 million in 2003-04.<sup>129</sup> Queer films get a small, but important proportion of this funding.

In South Africa in 1995, the old South African film box office return subsidy system was replaced by an interim film fund. Ten million rand was annually distributed among various projects until 1999. In 1999 the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) was established to support the local film industry. During 2002, R8 916,145 was invested in the production of 15 documentaries, one feature, five short films, one television series, one animation production and the post-production of one project. Fifteen training institutions and 12 student applicants for bursaries were supported.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> *Statistics South Africa*, mid-year population estimate 2004, July, 2004, [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za) Accessed 2 October 2004. South Africa has 46.6 million people.

<sup>128</sup> *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) Accessed 2 October 2004. Australia has 20.19million people.

<sup>129</sup> *Department of Foreign Affairs*, [www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au) Accessed 2 October, 2004

<sup>130</sup> Botha, Martin 'The Song Remains the Same: the Struggle for a South African Audience 1960-2003', *Kinema*, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, Spring 2004, [www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca) Accessed 18 July 2004

In the 2001/2002 financial year, the NFVF received R18 million and the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology announced a further R35 million allocation for the production of short and feature length films over the next three years, to be managed by the NFVF. In 2005, R27 million was available for the funding of projects in the film and television sector.<sup>131</sup> R27 million rand compared to A\$81.4 million (R366.3 million at an exchange rate of \$A1:R4.5) is a substantial difference in support for filmmaking. The larger number of Queer films in Australia, compared to South Africa, is in part a reflection of the overall support for film in both countries.

Pressure for commercial success is not surprisingly, a major factor in the funding of films. Countering the continued push for profitability in these subsidy regimes, Botha comments:

*If making profit is the only determining factor for the advancement of cinema, we would never had the remarkable aesthetic, technological and social developments in international cinema during the past hundred years: The Soviet Montage Movement and German Expressionism of the 1920s, Italian neo-realism in the 1940s, the French New Wave of the sixties, the New German Cinema and the Australian New Wave of the 1970s, the 5<sup>th</sup> Generation of Chinese filmmakers who took the world by storm in the 1980s and the Dogma Movement started in Denmark in the 1990s.*<sup>132</sup>

The success of Queer Cinematic Cultures in both countries, I would suggest, is another example of the importance of supporting filmmaking overall that does not have obvious financial rewards, but enormous social capital. Even taking into account the discrepancies in funding for film in general in both countries and the continuation of social discrimination for many Queer people, it is a positive sign that in both nations Queer Cinematic Culture have slowly been achieving increased funding for the production and exhibition for Queer filmmaking.

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<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*

## **Comparative Cinematic Analyses**

Numerous similarities and differences emerge when examining South African and Australian Queer cinematic histories side by side. Five of the most striking observations include the use of film in Australia and video in South Africa as part of Queer activism; Queer cinematic hybridity of South African and Australian cultures through Euro-American transfers and mimicry; emerging South African-Australian cross-cultural exchanges; the shared race-privileges of both cinematic cultures; and the existence of 'revolutionary' cinematic practices acting as catalysts for further social reform. These analyses aim to add a socio-political comparative to the more formative and institutional contrasts examined in the first section of this chapter.

### ***Activism and Consciousness Raising through Queer Film and Video***

As can be seen from the struggles for visibility for Queer film in both South Africa and Australia, the evolution of local Queer Cinematic Cultures did not occur outside of the broader Queer liberation movements. Both Queer Cinematic Cultures developed from within strong activist contexts that emerged in both South Africa and Australia.

The difference in technology, however, from when Australians started using Queer film as a consciousness-raising tool and from when South Africans started using Queer film for the same purpose, had a significant impact on the Queer communities' use of and access to Queer film. Whereas in Australia in the mid-1970s Queer people had to rely on institutions such as the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op or the AFI Cinema, in South Africa, as a consequence of the relative accessibility and affordability of video by the 1980s, activists who were just achieving critical mass, had much easier access to films on an individual and small community level.

### *Australia*

In Australia, Queer films in their various formats, from super 8 to 16mm and 35mm, was instrumental in mobilizing activist communities. Thanks to available infrastructure such as the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, Queer film in this period formed part of the consciousness raising arms of Gay Liberation, Feminism and Lesbian Feminism. Queer filmmakers developed new types of representations, new ways of discussing film in small gatherings and new ways of writing about film in community newsletters. They also organised Queer film evenings, mini Queer film festivals and small private screenings in various microcinema environments (see Chapter 2).<sup>133</sup>

In Sydney Queer film festivals were held at the Co-op and other venues from 1976 onwards, which increased the outreach of Queer film into the broader activist movements of the time. Although the availability of the Co-op centralized the screening of Queer films somewhat, other screening did take place in places such as the Holt Centre in Surry Hills and the Parramatta Town Hall.

By the mid-1980s, however, video had taken off in Australia. As part of a new section in the Queer newspaper *The Star* titled 'Video Watch', the author suggested:

*The Video Revolution is making a great deal of change in people's entertainment habits. It is estimated by the end of this year, half of Australians will have a video recorder... To be sure this is a cheaper way of seeing films, but it is not only the best way.*<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Berry, Scott 'Size Matters: Microcinemas and Alternative Exhibition Spaces', *Millennium Film Journal*, No 41, Chelsea, Michigan, 2003, p 68. Microcinemas are seen as alternative cinema screening venues including basements, community centres, performance spaces, art collectives, living rooms, outdoor spots, backroom bars and 'exploding' cinemas.

<sup>134</sup> 'Video Watch', *The Star*, Vol 6, No 7, October 4, 1984, p 27



Videos reviewed in the paper included *Querelle* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder), *Warhol on Video* and *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*. These Queer films were now available for the first time to a broader audience for personal, home viewing.

By the 1990s Queer film festivals in Australia began to incorporate video into their programs. Festival director Gillian Minervini re-arranged the structure of the 1993 *Sydney Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* to incorporate video<sup>135</sup> and another Queer film festival later on that same year, the *First Sydney International Queer Film and Video Festival*, acknowledged the importance of video as a medium more obviously in its title. The easy access and affordability of video meant that numerous Queer film products were now produced on video.



Figure 70

Video was also included in the festivals to accommodate the differences in mediums between lesbian and gay filmmaking and between Australian and international screen cultures. Women tended to make more budget oriented short films and video

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<sup>135</sup> 'Film festivities', *Sydney Star Observer*, January 29, 1993, p 19

and Australian Queer film culture as a whole was also represented more by shorts and video.<sup>136</sup>

### *South Africa*

In South Africa, by the time Queer consciousness raising groups were forming and using film for both entertainment purposes and visual activism by the 1980s, video had arrived. Whereas an institution such as the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op was instrumental in giving access to film for a broad audience in Australia, video in South Africa was used to assist in the Queer liberation movement.

This made visual activism in South Africa potentially more of a democratic process than that of Australia. Instead of relying on a particular institution for screening films of interests such as the Co-op in Sydney, in South Africa numerous groups such as *GASA Rand*, *GASA Northern Transvaal*, *GASA Natal Kus*, *GASA Oos Kaapland*, *GASA Natal Binneland*, *GASA OVS*, *GASA Noordkaapland* and *GASA Grens* screened films all over South Africa in their offices, members' homes or restaurants with video facilities. These microcinemas gave them access to local and international Queer film products at a time when mainstream Queer film screenings were either illegal or screening opportunities limited as a result of social discrimination.

In South Africa social gatherings in relative privacy also meant that in a society where there were still severe penalties for being openly Queer, people could meet and be entertained, challenged and supported through film in a non-public environment. These films did not necessarily have to be Queer, for example when *GASA Natal Coast* screened *Yentl*, *High Road to China*, *Footloose*, *To Be or Not to Be*

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

and *Gorky Park* in 1984.<sup>137</sup> The Queer social spaces and pleasures they provided were important enough political endeavours. Not until the emergence of Queer film festivals in the mid-1980s, starting with the first gay film festival in April/May of 1985,<sup>138</sup> could some of the Queer people comfortable with being out in public, participate and see films not necessarily available on video.

Other visual activist groups such as the Braamfontein *Weekend Theatre* also used video as part of Queer mobilisation. Wits drama students holding short video performance with pieces such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in the early 1980s were part of this emerging culture of Queer resistance.<sup>139</sup> The accessibility of video made it a practical technology for activism.

In Capetown, Jack Lewis also took advantage of Queer video's accessibility to raise funds for Queer organizations. He gathered money for Queer activist groups by showing videos in places such as *Jazz Art* and *Don Pedro's*, with people sitting on crates to watch Queer movies such as *No Skin of my Ass* (1994, Bruce la Bruce) and *Desert Hearts* (1986, Donna Deitch). These screenings eventually lead to the formation of the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

Lewis suggested that video will potentially have the biggest impact on the developing festival structure itself. He commented that it will have to become a video driven endeavor because it needs short, cheap videos made by a diverse range of people from different racial, class and gender backgrounds.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> 'Gaydate', *Gay View Natal*, No 1, 1984

<sup>138</sup> 'Film fest on cards', *Link/Skakel*, December 1984, p 16. The first gay convention was organised in 1982. The organisers of this initiative proposed that, '[a]lthough this is probably the first time such an event will be organised in South Africa, we intend doing it on a very grand scale, but with a distinctly local flavour.' 'Plans rolling for Gay Day', *Link/Skakel*, August 1982, p 11

<sup>139</sup> Krouse, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>140</sup> Lewis, Interview, *op. cit.*

The formation of the NFVF in South Africa also took into account this important role of video as an alternative filmmaking practice in South Africa. The writers of the original proposal wanted the South African film and video industry to be administered by one statutory body. Both comments:

*The Reference Group felt that it was important to include 'video' in the name, as it is then obvious that the Foundation embodies that area... It is from these [marginal] films and videos that the symbols and iconography of a national South African film industry can be drawn, rather than from the diversions produced by the Afrikaans cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, or the made-for-blacks cinema of the 1970s.<sup>141</sup>*

The importance of delineating video as separate to film, however, has decreased in recent years on the international stage. Jim Hubbard commenting in the *Millennium Film Journal* argues that: 'Today there doesn't seem to be much reason to maintain the distinction when makers shoot film and video, edit on laptop computers and output to tape, show on the internet and transfer back to film.'<sup>142</sup> The Queer film festivals in Sydney and South Africa do not distinguish between mediums anymore, neither in the titles of the film festivals nor the programs. Texts are generally referred to as films, with the content of the product, not the medium of greatest importance.

More recently, Queerscreen embraced emerging, digital visual technologies in its *Queer\_pixels* sessions for the 2005 Festival. This session screened digital media technology showcasing works of interest to a queer audience from new and established digital artists and producers.

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<sup>141</sup>Botha, 'The Song Remains the Same: the Struggle for a South African Audience 1960-2003', *op. cit.*

<sup>142</sup> Hubbard, Jim 'Introduction: A short, Personal History of Lesbian and Gay Experimental Cinema', *Millennium Film Journal*, No 41, Chelsea, Michigan, Fall 2003, p 9

The works were a mix of animated, design centred, narrative, non-narrative or experimental texts utilising CGI, digital and/or analogue images and/or video footage and produced using Flash, Photoshop, After Effects or similar software. Selected works opened sessions in the film festival, held at the Academy Twin and the Valhalla Cinema in Sydney from 17 February-3 March 2005.<sup>143</sup> It will be interesting to observe how this technology and its user base affect the representation of internal Queer difference in film in coming years.

### *Queer Cinematic Hybridity through Euro-American Transfers and Mimicry*

*Transfer involves the sending from one art culture and the reception and re-production in another of artworks, their styles and techniques, and their artists; their secondary mediators such as critics and art merchants; their elite; and various broad, mass publics and so on.*<sup>144</sup>

John Clark

*Mimicry represents an ironic compromise... Mimicry is the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power.*<sup>145</sup>

Homi Bhabha

The formation of hybrid Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia through Euro-American influences from the 'North' is not difficult to imagine when observing the numerous American and European Queer films screened as part of the activist and consciousness raising activities of Queer people in both nations. In particular, cross-cultural formations through two key mechanisms of hybridity - transference and mimicry - is evident when observing the influence of these predominantly Euro-American Queer cultures on local cinemas.

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<sup>143</sup> *Queer pixels* [www.queerscreen.com.au](http://www.queerscreen.com.au) Accessed 17 November 2004

<sup>144</sup> Clark, John *Modern Asian Art*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1998, p 49

<sup>145</sup> Bhabha, Homi 'Of Mimicry and Man', *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p 86

Just as the notion of Queer Theory travelled around the globe to influence lesbian and gay communities of various nations, Queer cinema played a similar, influential role. The reception of these global Queer Cinematic Cultures, however, as John Clarke suggests of mediated transfers, 'is above all governed by the receiving... culture's demand for the transfer of a specific art style at a given epoch.'<sup>146</sup> Both South Africa and Australia, keen host cultures for Queer films from Euro-America from the 1970s onward, have embraced these foreign texts to assist their own Queer cinematic and cultural liberation.

#### *Australia*

In Australia the process of cultural 'infection' as Lotman terms it, in particular from America, can be partly observed with the *Word is Out's* screening in 1978. Lee Franklyn writing about the film in 1978, a catalyst for the marches that lead to the Mardi Gras parade, commented in the local Queer newspaper:

*One could easily and heartily identify with the lives of these Americans, but could one express oneself so frankly and with the obvious self-awareness they possessed? 'Could a film like this be made in Australia?' ... 'Of course not' replied a man. 'What would we have to say? Said a woman: 'How many of us know ourselves that well and how many would dare stand up in front of a camera to say we did know? Its just not the done thing.' Another added: 'The American's are always getting it together, but we don't even know what questions to ask of ourselves. Still I wouldn't mind giving it a go.'*<sup>147</sup>

Lotman's observation that the foreign text is seen as superior is clearly evident in the conversations Franklin had with various Australians. In addition, the self-doubt and belief that Queer Australian's neither had the courage nor willingness to produce something with equal impact, is heart breakingly apparent.

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<sup>146</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p 49. Clark sees the transfer as a 'temporary and highly restricted process within reception', one which is made up of structured relations between 'heterogenous units and subject to many contingencies'.

<sup>147</sup> Franklyn, Lee 'Word is Out Now', *Campaign*, No 33, 1978, p 3

This self-doubt, thankfully, was not to last. A year later, the Gay Film Fund launched *Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers*, an Australian film looking at local Queer history. The film screened regularly over the next few decades in consciousness raising groups, Women's film nights and Queer film festivals in Australia and around the globe.<sup>148</sup> Dave Sargent commented that it was an 'important film not only because of its usefulness as discussion fodder, but because of its value as an information film and as a social and historical document, which is by and about, Australian lesbians and male homosexuals.'<sup>149</sup>

Although he critiqued it for employing documentary techniques in traditional ways, such as that used in *The Word is Out*, *WFDP* was uniquely Australian in content and style, with a mixture of newspaper headlines, interviews, footage of the arrests in 1978 and sometime humorous voiceovers. In 'mimicking' other documentaries such as *The Word is Out*, as Bhabha suggests, it appropriated *as* it visualized its own interventions. It was not a copy, but a unique creation, utilising filmic forms and histories already present in the culture.

What is interesting about this process of transference and mimicry, is the lack of deprecation *The Word is Out* received from Queer Australian audiences in later years. The text's arrival was seen initially as superior; a transformation occurred at both ends where the foreign text was read in an Australian context; the receiving culture was restructured through the marches and the formation of Mardi Gras; Australian's assimilated and internalized the imported text and became the producer of a new, original text (*WFDP*); and the receiver became the transmitter of this new text, with *WFDP* screened all over the world.

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<sup>148</sup> *WFDP* was screened internationally as recently as 2003 at the exhibition *Outlines: Lesbian and Gay Liberation in the 1970s*, November 2002 - March 2003, National Library Gallery, 58-78 Molesworth Street, Wellington, New Zealand, [www.laganz.org.nz](http://www.laganz.org.nz) Accessed 5 January 2005

<sup>149</sup> Sargent, Dave 'Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers', *Campaign*, Issue 54, 1980, p 5. The film was screened alongside *Farewell to Charms* and *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts*

However, the transcendence of the foreign text did not lead to its deprecation. *The Word is Out* was screened numerous times in the next few decades *in addition* to WFPD and as recently as 1998 it was advertised as 'a landmark film in gay and lesbian history'.<sup>150</sup> Perhaps the lack of deprecation is due to the shared oppression between American and Australian Queer people and the need to join forces against global Queerphobia as one. It does seem possible in this instance that cultural reception and transmission can take place without the deprecation of the foreign text. As Papastergiadis suggests, hybridity is a complex process that is culturally and historically specific and cannot always easily be placed within formulaic models.

#### *South Africa*

In South Africa, a relationship between transference and mimicry can also be observed in some early locally made films which showed American influences in style and content. Short films by Luis de Barros and Andre Odendaal, were critiqued by some as copying American realist products.

According to Lotman, the process of exchange results in the production of local, original texts that are seen as superior to the initial, imported text. In light of the racial, political imperatives of South Africa such 'mimicry' however, saw the *transcended, new texts*, deprecated by people in the host culture, in addition to the original foreign texts. Jack Lewis commented in 1998:

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<sup>150</sup> *A Queer Body of Film*, Mardi Gras Film Festival Program, 1998, p 51



*As far as South Africa goes I hope we will see the emergence of a representative Queer culture. If you look at the Underdog Production films, Luiz de Barros'... and if you look at Andre Odendaal's film The Dress... what appalled me about those films... [is that they] looked like third-rate films from a Californian film school. There was nothing in those films, apart from Brian Webber's accent, which struck me as being South African.<sup>151</sup>*

Lewis argued that South African Queer films needed to have content that spoke to the South African cultural, political and social landscape and which also addressed gender and race. He suggested:

*I think that the rest of the world...is hungry for all these kinds of stories, because the rest of the world [want] a larger view of the Queer issue. People, when the stories are well told, are interested in ways in which Queer issues play in cultures other than their own, because it gives them a take on their own experience, the contrast, the difference as well as the point[s] of similarity.<sup>152</sup>*

The nature of a successful or unsuccessful transformation and transmission for films such as de Barros' *Hot Legs*, however, must be seen in its own particular context. Influences on *Hot Legs*, assumed by Lewis to be American, were transformed and restructured, assimilated and internalized; new texts produced; and then transmitted (for example in its screening at the Sydney Mardi Gras Film Festival in 2000).<sup>153</sup> The film, reflecting de Barros' experiences as a white, gay male South African, a point of view as valid as a representation dealing with say, a South African black, lesbian experiences, should not be seen as 'unrepresentative' of Queer South Africa. It may be unrepresentative of a broader view of Queer South Africa, but it is very representative of de Barros' white, Queer South Africa.

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<sup>151</sup> Lewis, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Queer Screen Mardi Gras Film Festival Program, 2005

Because of the particular socio-political history of South Africa, however, and the context from within which it is judged, some people insist that films such as this 'fails' as South African Queer representations. Deprecation then can occur not only to the original, foreign text, but also to the host culture's new, hybrid products as a result of a perception of an unwanted mimicry and misrepresentation. Hybridity, as can be seen, functions on complex, sometimes incompatible levels and impacts differently on different constituents in the various Queer communities.

*Queer Cinematic Cross-Cultural Exchanges between South Africa and Australia*

As can be seen, even though they are close southern neighbours, any similarities South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures share have developed mainly through their parallel engagement with the 'North', rather than through significant 'South-South' cross-cultural hybridisation. However, both the *Out in Africa* film festival based in Capetown and Queer Screen's Mardi Gras film festival based in Sydney, have engaged with each other on some level and some Queer filmmakers have begun creating small, Queer filmic links in representation between the two nations.

The *Out in Africa* film festival and Queer Screen have, for instance screened Queer films produced in the others' country. In 1999, Queer Screen exhibited *The Man Who Dove with Mandela*, (Greta Schiller 1998); in 2000 it screened Luis De Barros' *Hot Legs* (1995) under the *Rough Trade* shorts section; and a special program of films titled *Out in Africa* including Jack Lewis and Thulanie Punghula's *Sando to Samantha* (1997), Ernst Thorpe's *Nil Desperandum* (1960) and the curator of the program, Paulo Alberton's own *Josi, The Queer Tour* (1999).



Figure 71

In South Africa, the *Out in Africa* film festival screened amongst others, in 1994 Stephen Elliot's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*; Stephen Cummins' *Resonance* (1991) in 1995; *Dallas Doll* (Ann Turner) in 1996; and Deb Strut and Liz Baulch's short *My Cunt*, (1996) and Ana Kokkinos' *Head On* (1997) and *Only the Brave* (1994) in 1998.

Although there have been these filmic exchanges, when both South Africa and Australia have engaged with visiting Queer filmmakers as part of their Queer film festivals, they have *not* linked with each other. When in 1994 and 1995 the *Out in Africa* film festival had guests as part of their film festivals, they included Barbara Hammer, Isaac Julian, Greta Schiller, David Haugland, Catherine Saalfield, Pratibha Parmar and John Greyson. None were from Australia. Although Queer Screen has had numerous unofficial guest directors who have accompanied and introduced their films, only once in 1999, when Nodi Murphy and Terese Rosenberg from *Out in Africa* visited the Mardi Gras film festival, was there an unofficial South African-Australian exchange when Murphy introduced *The Man Who Drove With Mandela*.

The lack of dialogue and of co-productions, when considering the number of Queer co-productions South Africa has had with Canada, the USA and the UK [*A Moffie Called Simon* (1986, John Greyson, Canada), *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*, (1998, Greta Schiller, UK/USA/SA) and *Proteus* (2003, John Greyson and Jack Lewis, Canada)] is surprising for two countries that are such close neighbours and who share so many post-colonial similarities. Considering the vast number of South Africans who have migrated to Australia over the past decade, this lack of connectivity feels almost ominous.

Apart from being economic competitors, having to fight it out for shared market resources, perhaps, as Nikos Papastergiadis suggests, this fear from an Australian perspective, may be in part about not wanting to recognise a similar, shared, racist mentality.<sup>154</sup> Australia's strong stand against countries such as Zimbabwe, for which South Africa has been a more vocal supporter, may also be influencing South Africa's position on Australia. Cross-cultural exchanges are therefore more the exception than the rule.

Two filmmakers, South African-Australian Fanny Jacobson and Brazilian-Australian Paulo Alberton have begun to open dialogue between South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures. Jacobson's films *Dual Passport* (1998) and *Chutzpah* (2000) echo her South African-Australian identities and Alberton's *Pride of Some Descriptions* (2000) deals with some cross-cultural comparisons between the South African and Australian Queer movements.



Figure 72

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<sup>154</sup> Papastergiadis, Nicholas *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deteritorialization and Hybridity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p 15

Born in South Africa, Jacobson has had a strong association with arts and culture since moving to Australia in the mid 1990s. In Perth she worked with the AFI and in 2004 was the Festival Director for *Feast*, the Gay and Lesbian Cultural Festival of Adelaide, South Australia.

*Dual Passport*, her first film in Australia, focuses not just on biculturalism, but also on body image and the difficulties of adapting to different states of being. The tension between these different states reflects perhaps the migrant's experience of 'dual belongings' and the difficulties in adapting to a new country. Duality, sexual fluidity, movement and transition also feature as key elements in this piece.

*Chutzpah*, her short animated film about the lesbian grapevine of gossip, also indirectly links to ideas of South African-Australian connections, if only through the broad South African accent of the narrator. The conversation between animated talking heads, humorously casts the net of intrigue about who is and who isn't a lesbian. Both films, if not necessarily consciously, link Queer South African-Australian Cinematic Cultures in a cross-cultural exchange.

Paulo Alberton's *Pride of Some Descriptions* also connects South Africa and Australia Queer Cinematic Cultures through its analysis of homosexual identities of the Pride parades of New York, Johannesburg and Sydney. Alberton commenting on some of the observations he made about these three different Queer cultures in the process of filming the documentary, suggests:

*There is a lot of similarity between Australia and the USA as they are both powerful and dominant world economies. I guess the gay scene follows that bland, brand, advertised, predictable and shallow feel to it...South Africa has a complex and fascinating social texture. Being gay is just a little detail...There are other issues that can have higher level of concern: you are black, you are white, you are colored, you are a woman, you are HIV+, you don't have money, you have been raped and so on. They speak 11 official languages... There are many ways of being gay, especially when you go out in the townships, where passive/effeminate is gay and active/masculine one is not considered gay... There is more queer politics and less gay and lesbian politics.*<sup>155</sup>

Although arguably there is a wide variety of internal Queer difference in America and Australia, which may not be as obvious or visible as it is in South Africa, issues of race, HIV status etc., affects different subgroups within the Queer communities of America and Australia just as significantly. This film, however, is part of a new, emerging body of work that has started to make visible the Queer connections between South Africa and Australia.

Alberton credits, in addition to Marlon Riggs, Jean Genet and Brazilian Jorge Furtado, the South African Queer filmmaker Jack Lewis as one of the key influences on him and his work. Now a student at the Australian Film Television and Radio School in Sydney, these influences are bound to be expanded to include Australian cinematic texts.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Alberton, Paulo E-mail correspondence, 4 November 2004

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* Alberton attended Jack Lewis' course on the *History of Homosexuality in the Cinema* at Wits University in Johannesburg in 1999.

## *Queer Race-Privilege*

*Despite the quantum leap that queer filmmaking has taken over the last decade, there are still some subjects which have proven difficult, if not impossible, for queer filmmakers to address adequately. Chief among these is the complicated and taboo laden convergence of race and sexuality in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.*<sup>157</sup>

Karl Bruce Knapper

In both South Africa and Australia, the majority of films that are available for activism, consciousness raising and entertainment are Euro-American products, predominantly made by white men. A few South African-Australian Queer cultural and Queer cross-cultural products made by women and of colour directors have recently emerged, but these are still few and far between.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the production and screening of white gay male images, as these films reflect the valid experiences of those who make them. As Richard Dyer suggests, however, what can happen when the majority of images come from a particular group, is that these representations tend to become the norm against which everything else is judged as different.<sup>158</sup> When this occurs in relation to Queer culture, Queer identities that have been forged through Euro-American socio-political male histories, take on the hue of a natural form against which everything else is measured.

The race-privileged group that dominates global Queer filmmaking at present are white. And they are predominantly, though not exclusively male. Whiteness Theories that emerged in the 1980s were developed to critique and understand,

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<sup>157</sup> Knapper, Karl Bruce 'The Color of Sex', 23rd Frameline Film Festival Program Essay, 1999, [www.frameline.org](http://www.frameline.org) Accessed 23 April 2003

<sup>158</sup> Dyer, Richard *White*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p 9

amongst other things, the processes that result in the lack of representation of a diverse group of non-white people.<sup>159</sup> Theorist Joe Kincheloe suggests:

*Even though no one at this point really knows what whiteness is, most observers agree that it is intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between white and non-white people.*<sup>160</sup>

Queer identities of countries not dominating Queer image making, are often invisible because of the presence of imported Queer texts. Cultural difference, sensitivities and nuances, which could teach an enormous amount about identity formations and the intersections of, amongst other things, race, gender and sexuality, can be ignored, or worse, misrepresented by Queer filmmakers from dominant cultures. Knapper suggested:

*The vast number of white Queer filmmakers either ignore the experiences of people of colour altogether, or get those experiences incredibly and sometimes horribly wrong.*<sup>161</sup>

Although South African and Australia Queer Cinematic Cultures have evolved from very different socio-political histories and have different audience demographics to support, they both screen films that come from a similar, predominantly white pool of global Queer texts. Local filmmakers in both country are also predominantly white, apart from filmmakers such as Tony Ayers and Melissa Lee in Australia and Zachie Achmat, Vusi Ntsoseng, Mpumi Njinge and Beverly Ditsie in South Africa.

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<sup>159</sup> Kuchta, Todd M 'The Dyer Straits of Whiteness', *Post Modern Culture*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Vol 9, No 1, September 1998, pp 1, 3. Kuchta comments that Dyer believes that 'the dominant religion of Europe, Christianity's ideal of bodily transcendence became synonymous with the ideal of whiteness itself, in turn shaping the European discourse on race throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.'

<sup>160</sup> Kincheloe, Joe L 'The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness: A Pedagogical Analysis', *College Literature*, West Chester, Pennsylvania, Issue 26, No 3, Fall 1999, p 1, 5. Kincheloe is quick to point out 'that whiteness is a market of privilege but that all white people are not able to take advantage of it.'

<sup>161</sup> Knapper, *op. cit.*



In both countries, the majority of screenings are to white audiences. Despite the fact that the majority of South Africans are non-white, the reality for Queer film going audiences, is that they are still from race-privileged backgrounds. There are several reasons for this and Nodi Murphy comments

*There are complaints and I don't think they are complaints per se... they are observations lodged about the film festival and it is still about representation....So its a difficulty in finding films in which those issues [of race] are addressed [and] its a difficulty in sourcing and getting a print in screenable form, because we have difficulty in formats with the machinery...[Also] the cinemas we tend to go to are the arty farty ones, the ones that tolerate film festivals.<sup>162</sup>*

Other venues have been tried, especially in the townships, but they have not been successful. Queer Black people would rather go outside of the township to see Queer films for fear that the township communities may be homophobic. Often entertainment priorities between the different racialised communities also differ, with cinema not a high priority for many.

The economic, educational and social differences that affect the racial mix of Queer film going audiences then, related in part to Apartheid, connects easily to theories around Whiteness. As Kincheloe suggests 'with race in general, whiteness holds material/economic implications – indeed, white supremacy has its financial awards... Undoubtedly there continues to be unearned wages of whiteness.'<sup>163</sup>

The impact of geography, historical segregation and disadvantages of non-white, Queer and non-Queer people and the difficulty in sourcing Queer films dealing with relevant issues, have had a dramatic impact on different Queer people's engagement with Queer Cinematic Cultures. Whiteness and its ramifications, has affected Queer

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<sup>162</sup> Murphy, Nodi Interview, *Out in Africa* Film Festival Office, Capetown, 12 January 1999

<sup>163</sup> Kincheloe, *op .cit.*, p 1

people of color's film going capacity; their ability to afford the cinema; and their ability to see issues of relevance to themselves on the screen.

In Australia, Queer filmmaking and participation is also marked racially and ethnically. In Sydney in 1997, Queer Screen held its first film festival in Sydney's western suburbs. It was held at the Roxy Cinema, a beautiful Spanish Mission Revival building from the 1930s in the heart of one of Australia's oldest colonial settlements, Parramatta. The opening night and party was one of the highlights of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festivals, supported by a large group of lesbians and gay men who live in western Sydney.<sup>164</sup> Stephen Hodge, a resident in the west commented: 'The move ... by Queer Screen and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras into western Sydney is an exciting step; it's a move beyond the ghetto and into the suburbs.... It shows that place can be implicated in the politics of sexuality.'<sup>165</sup>

Western Sydney constitutes about 72% of Sydney's total area, has twelve local government zones and a population of more than 1.5 million - about 42% of the total population of Sydney. In addition, more than half of its people were born overseas or are second-generation immigrants.<sup>166</sup> Sharon Chalmers, a researcher on lesbian and gay issues in Western Sydney comments that those who live outside the inner Sydney metropolitan area tend to be marginalized 'not simply by their sexual affiliations alone, but rather *in combination with* other factors such as geographic isolation, race, ethnicity, religion and class.'<sup>167</sup>

Although racial and ethnic diversity is prevalent in western Sydney, what is interesting is the festival in western Sydney is less racially marked than the city

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<sup>164</sup> *A Queer Body of Film, op. cit.*, p 13

<sup>165</sup> Hodge, Stephen 'Beyond the Ghetto', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 4 February 1999, p 9

<sup>166</sup> Chalmers, Sharon 'Introduction: Westies Come Out for A Show', *Edges: Lesbian, Gay and Queer Lives in Western Sydney*, Liverpool Regional Museum Exhibition Catalogue, Liverpool, 2001, p 5

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 5-6

festival. Curated programs dealing with Asian Queer issues such as *Through Eastern Eyes* in 1999, for example, were only screened in the CBD.

Chalmers and other researchers discovered patterns of socialising in general for Queer people in western Sydney and found that 'for a number of [Queer people] the city represents freedom, celebration, safety in numbers and anonymity.'<sup>168</sup> Perhaps, as in South Africa, the need to escape temporarily from families or communities of origin is essential for people to have a sense of a Queer identity.

It is important to recognize that Queer film festivals and their content in both South Africa and Australia are predominantly white with issues of racial differences occasionally projected onto the screen to give depth to the majority of white images. It is also important to be conscious that the majority of these images and the concerns they raise are not universal. Opportunities to represent diverse images have to be consciously developed, whether through the various mediums that are engaged with by film festivals or the geographical locations of the screenings.

In multiracial and multicultural societies such as South Africa and Australia, Queer film festivals must aim to be multi-dimensional. The backlash for instance against homosexuality as 'un-African' in neighbouring states to South Africa such as Zimbabwe and Namibia and in Australia, Chinese Labour MLC, Henry Tsang casting the deciding vote in the NSW Parliament against an equal age of same-sex consent, should be taken as the results of a singular focus on sexuality which did not engage multi-dimensionally with other issues of difference.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Chalmers, Sharon, Madeddu, Daniel and O'Sullivan, Kimberly 'Introduction', *Just Sensational! Queer Histories of Western Sydney*, Liverpool Regional Museum Exhibition Catalogue, Liverpool, 2001

<sup>169</sup> Bolger, Brendan 'Who killed the bill?', *Sydney Star Observer*, Thursday 25 November 1999

Queer film festivals need to develop adaptable strategies to insure differences in image making within their own and other cultures are encouraged, supported and embraced, to work towards empowering all the constituencies of the communities.

### ***Revolutionary Films and Revolutionary Film Festivals***

*The work of the revolutionary cinema must not limit itself to denouncing, or to appeal for reflection; it must be a summons for action.*<sup>170</sup>

Jorge Sanjines

Sanjines' understanding of 'revolutionary' cinema involves a refiguring of the role of cinematic cultures as not just entertainment, but a call to arms for the transformation of a society. Teshome Gabriel similarly suggests that there is no contradiction between a film being 'revolutionary' and being born from a crisis situation rather than a revolution, as revolutionary films exist to bring about a more radical outlook on the conditions of society.<sup>171</sup> Developing multi-dimensional Queer Cinematic Cultures can perhaps be seen as part of this revolutionary drive.

It is within this context, that I want to suggest that in both Australia and South Africa, moments of revolutionary cinema took place in response to local crisis situations. These moments impacted on and dramatically shifted not just the representation of Queer people on film, but the course of Queer rights and liberation in both countries.

In Australia *the Word is Out* acted as a 'revolutionary' film and in South Africa, the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival acted as, what I term, a 'revolutionary' film festival. Queer Cinematic Cultures were vital catalysts in bringing about social and judicial change for Queer people in both countries.

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<sup>170</sup> Sanjines, Jorge 'Cinema and Revolution', *Cineaste*, Winter 1970/71, p 14. Quoted in Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p 21

<sup>171</sup> Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p 37

As discussed in Chapter 3, the American film *The Word is Out* played an important role in the emergence of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in 1978. Lee Franklyn commented at the time that the screening was a very moving experience, with a full theatre of gay men and lesbians powerfully affected by the range of emotions the film evoked.<sup>172</sup> He also rallied readers to action by suggesting:

*Yes, word it out now. We gay Australians have something to say and we are beginning to say it, with honesty and pride. We may not be as upfront as our American brothers and sisters, but were getting there our way.*<sup>173</sup>

After the screenings, people stayed back to discuss the film and inspired by the American marches, the idea of an apolitical street party was taken to CAMP's Action Group, where the 'mardi gras' was born.<sup>174</sup> The result was a set of confrontations and political actions that eventually turned into the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

*The Word is Out* functioned in all the aspects of what Gabriel terms a revolutionary film. The film did more than offer a voice for Australian Queers - it mobilised them into action. The film acted as a catalyst for a crisis moment in Australian Queer history and not just denounced homophobia, but offered alternative visions of life and acted as summons for action. As Gabriel comments on Third Cinema:

*It is not enough to make a film with a revolutionary perspective, or to simply express a political opinion...the whole institution within which filmmakers and audiences interact must undergo a radical change.*<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Franklyn, *op. cit.*, p 3

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Harris, Gavin *Its a Riot: Sydney's First Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Australian Telegraph Publications, Sydney, 1998. '...Just before the... celebrations, the collective...cal[ling] itself the Gay Solidarity Group... drew up four demands... It wanted the police to stop harassing gay men and lesbians...[I]t wanted the government to repeal NSW's anti homosexual laws and summary offences Act, to stop workplace discrimination and to protect lesbians and gay men's rights.'

<sup>175</sup> Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p 23

In addition to its content and reception marking *The Word is Out* as a revolutionary film, its unique documentary style also linked it to its ideological base, further positioning it as revolutionary film. Commenting on the role of style in revolutionary cinema, Gabriel suggests:

*Style is not reserved for a specific ideology. But style can help us 'squeeze' out a film's ideological undercurrents. In its proper use, style can serve as a 'key' to understanding ideology.* <sup>176</sup>

As Dyer suggests, lesbian and gay documentary filmmakers at the start of the gay and lesbian liberation, developed unique form of representation from and for the movement, despite their flawed understanding at the time that they were simply recording 'reality'. Filmmakers refused to bring in 'experts'; used a talking head strategy for conveying ideas; allowed dissidence within the filmic structure; and were actually from the groups they were filming, thus challenging the object/subject dichotomy of previous documentary making.<sup>177</sup>

This was a unique style of representation that revealed some of the key ideological parameters for Queer filmmaking, which sought to get the 'truth' from ordinary people's lives. Even though specific ideologies and styles are not exclusively reserved for each other as part of a push for a revolutionary film, *The Word is Out's* style emphasised its dissident push to break free of the Queerphobic social limitations imprisoning people at the time.

As opposed to a single film, I suggest what was instrumental in South Africa instead was an entire Queer film festival. The emergence of the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1994, saw the mobilization of Queer people from all over South Africa into a Queer community that started fighting for national Queer rights.

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p 41

<sup>177</sup> Dyer, Richard *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, Routledge, London, 1990, p 236

In the South African context, *Out in Africa* became the organisational ground for the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition, a national body of gay and lesbian rights, which transformed the South African Queer landscape through its actions over the next few years.<sup>178</sup> The festival thus facilitated broader activist concerns for all discrimination faced by Queer people and offered one of the only opportunities for a collective coming together in pleasure and celebration. Festival Director Nodi Murphy comments on this networking role:

*[The Festival] has undoubtedly given impetus to the emergence of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition which has formed to ensure that freedom of sexual orientation is maintained in the final constitution of South Africa.*

<sup>179</sup>

Pride organisers also found that the film festival offered an opportunity to meet and discuss plans. The sense of community generated from the interaction of a group of people who were rarely together on mass at such specifically Queer cultural events, brought about a great sense of belonging and purpose. As the first report on the *Out in Africa* film festival comments:

*One of the most rewarding aspects of the festival was the palpable sense of community that characterised the atmosphere from the opening night to the close. The festival succeeded in drawing gay and lesbian people together from all sections of our diverse community and creating a sense of presence, creating a tangible sense of self-recognition as part of civil society.*<sup>180</sup>

The film festival acted as a mobilising force in a similar way as *The Word is Out* did in Sydney. It established a forum and a meeting ground for activist and community

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<sup>178</sup> *Lesbian and Gay Equality Project*, South Africa, [www.equality.org.za](http://www.equality.org.za) In 1998 the National Coalition won its case to decriminalise sodomy. It was received as the first applicant, a duly constituted voluntary association of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender persons comprising seventy organisations and associations. Accessed 5 January 2005

<sup>179</sup> Murphy, Interview, *op. cit.*

<sup>180</sup> 'Introduction', *Report on the 1st South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, Johannesburg, Capetown, Durban, Bloemfontein, June-July 1994

leaders in a spirit of politics and pleasure. In the context of numerous films dealing specifically with relevant and contemporary issues facing Queer people, what more significant event could bring about such a broad range of discussions, debates and concerns and help activate a large group of people for the betterment of their own lives.

If the work of the revolutionary cinema is not just about denouncing that which oppresses people or to provide reflection of this oppression, but to be 'a summons for action' as Sanjines insists, then the *Out In Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* was indeed a 'revolutionary' film festival.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I analysed two comparative streams. The first examined how Queer Cinematic Cultures were initially inhibited and suppressed through censorship and lack of institutional support. In recent years, due to the continued activism and social reform, a remarkable shift in support and visibility has been facilitated.

The second stream examined five distinct comparative observations made between the two Queer Cinematic Cultures. They included differences in cinematic activism due to changing technologies; hybrid Queer cinematic cultures that have formed in both nations as a result of Queer cinematic dominance from the 'North'; the emergence of some South African-Australian 'South-South' cross-cultural exchanges; similar white, race-privileged Queer Cinematic Cultures; and the existence of 'revolutionary' cinemas in both nations that facilitated further social and institutional reform.

It is a testament to the energy and drive of all those behind Queer Cinematic Cultures in both Australia and South Africa, that they were so instrumental in mobilizing communities and bringing about change. Their revolutionary impulses



need to be recognized as important contributions not only to their own countries, but also to global Queer cultures.

To honour these histories and the struggles that allowed them to survive the years of oppression and persecution, I suggest in the last Chapter a new genus of global cinematic classification of which they form a part.

I term this genus *Fifth Cinema*.



Figure 73

## Chapter 5

### *Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema*

*We realized that the most important thing was not the film and the information in it so much as the way this information was debated...The projection became a place where people talk[ed] about and develop[ed] their awareness. We learnt the importance of this space: cinema here becomes humanly useful.<sup>1</sup>*

Joris Ivens, 1978

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<sup>1</sup> "'Cinéma d'auteur ou cinéma d'intervention?', Table Ronde avec Fernando Solanas et. al.' in *CinémAction I*, Paris, 1978, p 60. This discussion revolved in part around the film *La hora de los hornos* (*Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968, Grupo Cine Liberación).



The research in this thesis is contextualised within broader cultural debates about the classification of global cinema. In considering Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia, it is useful to draw upon theoretical discussions that have deployed terms such as First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinemas.<sup>2</sup> These categories assist in placing Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia within international trends for both Queer and non-Queer Cinemas.

What becomes apparent when examining the broad cultural definitions of First, Second, Third and more recently, Fourth Cinema categorisations, is that various, if unequal, attempts at cultural decolonisation exist within all of them.

Decolonisation in this context refers to the drive for self-determination and the development of interventions and representations that counter dominant, cultural cinematic forms. As part of this cinematic decolonisation, I suggest there exists another cinematic practice dealing with a type of 'decolonisation'. I term this cinema Fifth Cinema.

Fifth Cinema endeavours to assist in decolonisation not of itself (as does critical First Cinema), or of one dominant cinematic form by another (Second Cinema), or of one 'nation' by another (Third and Fourth Cinema); rather it seeks to decolonise discriminatory and dominating representations that come from *within* a society of origin or a society lived in *by choice*.

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<sup>2</sup> First Cinema in this thesis is classical or Hollywood Cinema, Second Cinema is Arthouse Cinema or *Nouvelle Cinema*, Third Cinema is films and cinematic practices that are produced to assist in the decolonization of Third World people and Fourth Cinema is a cinematic practise developed by Fourth World, indigenous people who remain in nation states that have persisted after colonisation. (see later in this chapter for more detailed definitions)

## **From First to Fifth Cinema**

To understand the arguments for a Fifth Cinema in relation to Queer Cinema, it is important to clarify some of the meanings and ideologies attached to First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinema. Although some of these definitions and their praxis bleed into each other depending on where the films are screened and who the audiences are, they help point to the evolution of Queer Cinema as a distinct part of Fifth Cinema.

It is important in the preface of this argument around Fifth Cinema, to establish the relationship, or lack thereof, between First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinemas and First, Second, Third and Fourth Worlds and their cinemas. Understanding these concepts will allow Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema to exist in the so called First, Second, Third and Fourth Worlds, without needing a corresponding 'Fifth World' as a point of origin.

Theorist Michael Chanan points out that the concept for a First, Second and Third World had its origins at the Bandung Conference in 1955, the founding conference of the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>3</sup> At this conference, First World was defined as the advanced capitalist countries of the West including North America and Australasia (I would suggest Apartheid South Africa as an industrialized nation can also be added to this). Second World countries were defined as those comprising the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. China, at that time, declared its allegiance to the remaining underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which became known as the Third World.

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<sup>3</sup> Chanan, Michael 'The changing geography of Third Cinema', *Screen*, Vol 38, No 4, Winter 1997, pp 373-374

The term Fourth World, according to Richard Griggs, first came into wide use in 1974 with the publication of Shuswap Chief George Manuel's *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. Manuel argued that the Fourth World consisted of indigenous peoples descended from a country's aboriginal population who are completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and resources.<sup>4</sup> However, because of the many indigenous nations in Europe, the Soviet Union, the Middle and Far East, in addition to more obviously colonized indigenous peoples such as those of the American Indians and Australian Aborigines, the definition of Fourth World as 'Nations forcefully incorporated into states which maintain a distinct political culture, but are internationally unrecognized' was developed to be more inclusive.<sup>5</sup>

Films produced within First, Second, Third and Fourth World Cinemas, however, may have nothing in common with the ideological parameters of what is known as First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinemas. Geography does not dictate the type of films developed for these categories.

Chanan suggests First and Second Cinemas 'constitute a virtual geography of their own.'<sup>6</sup> Teshome Gabriel argues similarly for Third Cinema and suggests:

*The principle characteristic of Third Cinema is not so much where it is made, or even who makes it, but, rather, the ideology it espouses and the consciousness it displays. The Third Cinema is that cinema of the Third World that stands opposed to imperialism and class oppression in all their ramifications and manifestations.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Griggs, Richard 'Background on the Term "Fourth World"', *The Meaning of 'Nation' and 'State' in the Fourth World*, University of Capetown, Center for World Indigenous Studies, 1992. Nations such as Wales, Catalonia, Brittany, Flanders, Bavaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Armenia, Georgia, Palestine, Kurdistan, Khalistan, Balochistan and Tibet are some examples of Fourth World nations. [www.cwis.org](http://www.cwis.org). Accessed 27 March 2004

<sup>5</sup> Griggs, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Chanan, *op. cit.*, p 375

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel, Teshome H *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1982, p 2

South African theorist Jacqueline Mainguard also suggests Third Cinema need not be confined to the Third World. Similar to the virtual, ideological space of First and Second Cinemas, her differentiation between Third Cinema and Third World Cinema suggests that the power of “Third Cinema” ... is the space it opens up for film to be viewed, not geographically, as the term “Third World Film” might suggest, but in terms of shared global concerns for socio-political transformation.<sup>8</sup>

Reece Auguiste a member of the Black Audio Film Collective in the early 1990s, however, was less sure about the split between Third Cinema and the Third World. He suggests that ‘the manner in which the concept [Third Cinema was] loosely deployed mean[t] that it [was] progressively in danger of abandoning its analytical potency. In invoking the term Third Cinema practice, film artists in Britain must recognize that Third Cinema in its classical dimensions does not exist in Britain... [and] those film-makers who remain adamant about its existence should at least give recognition to its infancy.’<sup>9</sup>

However, Auguiste admitted that geography was not the only marker of Third Cinema production and that a ‘tentative relationship... exist[ed] between Third Cinema in the Third World and that which [was] in the process of becoming in Britain’s Black communities’ in the early 1990s.<sup>10</sup> He qualified this by suggesting it was important for interventionist filmmakers in Britain to acknowledge influences other than Third Cinema in their attempt to develop an alternative visual grammar. They had to recognise that there were unique political, cultural and historical specificities to each of their cinematic practices, which Third Cinema had not influenced.

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<sup>8</sup> Mainguard, Jacqueline M *Community Film in South Africa as a Mode of Emergent Cultural Production*, Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1990, p 52

<sup>9</sup> Auguiste, Reece ‘Black Independents and Third Cinema: The British Context’ in Pines, Jim and Willemen, Paul (eds.), *Questions of Third Cinema*, British Film Institute, London, 1991, p 215

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Fourth Cinema, which according to Maori filmmaker and critic Barry Barclay means Indigenous Cinema, also need not be tied geographically to the Fourth World or be confused with Fourth World Cinemas. Although Barclay stops short of exploring this difference in the development of Fourth Cinema ideologies, an alignment with Fourth World ideologies and the best interest of Fourth World people, I argue, is a far more beneficial relationship than a geographical, Fourth World anchor.<sup>11</sup> Jo Smith in an analysis of Barclay's theories argues that:

*Barclay asserts an open-ended and non-totalising category of cultural production... [S]uch an act of provocation is a fundamentally political gesture that departs from the norms of minority representational politics and which demonstrates the possibility of a more virtual cultural politics.<sup>12</sup>*

Although Smith does not draw clear distinctions between Fourth Cinema and Fourth World filmmakers, there is space in her understanding of the 'virtual cultural politics' of Fourth Cinema that, I argue, would suggest a geographical link to the Fourth World might not be necessary for Fourth Cinema to exist. Fourth Cinema, like First, Second and Third Cinema and their corresponding 'worlds', does not automatically have to be mapped onto a Fourth World. Although there are often important alliances between filmmaking and geography, these are not essential for significant First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinematic Cultures to exist.

### ***First Cinema***

We can regard classical Hollywood film as being First Cinema, characterized by a particular history and narrative form. According to Bordwell and Thompson, it has narratives with characters motivated by personal psychology and actions;

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<sup>11</sup>Barclay, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Jo T 'The Time of *Fourth Cinema*', Draft paper CSAA Conference, Christchurch, 2003, p 3

narrative closure; no co-incidental action; and always maintains the illusion of 'objectivity'.<sup>13</sup>

First Cinema is also understood by South African theorists, Keyan Tomaselli and Jeanne Prinsloo, as that which is politically supportive of the dominant ideology in both content and form and which 'invit[es] belief and adherence'.<sup>14</sup> They add, however, that First Cinema can be more complex and 'may have explicit political content, but adopt, if critically, the language, imagery and form of mainstream cinema.'<sup>15</sup>

In Solanas and Getino's essay of 1969, where they first articulate the concept of Third Cinema, First Cinema expresses 'the reality as it is conceived by the ruling classes'.<sup>16</sup> It is ultimately seen as the dominant, ownership class' representation of reality, a reality that excludes the colonised subjects. Originally they associated 'big budget' movies with First Cinema, but later reviewed their definition of First Cinema as a cinema that 'responds to the interests of transnational, monopoly capital'.<sup>17</sup>

Although for Barclay, First Cinema simply means American cinema,<sup>18</sup> Chanan sees First Cinema not so much as American cinema per se as the model imposed by the US Film industry, whose domination in the past ensured that even films which had begun to appear in Second World countries, submitted to the same structures of First Cinema. Chanan argues:

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<sup>13</sup>Bordwell D and Thompson, K *Film Art: An Introduction*, MacGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., University of Wisconsin, 1997, pp 108-110

<sup>14</sup>Prinsloo, Jeanne and Tomaselli, Keyan 'Third Cinema in South Africa' in Blignaut, Johan and Botha Martin (eds.), *Movies, Moguls, Mavericks: South African Cinema 1979-1991*, Showdata, Capetown, 1992, p 355

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p 355

<sup>16</sup>Solanas, Fernando and Getino, Octavio 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Nicols, Bill (ed.), *Movies and Methods Volume 1: An Anthology*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, p 51. The article first appeared in the journal *Tricontinental* in Paris in October 1969.

<sup>17</sup>Chanan, *op. cit.*, p 378

<sup>18</sup>Barclay, *op. cit.*



*Even [when these Second World films] adopt only the language of the US model, and not its themes, this still corresponds to an ideology, which posits a particular relationship between film and spectator – where cinema is conceived as pure spectacle.<sup>19</sup>*

This cinematic culture is transmitted through the absorption of its filmic language and form and through its industrial, technical and commercial apparatus that often dominate the industry. In the absence of strong, local filmic cultures in countries other than the United States, American product and distribution often overpowers local markets. Localised film industries, to survive, have to rely on heavy subsidies from their governments.

### ***Second Cinema***

Although Barclay sees Second Cinema as Art House Cinema, Chanan, in the context of examining Solanis and Getino's revision of their original film categories, understands Second Cinema as resistant texts expressing the aspirations of the middle classes or the petit bourgeoisie. For him Second Cinema includes Author's Cinema, Expression Cinema, *Nouvelle Vague* and *Cinema Nuovo*. Chanan argues, however, that:

*inasmuch as [Second Cinema] was an attempt at cultural decolonization... such attempts have already reached... the outer limit of what the system permits. The second cinema filmmaker has remained 'trapped inside the fortress' as Godard put it, or is on its way to becoming trapped.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup>Chanan, *op. cit.*, p 375

<sup>20</sup>Solanis and Getino, *op. cit.*, pp 51- 52

Chanan comments that Second Cinema is 'often nihilist, pessimist, mystificatory [but that] here too all categories of films may be found, including the political'.<sup>21</sup> Although he is more sympathetic to some of its political aspirations, he suggests that in neocolonial and dependant countries, Second Cinemas are more often than not aligned with the 'metropolis'.

Second Cinema, within the Argentinean system Solanis and Getino described earlier is seen by Chanan as a cinema for the *dilettante elite*, 'who were politically reformist – for example in opposing censorship – but incapable of achieving any profound change.'<sup>22</sup> He describes this class as 'especially impotent in the face of the kind of repression unleashed by the victory of reactionary, proto-fascist forces'.<sup>23</sup>

In an Australian context, Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka sees Second Cinema as a cinema split between its own national ideals and that of the bigger American and European market's ideals. They suggest:

*The Australian industry, like those of other 'second world' (sic) countries, exists in an environment strongly conditioned and even regulated by the norms established by Hollywood... Locally produced products have had to compete both at home and abroad within a set of viewing expectations that is American, or formed by American culture abroad. At the same time they must display sufficient distinction from American product to permit differentiation.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Chanan, *op. cit.*, p 378

<sup>22</sup>Chanan, Michael, *op. cit.*, p 376

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p 376

<sup>24</sup>Dermody, Susan and Jacka, Elizabeth 'The Second Cinema: A Doubled Industry', *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema, Volume 2*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1988, p 13

Dermody and Jacka elaborate on the problems non-American countries have in producing commercially viable films and outline the difficulties smaller national film industries face in relation to their 'Second Cinema' producing images of their own cultures. It can be argued, however, that similar issues relating to self-representation result for Third and Fourth Cinemas for the same economic reasons. In this light, therefore, this thesis regards Second Cinema as Art House Cinema, *Auteur* Cinema and cinema for the local middle classes, rather than national cinemas competing with US interests.

### *Third Cinema*

Third Cinema, [is] in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes... the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word decolonization of culture.<sup>25</sup>

Third Cinema filled the anti-colonial needs which Second Cinema was incapable of delivering. Chanan argues that militant or guerrilla filmmaking, internal categories of what later became known as Third Cinema, was the first cinematic products to facilitate this struggle. To achieve this, he suggested Third Cinema film crew members needed to 'operate with a radical conception not only of the content of the film but also of the production process including the team's internal relations, the role of the producer or director, and of individual skills'.<sup>26</sup>

Tomaselli and Prinsloo also suggests that Third Cinema deals more effectively with the difficulties facing Second Cinema, as it arose from new production and exhibition practices which addressed discourses of resistance in terms of histories of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation in South America and North Africa in the

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<sup>25</sup>Solanas and Getino, *op. cit.*, p 47

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

late 1960s. They argue that it draws on elements from the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s, the British Documentary Movements of the 1930s, Italian Neo-realism in the late 1940s and other national influences, in an attempt to subvert dominant perspectives and create alternative cinemas. Tomaselli and Prinsloo suggest that 'Third Cinema... shifts the aesthetics of dominant cinema, without rejecting its forms completely...[and that] Third Cinema is committed to critical lucidity and change.'<sup>27</sup>

Gabriel, in his book *Third Cinema in the Third World*, articulates the ideology of Third Cinema in terms of colonial and anti-colonial projects. Third Cinema in its Third World context, according to Gabriel, aims to:

- *decolonise minds;*
- *contribute to the development of a radical consciousness;*
- *lead to a revolutionary transformation of society; and*
- *develop new film languages with which to accomplish these tasks.*<sup>28</sup>

Third Cinema is about decolonisation, 'guerrilla' cinema and exhibition practices, anti-colonial ideology and a new, revolutionary film grammar. As previously stated, this ideology is not necessarily located in the Third World, but employed in the process of self-actualisation by colonised people everywhere.

Gabriel identifies three stages in the development of the ideological consciousness as described by Fanon, which heralds decolonisation in the Third World. They are:

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<sup>27</sup>Prinsloo and Tomaselli, *op. cit.*, p 355

<sup>28</sup>Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p 3

- *[First]- the unqualified assimilation phase where the inspiration comes from without and hence results in an uncritical imitation of the colonial culture;*
- *[Second] - the return to the source or the remembrance phase, a stage which marks the nostalgic lapse to childhood, the heroic past, where legends and folklore abound; and*
- *[Third] - the fighting or combative phase, a stage that signifies maturation and where emancipatory self-determination becomes an act of violence.<sup>29</sup>*

Outlining an evolution of the institution of the cinema in the Third World, based on Fanon's models of the development of ideological consciousness, Gabriel's homology suggests the following sequence:

- *a dependency on the Hollywood model of conventional cinema, submitting both to the concepts and propositions of commercial cinema;*
- *national cinemas that promote the decolonization process but without at the same time decolonizing conventional film language; and*
- *the emergence of decolonization of culture and liberation - here the entire spectrum of conventional production apparatuses of cinema undergoes a radical alteration.<sup>30</sup>*

This last stage Gabriel calls 'guerrilla' cinema, which also involves 'guerrilla' cinematic distribution and exhibition, ultimately part of what he terms Third Cinema.

Third Cinema production and exhibition were radically different from, up to then, conventional cinematic practices.<sup>31</sup> Apart from unconventional production

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p 7

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 7-8. Gabriel argues that Third Cinema breaks with the assumed semiotic system of the ideal code or grammar of cinema by questioning the psychoanalytical model of the 'spectator'. The latter occurs because the Althusserian notion of the interpellation of the subject and 'point of

methods where there were no defined or rigidly structured roles assigned to the film crew, Third Cinema exhibition methods were often different from conventional cinema screenings. In some cases, Third Cinema films were designed to stop midway through a showing, so that people could talk and debate the issues before the film continued. Films such as *La hora de los hornos* (*Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968, Grupo Cine Liberación) were shown underground through very different distribution channels - clandestine, mouth to mouth advertising and in secret locations, if the local regimes were against the film screenings.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 75

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view' placement of this subject with respect to the film, is disrupted by Third Cinema. Gabriel suggests 'the "point of view" in Third Cinema is not a reflection of the consciousness or subjectivity of a single subject... rather, the central figure... serves to develop an historical perspective on radical social change. The masses hold the spectators attention.' The protagonists, he theorises, are not shaped as individuals but as trans-individuals who are given substance by the masses. The psychoanalytical model of the spectator is also questioned because the identification process in Third Cinema is less like a dream sequence or 'oedipal' engagement and more likened to a political and social experience. Third Cinema is theorised to move between two poles - the one demanding the engagement with pressing social realities and another that demands the film not simply deliver impressions of reality by mirroring it, but by participating in the very process that transforms it.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

Third Cinema filmmakers developed this range of new production, exhibition and reception strategies to manifest the needs of their 'revolutionary' cinema. This type of cinema was oriented not towards profit, but to broader consciousness raising and to assist in the decolonisation of the political, cultural and economic lives of the colonised.

### *Fourth Cinema*

*I am a filmmaker, as you know... My tribe is Ngati Apa from down Marton/Bulls way, Ratana territory. I am, then - by birth, at least - a person of two allegiances: one to the modern nation state of New Zealand; and one to the tribal world of Aotearoa... I am going to propose here... that there is a category which can legitimately be called 'Fourth Cinema', by which I mean Indigenous Cinema - that's Indigenous with a capital 'I'.<sup>33</sup>*

According to Barry Barclay, Fourth World people, those belonging to 'ancient remnant cultures persisting within the modern nation state' produce Fourth Cinema. He suggests both international and New Zealand examples of what he calls Fourth Cinema, including Tracey Moffat's *Bedevilled* (Australian Aboriginal), Nils Gaup's *The Path Finder* (Saami of Norway), Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples of Oregon) and Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Inuit people). The New Zealand examples include *Ngati* and *Te Rua*, produced by Barclay as well as Merata Mita's *Mauri*, Lee Tamahori's *Once Were Warriors* and Don Selwyn's *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weneti: The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>34</sup>

Theories about Fourth Cinema are not as extensively developed as First, Second and Third Cinema as it is a relatively new category developed by Barclay. Some

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<sup>33</sup> Barclay, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p 3

points, however, have been argued for, above and beyond the notion that it is produced by Fourth World cinematographers in the Fourth World. Film theorist Jo Smith suggests that:

*For Barclay, the term 'Fourth Cinema' is a provocation to imagine and to thus call into being a cinema made by indigenous peoples within a nation-state organized by the principles and laws of a foreign people...Such an act of provocation [suggesting the notion of a Fourth Cinema] is a fundamentally political gesture that departs from the norms of minority representational politics and which demonstrates the possibility of a more virtual cultural politics.<sup>35</sup>*

The virtual cultural politics of Fourth Cinema, Barclay and Smith argue, has several distinctive features occurring in the production, exhibition and reception of Fourth Cinema texts. Barclay, in the Maori context, suggests that Fourth World filmmakers, like Third World filmmakers, engage heavily with the community. In a Fourth Cinema capacity, however, these filmmakers act not just as consultants, but as conduits for the community, expressing mediated cultural values from the community to the community. Barclay suggests Maori filmmakers have often accompanied their films to their screenings and insisted that the films be presented to the people of the area with full ceremonial.<sup>36</sup> As Smith suggests:

*This kind of practice approaches film... as an event more than simply a text, an event where the context of production and exhibition are as important as determining the substance of the narrative that unfolds.<sup>37</sup>*

A practise of paying people to see films as part of their cultural experiences and subsidizing film viewing rather than making profit, is another area where Fourth

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p 1

<sup>36</sup> Barclay, *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p 5



Cinematic exhibition practices may vary from other film genera. Barclay suggests:

*With First, Second and Third Cinemas, it is unthinkable that the owners and the makers would actually pay people to come and watch the film, pay for example, for their transport, pay for the venue and the print...and pay for a celebratory communal meal afterwards... For such a radically new type of cinema to blossom, there would have to be some alternative base firmly set in the customs and laws of the community that conceived and manufactured the film.<sup>38</sup>*

Another difference between Fourth Cinema and other cinemas, he argues, lies in the reception of Fourth Cinema films by Indigenous people. Barclay suggests that Indigenous people often perceive narratives and symbols in these films not obvious to non-Indigenous people. He clarifies this by stating 'Lest I antagonize everybody... who is not Indigenous, let me make myself clear that I am not saying that... [these films] can only be appreciated by Indigenous people... [However] in my direct experience, [certain contexts are] not experienced by *many* who are not Indigenous.'<sup>39</sup> Although a feature perhaps of many local and national cinemas, this Fourth World spectator position points to a specific Indigenous sensitivity in regards to Fourth Cinema.

Smith, using Merata Mita's film *Mauri* (1988), illustrates how some Maori filmmakers, within the limitations of a cinema connected to a nation state, make use of Indigenous historical traditions within their filmmaking, which often resonate with Maori spectators, but not necessarily with non-Maori viewers. Mita's second film *Mana Waka* (1990), made to launch New Zealand's centennial celebrations and using 50-year-old silent footage from the sacred *Turangawaewae Marae* in the central North Island, does a similar repositioning. The early footage

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<sup>38</sup> Barclay, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

had been commissioned by Princess Te Puea for the re-building of the *wakataua* (seven war canoes) of the Great Fleet in which her forbears had travelled from *Hawaiki*. *Mana Waka* was therefore not only a film but a gift from the Maori Princess to the people of Aotearoa to lift their spirits.



Figure 75

Mita uses dual meanings within her filmmaking, one which Smith calls habitual, arty shots or 'just another sign of a commodity ripe for exchange on the national and global market' and another 'which is based upon the image as the living past, present and potential future... one conditioned by another form of history, another form of time'.<sup>40</sup> Mita suggests this creates a Maori context, not a *Pakeha* [European] one and thus allows symbolism connected to a Maori tradition to take precedence.<sup>41</sup> Fourth Cinema filmmakers develop new methods of production, exhibition and reception to engage their own cultural needs.

### ***Fifth Cinema: Contesting Internal Colonisation***

Second, Third, Fourth and on occasion First Cinema, all deal with various forms of decolonisation. As mentioned previously, Chanan argues that Second Cinema was the first attempt at 'cultural decolonization' of First Cinema. Gabriel suggests that

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p 6

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Third Cinema's major aim was to 'decolonise minds' of Third World people and to develop new forms of production, exhibition and reception to assist in liberation. For Barclay, Fourth Cinema comes from and deals with ancient remnant cultures persisting within the modern nation state, which I would argue attempts to decolonise dominant cinematic practices for specific Indigenous needs. Tomaselli and Prinsloo suggests that despite its predominantly non-critical history, First Cinema may also have explicit political content and be critical of itself as a medium, even if it has to use the language, imagery and form of mainstream cinema.

What becomes apparent when examining these genera of cinema, is that various, if unequal, forms of cultural decolonisation exists in all of them. Decolonisation of ideologies not just of First Cinema, but also of Second, Third and Fourth Cinemas of each other. Within this history of cinematic decolonisation, I suggest another cinematic practice dealing with a form of decolonization. Not a decolonisation of one cinematic form of another or a support for decolonization of one nation by another through cinema, but *a decolonisation of dominating and discriminatory representations that come from within a society of origin or a society lived in by choice*. I term this cinema Fifth Cinema.

Within the parameters set up by this research, I suggest Fifth Cinema is a cinematic practice that counters a society's various 'internal' cultural colonisations. Countering oppression inflicted on people by the cultures to which they identify themselves as belonging or by cultures they have chosen to live in, forms the basis of Fifth Cinema. This Cinema endeavors to assist in the decolonization not primarily of itself, as critical First Cinema does, or of one dominant cinematic form of another as does Second Cinema, or of one 'nation' by another as does Third and Fourth Cinema, but of the decolonisation of oppressions forced onto people by others from within their own cultural milieux.

The fight against various forms of oppression that take place *within* cultures of all different make-ups, including dominant, colonized, immigrant and/or Indigenous societies, form part of Fifth Cinema. Whereas the oppression of one nation by another is relatively easy to understand within the current First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinema ideologies, the various internal oppressions by the dominant, colonized, immigrant and/or Indigenous cultures on their own subjects, are less easily placed within these categories. A separate category is essential to articulate their needs.

This internal colonization, I argue, include amongst others, the colonization of people who are not sexuality-, gender-, race- or ethnically privileged. For example, Queer and non-Queer people's lives are colonised by hetero-dominant ideologies of sex and gender master-discourses; women's, transgender and men's lives are colonised by patriarchal ideologies; and immigrant lives and those from multi-cultural backgrounds are colonised by ideas of nationalism that sometimes exclude them.

In this sense, Fifth Cinema may be able to function as an index of all that which First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinema ignores. It calls into the light that which is masked, oppressed or swept under the carpet by the latter's theoretical gatekeepers.

Fifth Cinema therefore can include, amongst others, Queer Cinema, Feminist Cinema, Immigrant/Multicultural Cinema and other cinematic counter cultures that have arisen or may still arise from within cultures (be they dominant, colonized, migrant or Indigenous) and which inflicts 'internal' oppression on the people from within and across these cultures.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Many of these cinemas impact on and/or are part of each other. Multi-dimensional oppressions are often inseparable from each other, such as in Jack Lewis' *Sando to Samantha* or Melissa Lee's *Mary's Place*, where issues of race, ethnicity and gender are inseparable from sexuality. Queer

Of additional complexity in the analysis of Fifth Cinema is the crossovers that happen when colonizing or dominant cultures and their social values affect the colonized, immigrant or Indigenous cultures' social values. Multidimensional oppression and the various manifestations of discrimination and domination form complex intersections, so that it's almost impossible to ascertain whether, for example, the homophobia or sexism or xenophobia that may exist within colonized, migrant or Indigenous cultures were previously present.

Technically, however, where these oppressions existed prior to colonization or migration, the cinematic representations that have been created to counter this oppression, I argue is part of Fifth Cinema. Where these oppressions may be foreign to a colonized, migrant or Indigenous culture, I suggest cinema countering these oppressions still deal with the decolonisation of one nation/culture by another and may be closer to Third or Fourth Cinema. It is less about internal critique and more about broader cultural decolonisation.<sup>43</sup>

Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema can also engage with or be part of classical, Hollywood narratives that dominate global filmmaking as a First Cinema (for example *The Bird Cage*, Mike Nichols, 1996 or *Philadelphia*, John Demme, 1993) with art house inflections of these representations as part of Second Cinema (for example *Sebastian*, Derek Jarman, 1976 or *Satdee Night*, Gillian Armstrong, 1973), with issues of a foreign colonial power as does Third Cinema (*Woubi Cherie*, Phillip

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people of colour and different genders experience several layers of discriminations from within and outside of their community of origin or choice. Multiple oppressions create multi-dimensional layers of discrimination, which can occur in all cultures, be they dominant, colonized, migrant or Indigenous and be reinforced or contested within First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Cinema.

<sup>43</sup> The permutations are further complicated when considering the crossovers of First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinemas with Fifth Cinema, where multidimensional layers of influence can exist. Fifth Cinema films can be informed by and be part of First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinema, even though they come from an ideological angle which only deals with representing and counteracting internal struggles faced by people from within their own cultural backgrounds or societies of choice.

Brooks and Laurent Bocahut, 1998)) and with a dispossessed Nation within a Nation State such as Fourth Cinema (*Double Trouble*, Tony Ayers, 1992). Queer Cinema as part of Fifth Cinema, like other subcategories of Fifth Cinema, can cross into other film categories.

So why another genus of film? Why the need for a distinctive delineation of another form of decolonization? As previously argued, it is primarily to make visible various internal oppressions by the dominant, colonized, immigrant and/or Indigenous cultures on their own subjects, which at present are less easily placed within the dominant First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinema categories. A separate category to articulate the specific needs and achievement of cinemas that have countered these internal oppressions are not only necessary to acknowledge and articulate their enormous achievements in the face of often extraordinary adversity, but essential in furthering debate about different forms of cinematic decolonisation.

Although there are dangers in claiming another 'number' in a genealogical queue, perhaps even burdening the category by putting it at the end of the present line, I believe there is a need for a distinctive genus, Fifth Cinema, with all its unique component cinemas, to engage with a global tradition of theorizing about cinema. This new genus does not exclude Queer Cinema or other component cinemas from existing as categories in their own right, but brings them together, on a stronger platform, into a global debate about representation, politics and filmmaking.

This distinctive genus articulates the significance, importance and continued energy these cinematic cultures have contributed to global film production, exhibition and reception. Rather than seeing them as separate entities, or as marginal cinemas, the term Fifth Cinema offers a platform, which becomes part of a broader, international tradition of engaging with various cinematic cultures. It

has to separate itself and be made visible, in fact, to become part of global film culture debates. Ironically, this separation fosters inclusivity and recognition.

### **Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia as a Fifth Cinema**

Within the parameters of this thesis, the focus is on Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia. The employment in these countries since the 1960s and 1970s of Queer film in relation to politics, liberation and self-representation, has had an important impact on global Queer Cinematic Cultures. Having had their origins in liberation politics and emerging from a long history of censorship and persecution, I suggest Queer Cinema in South Africa and Australia is part of Fifth Cinema.

As suggested in Chapter 1, Queer Cinema has developed unique strategies for its cultural survival. Queer Cinematic Cultural strategies in relation to political effectivity include visibility; documentation; positive/negative images; mobilization; access; self-critique/recognition; diversification; pleasure; interventions; and Queering.

Within a still broadly anti-Queer global climate where Queer 'friendly' countries such as South Africa and Australia are more the exception than the rule, especially in their immediate regions, the screening of Queer images is still a revolutionary act. Political imperatives and the struggle for liberation is a critically important part of Queer Cinematic Cultural practice.

In its attempt to decolonise 'internal' cultural oppressions, Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema in South Africa and Australia share many key aspects of Second, Third and Fourth Cinema, including that:

- it has its origins in the politics of liberation similar to Third and Fourth Cinema, with numerous consciousness raising/liberation groups such as *CAMP* and *GASA* having used Queer films to educate against oppression;

- it counters dominant and oppressive images by advocating for and bringing about more diverse representations similar to Second, Third and Fourth Cinemas. For example the emergence of strong Queer Cinematic Cultures have supported Queer filmmakers such as Pratibha Parma, who, in the beginning of their careers, would not otherwise have been given production or exhibition opportunities by a heterocentric, mainstream cinema;
- it actively seeks to bring about social change not just through representation, but also through different exhibition, distribution and reception strategies, similar to Third and Fourth Cinema. Numerous forums and discussion panels, for example, were incorporated into the programming of both South African and Australian Queer film festivals such as forums on Queer Cinema in South Africa in 1994 and AIDS in Australia in 1992;
- it is a cinema about decolonisation of oppressive, dominant cultural norms similar to critical First, Second, Third and Fourth Cinema, with films such as John Greyson and Jack Lewis' *Proteus* (2004) and Ana Kokkinos' *Head On*, (1998) subverting heterosexist social paradigms to reclaim Queer Cinematic space;
- it has used underground, discreet and clandestine production and screening practices to avoid censorship and persecution like Third Cinema, for example the illegal filming in the Voortrekker Monument of part of *The Soldier* and the smuggling out of South Africa of the film for processing; and
- it has generated 'revolutionary' films like Third Cinema, such as *The Word is Out* acting as a catalyst for the Mardi Gras marches of 1978.

Queer Cinema as part of a Fifth Cinema in South Africa and Australia also has unique characteristics, which include the following:

- it fostered a 'revolutionary' film festival, when the *First Out In Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1994 became an activist platform for community building and the formation of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition;
- it took potentially oppressive local and international Queerphobic texts and intervened in their representation by defusing their content and context. For example the American new-right video *The Gay Agenda* was screened at



the 1993 Sydney *Queer Film and Video Festival*, followed by a Queer 'positive' film in response titled *One Nation under God*;

- it actively seeks, if not always successfully, to broaden its representations to be more inclusive of internal difference, with both countries' Queer Cinematic Cultures having fostered and encouraged gender, ethnic and racial diversity in representations. Examples include Queer Screen's post-production support for Melissa Lee's *Mary's Place* (1998) and *Out in Africa's* support for short films such as *Vula Ucano* (1995) and *Signs* (1995); and
- it assists Queer people in finding a sense of self in a world that often oppresses Queer difference. In both South Africa and Australia, the Queer film festivals were and continue to be important social spaces where Queer images, not otherwise accessible in the mainstream, can be accessed and enjoyed by a range of people in a supportive environment.

The research for this thesis demonstrates an interesting homology with the phases Gabriel describes for Third Cinema and its evolutionary 'stages'. Outlining a trajectory for the evolution of a Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema in South Africa and Australia and more broadly, I echo Gabriel's vision for Third Cinema and suggest a progression of filmic emancipation, along the following lines:

- first a subjection to the imported Hollywood model of conventional hetero-dominant cinema. [Often such films were Queered, for example *Calamity Jane*, (David Butler, 1953)];
- which then shifts to a subjection of imported Queer films that promote, more openly, central Queer issues and non-heterosexual representations. (*The Word is Out* was a film important in both South Africa and Australia as an early Queer imported text);
- this in turn assists in the development of local Queer representations, shorts, documentaries and features, using previous models of filmmaking and film language. [A multiple engagement with film representations on all levels, including commercial First Cinema, independent experimental Second Cinema, 'guerrilla' Third and Indigenous Fourth Cinema can occur. Examples in Australia are *Witches, Faggots, Poofers and Dykes*, (Digby Duncan and the One in Seven Collective, 1979) and in South Africa Jack Lewis and Zachie Achmat's *Apostles of Civilised Vice* (1999)]; and finally

- local films that develop their own Queer filmmaking styles and languages. [In Australia Ana Kokkinos' *Head On* (1997) and in South Africa Jack Lewis and John Greyson's *Proteus* (2004), are examples of locally produced Queer films that have their own unique aesthetics]

A stage important for Queer texts circulating within a global Queer market, which Gabriel does not engage with for Third Cinema, is the transmission of local texts to other countries. So I suggest a last stage for Queer Cinematic Cultures which includes:

- the local productions of films with various genres and styles, transmitted to other countries, where they become part of a global Queer Cinematic Culture. (*Head On*, for example, was screened at the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa in 1998 and *Proteus* screened as part of the Sydney Film Festival in Australia in 2004)

This process does not necessarily occur in a linear fashion, but forms the major features of how Queer Cinematic Cultures in Australia and South Africa evolved. It describes a trajectory that developed over the last thirty years as part of a political process for Queer liberation and continues in various forms and stages to date.

Articulating the characteristics of Queer Cinema as part of a Fifth Cinema and indeed of Fifth Cinema itself, will be an ongoing process. This thesis is at the beginning of a debate about the possibility of this new genus.

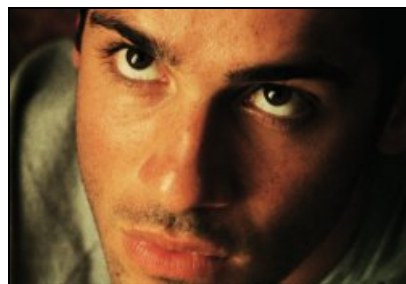


Figure 75

# Conclusion



In the core of this thesis is embedded a hope. A hope that the knowledge gathered and presented in this text will make a difference. A difference not only to our understanding of Queer Cinematic Cultures, but also to Queer people's lives and perceptions of themselves and their achievements. The evolution of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa and Australia, in the face of overwhelming odds, are truly remarkable achievements. These achievements must be honoured and above all, celebrated.

This thesis began its analysis of the Queer Cinematic Cultures of South Africa and Australia by setting up the notions of 'North-South' and 'South-South' comparatives. 'North' and 'South' are seen not simply as geographical concepts, but connected to the specific cultural histories of both post-colonial societies and their attempts at reconciling their indigenous, diasporic and settler groups in relation to more dominant metropolises.

Setting the scene for this comparative, I use the Boer War as a backdrop onto which both the emergence of film as a global medium and the re-negotiation of anti-Queer laws as a result of the war, are projected. Unfortunately, neither the new South African nor Australian national identities fully embraced internal cultural difference in relation to race, gender or sexuality. Queer people as part of the new national identities, in life and on screen, were mutually exclusive concepts.

Whereas the Introduction positions South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures within a broader, global context, Chapter 1 situates Queer Cinematic Cultures within a more specific Queer cultural context. This chapter begins with an epistemology and etymological analysis of the term Queer and its use in Queer Theory. Queer in this research signifies lesbians, gays, bisexuals, straight Queers, transgenders, intersex and other individuals who challenge heterosexist ideas of sexuality and gender by virtue of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation and practices. Its use in Queer Theory also aims to unpack racial, ethnic and other attendant differences within the Queer communities.

Although Queer and its use in Queer Theory is a term that points to precise and specific cultural formations of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is also used in this thesis as an inclusive concept to describe the complex identity formations of individuals and communities of the past. Queer embraces participants such as transgender or intersex people, who were involved in gay and lesbian politics, but who have been historically omitted because of the signifying limitations of the latter terms.

In addition, as an elastic term that has been popularly used to describe both identity formation and disidentification, in some instances Queer signifies a coalition between gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people (GLBTI) and at other times a more fluid coalition between GLBTI's and HIV

positive people, straight Queers and other similar political groups. To accommodate these differing notions, the concept of a heterognosis, which signifies the co-existence of different knowledges in one space and time, is employed.

Given the complexity of these formations, I posit that there are several strands of Queer Theories affecting, albeit on unequal terms, Queer Cinematic Cultures. The difference in Queer Theories as argued for by white theorists and theorists-of-colour, in particular relating to multi-dimensional oppression, reveals one of the more important points of difference. Whereas white theorists argue for an identity disruptive Queer Theory, in an attempt to complicate 'normal', historical notions of white gay and lesbian identities, some of-colour theorists suggests that a more identity constructive Queer Theory would suit Queers-of-colour. Queer people of colour's 'normal' lives are often full of anomie and forces of disidentification; what they need is not further disruption, but more stability.

The difference between identity formation and identity disruption in this sense also reflects the state of South African and Australian Queer Theories and Queer Cinematic Cultures. Whereas in South Africa at present the term gay and lesbian is used more frequently, in Australia Queer is more popular. This difference is not based on the racial make-up of the two countries, but on the presence of an historically visible, multi-cultural Queer community in Australia which needs to complicate its gay and lesbian identities, and a relatively recent, non-racial, visible Queer community in South Africa, which is still in the process of identity formation. Ironically, the various identities in the communities of South Africa are often Queerer than that of Australia.

Queer Theories and debates about identity have had and continue to have enormous impact on Queer Cinematic Cultures and politics. Theorist Samantha Searle suggests that strategies for representation that have developed around Queer Cinematic Culture and used to measure its political effectivity, include

visibility; documentation; positive/negative images; mobilization; access; self-critique/self-recognition; diversification; and pleasure. I add a further two strategies that I believe evolved from Queer Cinematic Cultural practices, which I term interventions; and Queering.

In Chapter 2 the thesis departs from a more general sweep of Queer cinematic analysis to focus on the specific histories of Queer Cinematic Cultures in South Africa. To start, I Queer early South African films such as *Sarie Marais* (1931, Joseph Albrecht) and *Fratse in die Vloot* (1958, Pierre de Wet) and reveal a South African cinema rich in sexual and gender ambiguity.

Moving more directly into examining Queer films for and by Queer people, a potted history of Queer Cinematic Cultures, impacted on by the ideologies of Apartheid, is revealed. These range from local Queer super 8 films by Ernst Thorpe in the 1960s; to the beginning of international Queer films screened in South Africa in the 1970s; consciousness raising video evenings by organization such as GASA in the 1980s; experimental Queer filmmaking by the Braamfontein Weekend Theatre; the emergence of a Queer sensibility connected to military films; multi-dimensional films on race and sexuality such as *Quest for Love* (1987, Helen Nogueira); and the initial Queer video screenings held by Jack Lewis in Capetown in the early 1990s. These disparate histories create a fascinating early Queer South African cinematic genealogy.

When the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival opened in 1994, it created for the first time a cohesive, non-racial, national sense of arrival for the Queer communities of South Africa. It acted not just as a cinematic space, but also as a space for community building, access, mobilization and political action, contributing to debates which eventually saw the inclusion of same-sex sexuality in the new post-Apartheid constitution. This constitutional protection on the basis of sexual orientation was the first of its kind in the world.

Australian cinematic cultures also had significant global firsts, with *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, the world's first feature film, produced in 1906. Chapter 3 begins by examining the unique evolution of Queer Australian Cinematic cultures in relation to this significant involvement in film from the 1900s onwards.

Queering early silent Australian films directed by women such as *Sunshine Sally* (1922, Lawson Harris and Yvonne Pavis) and *Jewelled Nights* (1926, Louise Lovely) reveals the existence of a strong presence of sexuality and gender play in early Australian cinema, where women in particular challenged the roles assigned to them in a still very patriarchal, post-Federation Australia. Moving on to the talkies in the 1930s, the emergence of films such as *Rangle River* (1936, Clarence Badger), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938, Ken G Hall) and *Forty Thousand Horseman* (1940, Charles Chauvel) reveal several sissy characters and homosocial viewing positions that can also be Queered from a contemporary perspective.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that openly Queer films for and/or by Queer people emerged, with productions such as a feature film *The Set* (1970, Frank Britton) and an experimental short film by Gillian Armstrong titled *Satdee Night* (1973). The critical mass created by these new Queer films saw another significant global first, with the world's first gay film festival, *Festival of Gay Films* held in Sydney in June 1976. Two years later, the screening of *The Word is Out*, an American civil rights documentary at another gay film festival, *Images of Gays*, is in part credited for mobilising activists for the first Gay Mardi Gras March of 1978. Significantly, Queer Australian Cinema of the 1970s not only saw the first openly lesbian/gay/Queer Australian films and global Queer film festivals emerge, but also impacted significantly on the creation of a socially mobilised, political body of activists who subsequently contributed to major social and juridical change.

Supportive film industry structures such as the Australian Film Commission (AFC); UBU Film; the Women's Film Fund (WFF); the Gay Film Fund; and the

Sydney Film-makers Co-operative, were instrumental in the development and nurturing of these early lesbian/gay/Queer films. The consolidation of these cultures in the 1980s, in part as a result of HIV/AIDS and their coming of age in the 1990s, saw an amazing journey for Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures through invisibility and repression, to a golden age of centrality within the Australian film industry.

Placing South African and Australian Queer Cinematic Cultures side-by-side, Chapter 4 examines the similarities and differences between the two Queer Cinematic Cultures as a result of their different institutional and policy contexts. Whereas government support for independent film in Australia through, for example the Experimental Film Fund in the 1970s, was vital for the development of marginal Queer representation, the active exclusion of these voices in South Africa through censorship and lack of support meant that few Queer films were made before the dismantling of Apartheid in 1994. This difference has recently decreased, with the adoption of a film industry structure by South Africa based on a mixture of the Australian, French, New Zealand and Canadian models.

Another key comparative observation I make is the role of Queer cinema in activism and consciousness raising in both nations. What is interesting to note, is the difference in the deployment of visual activism as a result of the technologies available when Queer critical mass was reached in Australia in the 1970s and in South Africa in the 1980s. Infrastructure such as the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op and celluloid film was important in Australia at the beginning of its Queer movements, whereas video technology was more available in South Africa by the time Queer activist initiatives took place in the 1980s. A potentially more democratic process of visual information sharing occurred in South Africa as a result of this changing technology.



I also discovered that the subsequent successes of both these Queer Cinematic Cultures took place in parallel rather than connected to one another. Although they are close southern neighbours, they accessed international films through the more prolific Euro-American channels, rather than each other. As a result, both developed hybrid Queer Cinematic Cultures in relation to the Queer Cinematic models of the 'North'.

Some cross-cultural exchanges between the two countries have recently taken place, with the screening in South Africa of Queer Australian texts and vica versa. However, South African-Australian filmmaker Fanny Jacobson's *Dual Passport* (1998) and Brazilian-Australian Paulo Alberton's *Pride of Some Descriptions* (2000) are some of the first, rare cinematic texts that deal with cross-cultural, Queer South African-Australian experiences.

Although the majority of Australians are of European descent and the majority of South Africans are of African descent, the overwhelming number of films available for activism, consciousness raising and entertainment in both countries are Euro-American products, predominantly made by white males. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but as the cinematic needs of a variety of Queer people have to be met, the push for more diverse Queer cinematic representation has been an important function of Queer Cinematic Cultures. Encouraging race privileged industries to embrace further diversity, will be an ongoing process of negotiation.

Leading into Chapter 5, the emergence of a 'revolutionary' Queer film in Australia and a 'revolutionary' Queer film festival in South Africa is observed. With their origins firmly rooted in activism, this revolutionary drive has been and continues to be a key focus of the Queer Cinematic Cultures of both nations.

In conclusion and stemming from their strong activist beginnings, I propose the existence of a new genus of cinema I term Fifth Cinema. Fifth Cinema aims to decolonise dominant and discriminatory representations that come from within a society of origin or a society lived in by choice.

Fifth Cinema include Queer Cinema, Feminist Cinema and Immigrant/Multicultural Cinema and can be informed by First Cinema (classical, Hollywood), Second Cinema (arthouse or dual national cinemas), and Third and Fourth Cinema (cinema dealing with the decolonisation of Third World and Fourth World people).

It develops its unique difference, however, from engaging with the internal struggles of the dominant culture. Some of these dominant cultural ideologies which can be challenged include women's, transgender's and men's lives which are often colonised by patriarchal structures; Queer and non-Queer peoples lives which are often colonised by the hetero-dominant ideologies of sex and gender master-discourses; and immigrant lives and those from multicultural backgrounds that can often be dominated by ideas of nationalisms, race and ethnicity that exclude them.

Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema in South Africa and Australia has played an enormously important role in mobilizing unique, heterognotic, Queer Cinematic Cultures for liberation and freedom. Even though Australia has been active from much earlier on in public Queer filmmaking, the kinds of representation evolving in South Africa, broadly speaking, is more inclusive and sensitive to issues of race to date. However, there is a sense of pleasure and play around gender and sexuality in Australian Queer Cinema which is extremely valuable and important as an aim in itself.

Queer Cinema as a Fifth Cinema in South Africa and Australia embraces all of these modes of representation and assists in developing autonomous and vibrant local Queer Cinematic Cultures. I hope we are only at the beginning of emerging debates around this new Fifth Cinema genus.



# List of Images

- Front cover: *Symbolic Figure of Moving Entertainment Covering the Hemispheres*, Twentieth Century Theatre, Johannesburg. Decorated by Ernest Ullmann, c. 1950s
- Back cover: *Gays are everywhere*, CAMP INK, No 40, 1977, p 20
- Figure 1 *Bioscope: Animated Pictures*, Boer War film poster, produced by the Davies Brothers for the Hobart Town Hall, State Library, Tasmania, 1900
- Figure 2 *The First Sydney International Queer and Video Festival* poster, 1993
- Figure 3 The first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival program cover, 1994
- Figure 4 Paul Körner (Conradt Veidt) and Kurt Sivers (Frits Schulz) in *Anders als Die Anderen*, Richard Oswald, 1919
- Figure 5 Poster for *The Word is Out*, directed by Peter Adair and the Mariposa Film Group (1977) and used in Sydney for publicity in 1978
- Figure 6 Poster for *Tea and Sympathy*, directed by Vincente Minnelli, 1956
- Figure 7 Poster for *Poison*, directed by Tod Haynes, 1991
- Figure 8 Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein) and Wai-Tung Gao (Winston Chao) from Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet*, 1993
- Figure 9 *Positive Visions AIDS Film Week* Program, 1995
- Figure 10 Doris Day as Calamity Jane in *Calamity Jane*, David Butler, 1953
- Figure 11 Frikk Burgers (centre) and Al Debbo (right) in *Kom Saam Vanaand*, Pierre de Wet, 1949
- Figure 12 Still from *Vratse in die Floot*, Pierre de Wet, 1958 with Frikk Burgers (left) and Al Debbo (right)
- Figure 13 Frikk Burgers (left) disguised as a woman disguised as a man in *Piet my Niggie*, Pierre de Wet, 1964

- Figure 14 Still from the ballet scene in Ernst Thorp's *Faux Pas de Deux*, c 1960s
- Figure 15 Still of man with bra from the dressing scene in *Nil Desperandum*, Ernst Thorpe, c. 1960s
- Figure 16 Still of African Rickshaw pulling the two dandy sailors in *Nil Desperandum*, Ernst Thorpe, c. 1960s
- Figure 17 Portrait of Cecil Williams, date unknown
- Figure 18 A scene from John Greyson and Jack Lewis' *Proteus* (2003) with left, Rijkhaart Jacobsz (Neil Sandilands) and right, Claas Blank (Rouxnet Brown)
- Figure 19 Still with Kewpie from *A Normal Daughter*, Jack Lewis, 1997
- Figure 20 Still with the German *Oberleutenant* Werner von Steinhausen and *Kaptein* Reynecke in *Seuns van die Wolke* (*Sons of the Clouds*, 1975, Franz Marx)
- Figure 21 Copy of *Gayety*, No 4, 1984 where a video on AIDS was advertised for screening at the Fish station
- Figure 22 Publicity still with Michael Ontkean, Harry Hamlin and Kate Jackson in *Making Love*, Arthur Hiller, 1982
- Figure 23 Program of the Memorial Service held for Simon Nkoli who died of an AIDS related illness in 1998
- Figure 24 Jana Cilliers, Helen Nogueira and Sandra Prinsloo on the set of *Quest for Love*, 1987
- Figure 25 Photograph Kewpie in *A Normal Daughter*, Jack Lewis, 1997
- Figure 26 Capetown Queer residents in *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, Zachie Achmat and Jack Lewis, 1999
- Figure 27 Claas Blank played by Rouxnet Brown in John Greyson and Jack Lewis' *Proteus*, 2003
- Figure 28 Lesbian *sangoma* in *Everything Must Come to Light*, Mpumi Njinge and Paola Alberton, 2000
- Figure 29 Photograph of Kewpie in *A Normal Daughter*, Jack Lewis, 1997

- Figure 30 Hugo Weaving in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, Stephen Elliot, 1994
- Figure 31 Tottie Faye (Joy Revelle) and Sal (Yvonne Pavis) in *Sunshine Sally* directed by Lawson Harris and Yvonne Pavis, 1922
- Figure 32 Larry Salarno (Gordon Collingridge) and Elaine Fleetwood (Louis Lovely) in *Jewelled Nights*, Louise Lovely, 1926
- Figure 33 Entwistle (Alec Kellaway) in *Dad and Dave Come to Town*, Ken G Hall, 1938
- Figure 34 Video cover for *Rangle River*, Clarence Badger, 1936
- Figure 35 Still with Daubenney Carshott (Lloyed Hughes), Lorna Quidley (Shirley Ann Richards) and Archie (Campbell Copelin) from *Lovers and Luggers*, Ken G Hall, 1937
- Figure 36 Lorna Quidley (Shirley Ann Richards) in *Lovers and Luggers*, Ken G Hall, 1937
- Figure 37 Poster for *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, Charles Chauvel, 1940
- Figure 38 Ken Garrahy, 2003
- Figure 39 Photo from the *Village Voice*, 3 July 1969, p1
- Figure 40 Still with Paul Lawrence (Sean McEuan), Ken 'Candy' Johnson and guest in *The Set*, Frank Britton, 1970
- Figure 41 Poster of *Number 96* the movie, 1974
- Figure 42 Nell Campbell as Meg in *Journey among Women*, Tom Cowan, 1977
- Figure 43 Billy (David Gulpilil) and Daniel Morgan (Dennis Hopper) in *Mad Dog Morgan*, Philippe Mora, 1976
- Figure 44 Still from Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert's *On Guard*, 1983
- Figure 45 Flyer for a lesbian film night, 1979
- Figure 46 Advertisement for a Gay Film Fund fundraiser in *CAMP NSW News Blurb*, No 15, 30 June 1977

- Figure 47 Still from Digby Duncan and the One in Seven Collective's documentary *Witches & Faggots, Dykes & Poofers*, 1979
- Figure 48 Sydney Gay Film Week program, 1986
- Figure 49 Members of the Feminist Film Workers from left to right Beth McRae, Carole Kostanich, Sarah Gibson, Jeni Thornley, Martha Ansara, Margot Oliver, Susan Lambert. Photograph by Sandy Edwards.
- Figure 50 Still from *Elevation*, Stephen Cummins, 1989
- Figure 51 Hugo Weaving, director Stephen Elliot and Terence Stamp on set for *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, 1994
- Figure 52 John Polson, Jack Thompson and Russel Crow in *The Sum of Us*, Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling, 1994
- Figure 53 *The Gay and Lesbian Film Week* program, 1990
- Figure 54 *The 1991 National Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* program
- Figure 55 Simon Hunt and Susan Harben (both centre) at the signing of Mardi Gras funding for Queer Screen, 1993
- Figure 56 Hugo Weaving in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, Stephen Elliot, 1994
- Figure 57 Still from *Double Trouble*, Tony Ayers, 1991
- Figure 58 Still from *Mary's Place*, Melissa Lee, 1997
- Figure 59 Still from *China Dolls*, Tony Ayers, 1997
- Figure 60 Still from *China Dolls*, Tony Ayers, 1997
- Figure 61 Poster for *Pixote*, Hector Babanco, 1981
- Figure 62 Al Pacino in *Cruising*, William Friedkin, 1980
- Figure 63 Scene from *Salo*, Pier Passolunni, 1975
- Figure 64 Still from *Anatomy of Hell*, Catherine Breiliet, 2004
- Figure 65 Poster of Sandra Bernhard in *Dallas Doll*, Anne Turner, 1993

- Figure 66 Alex Dimitriadis and Ana Kokkinos on the set of *Head On*, Ana Kokkinos, 1998
- Figure 67 William Yang in *Sadness*, Tony Ayers, 1999
- Figure 68 Still from *The Man Who Drove With Mandela*, Mark Gevisser and Greta Schiller, 1998
- Figure 69 A scene from John Greyson and Jack Lewis' *Proteus* (2003) with left, Rijkhaart Jacobsz (Neil Sandilands) and right, Claas Blank (Rouxnet Brown)
- Figure 70 Poster for *The First Sydney International Queer Film and Video Festival*, 1993
- Figure 71 Sando Willemse in a shot from *Sando to Samantha*, Jack Lewis and Thulanie Phungula, 1998
- Figure 72 Still from *Chutzpah*, Fanny Jacobson, 2000
- Figure 73 Cross-dressing female doctor in *Apostles of Civilised Vice*, Zachie Achmat and Jack Lewis, 1999
- Figure 74 Poster for *La hora de los hornos* (*Hour of the Furnaces*), Grupo Cine Liberación, 1968
- Figure 75 Still from Merata Mita's *Mana Waka*, 1990
- Figure 76 Alex Dimitriatis as Ari in *Head On*, Ana Kokkinos, 1998

All other images reference the *Wizard of Oz*, (Victor Fleming, 1939)





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