

Eli: Hi everyone, just before we start this episode we're gonna do the content warnings here this time, because some of the content warnings apply to the intro as well. So for this episode we've got some homophobic slurs, period-typical homophobia and police discrimination against queer people, including violence and arrests. If any of that sounds like something you'd rather not listen to, we have plenty of other content and you can see us next time instead. But otherwise, on with the show!

Hello and welcome to Queer as Fact. My name is Eli.

Jessie: I'm Jessie.

Irene: I'm Irene.

E: We are a queer history podcast coming out on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of every month, talking about queer history from around the world and throughout time. Today we have a special guest! What are you gonna be talking to us about, Jessie?

J: Hi guys! The topic I'm gonna be talking about today is an Australian film from 1979 called *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers*, which is the explanation for the trigger warning you just heard. [laughs]

[intro music plays]

J: So I just wanted to start off today with a few acknowledgements.

E: Mmhm.

J: So a lot of the research I'm talking about comes from work I did while at the University of Melbourne. So thank you Unimelb, for all that. Also as a student I kinda come out in hives if I don't mention my sources.

[laughter]

J: So as much as I can I'll reference verbally...

E: Mmhm.

J: ...if I'm talking about another historian's work. But if anyone would like a full list of references I'm sure they can hit you guys up...

E: Yep.

I: Yeah.

J: ...for that.

I: We can post them on the blog.

J: Okay, great. So *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers* is a film that represents a culmination of a bunch of different social and political issues that were kind of present in the urban gay experience in Australia, which actually reminds me – I am gonna use the term “gay” pretty broadly.

E: Uh-huh.

J: And that's mostly because that's how it was used...

E: Mmhm.

J: ...in the period I'm discussing.

E: Yep.

J: So for example, I'm gonna talk about the Gay Film Fund later. The Gay Film Fund included cis and trans stories, it included homosexual stories, bisexual stories, and it was all kind of united under this umbrella of “gay”, which is a term everyone frequently identified with. Obviously the problem with that is sometimes I

will be talking about someone and I will call them a gay person – it doesn't necessarily mean they were homosexual, it definitely doesn't mean that they were a man.

E: Yep.

J: So just try and imagine the whole spectrum of...

E: Uh-huh. [laughs]

J: ...gender and sexuality.

I: Okay.

J: We can play a bit of fanfiction and decide. [laughs]

E: We do that as often as possible anyway. [laughs]

I: Mm.

J: So now that all of my like, annoying caveats are out of the way, I wanna start by setting up a bit of context. And the first thing you need to know is that until the 1970s, Australian film was really bad. Like, really, really, bad.

E: Like, for gay people, or just all of it?

J: All people.

E: Oh, okay.

J: It was bad.

[laughter]

J: Basically in 1906 we made the first ever feature film, which was called *The Story of the Kelly Gang*.

E: Mmhm. [laughs]

I: Oh yeah.

J: Of course it was.

I: Yeah, I've heard of this.

E: Yeah.

J: And then pretty much after that, bad. Like, nothing good.

E: So we had a banger right out of the gate and then it all went to hell for 70 years?

J: We were just like, "We're sorted."

[laughter]

J: Well, to give you an idea about how bad, there's a story that Cathy Hope and Adam Dickerson – who are Australian film historians – talk about, and basically they say, by the 1970s, there was a serious debate about whether the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals should have to show Australian films if there were literally no good Australian films to show.

[laughter]

J: So they ran, as a compromise, a short film competition. 52 films entered. Ten were shortlisted. The winner of the competition was a 24-year-old first-time director who made a film about the dangers of drug addiction.

E: Okay.

J: And third place went to a group of six students from North Sydney Boys' High School who did the whole thing on a camera they'd borrowed from the school, for about \$100.

[laughter]

J: Afterwards – this is a quote from one of the boys that won – he said, “Technically our film was awful, and we couldn't understand how it made the top ten, until we saw the other entries.”

E: [laughing] Oh my God.... Are these accessible now?

J: Some of them are.

E: Oh man.

I: [laughs]

J: They're so bad.

[laughter]

I: We should put them on the blog.

J: Yeah. [laughs] And like, I feel like I should also say that this isn't altogether the fault of like, a chronically uninspired Australia.

E: Mmhm.

J: Throughout the 50s and 60s in particular, film was treated with like, outright suspicion.

E: Mmhm.

J: Film festivals were kind of a safe space for Communist groups and radical students and as a result they were monitored a lot by ASIO.

[laughter]

I: Ah, okay.

J: Okay, so ASIO is the Australian Security and Intelligence Officers, so picture like, the CIA kinda suits guys, just showing up at film festivals, and like, monitoring who went to film festivals. Like, that's where we're at.

[laughter]

E: I love how quickly ASIO shows up in like, relevant time-periods for queer history in Australia.

J: I know.

I: Yeah.

J: Yeah, like...

I: It's always Communists. Communists show up immediately.

J: Mm.

E: Yeah.

J: Yeah.

I: Every time.

E: We're not deliberately only talking about Communists, but they just keep happening.

J: They're just so busy in Australia in this time.

I: Yeah.

J: And I think they keep ASIO very busy, which I like.

E: [laughs]

I: Yes.

J: I also have this image in my head of perhaps maybe just someone at ASIO who wanted to go to the film festivals, you know...

[laughter]

J: Suddenly this elaborate thing starts being played out, where Communists are being like, targetted at film festivals.

[laughter]

E: And then whoever the official was realises that all the films are bad, but it's too late to dial it back.

J: Exactly!

E: [laughs]

J: I know, it's a beautiful little kinda head-canon I have going on, anyway.

E: Yep.

J: So, the most stringent area where this suspicion played out was film censorship. So basically there was no rating system in Australia before 1971. So like, a film would go before the board, and they would ask themselves, could literally anyone watch this film.

E: Ooh.

I: Ah.

[laughter]

J: Like, so, they ended up being very patronising, pretty moralistic. So in 1958, for example, they just instituted a blanket ban on all horror films.

E: I'm aware of this, yeah.

J: Mm. So the Commonwealth Censor at the time, who was a man named J.O. Alexander, argued that such films were, quote, "catering only for a small minority of the moronic type."

[laughter]

E: I love horror films!

[laughter]

I: I was about to say, that's you, Eli.

[laughter]

J: So then again, in 1965, the Censorship Board complains that an increasing number of films were dealing with what they called "sordid subjects", including rape, nymphomania, homosexuality, and prostitution, while fewer and fewer dealt with more wholesome, happier subjects.

E: Cool.

J: So, it's like a actual program of kind of controlling the populace...

E: Yeah.

J: ...that we're talking about here, rather than just kind of like a benign, trying to keep porno out sort of system – which they did as well, obviously.

I: Yeah.

J: Yeah. [laughs]

E: It would be weird if that got through.

J: [laughs]

E: That film you mentioned that was about like, the dangers of drug use or whatever, in this time, or was that a bit later?

J: So that was the 1970s.

E: Uh-huh.

J: And as far as I can tell – I have to say I haven't seen that one...

E: Fair enough.

J: ...but from what I've read, picture less like, you know, a gritty portrayal of what it's like to live with addiction...

E: Okay.

J: ...and more like “Michael took drugs. Drugs are bad.”

E: [laughs] Okay.

[laughter]

E: Yeah.

J: Like...

E: The kind of film they showed us in like, year ten...

J: Yeah. Or like *Reefer Madness*, that kind of film.

E: Yeah, okay.

J: You know? Than anything that was dealing with real issues or people.

E: Mmhm.

J: And as I'm sure you can imagine, this did not bode well for gay film.

E: Yeah.

J: In fact like, gay everything was censored really heavily in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, so we're also talking about books, by authors like Gore Vidal and James Baldwin, like real classic...

E: Yeah.

J: ...kind of queer literature tomes that were coming out at this time were also banned. Nicole Moore, who's a historian of censorship describes this as “frequently and secretly Australian censorship banned any material with real or identifiable hints of homosexuality.”

I: Okay, yep.

J: So we're talking about kind of a total cultural erasure here.

I: Yeah.

E: I've also read like, memoirs and stuff from people around that time talking about like, "It's been like ten years, and this thing's only making it to the publishers here now", even when it's not like some big bad dangerous queer druggo film or whatever.

J: Yeah.

E: So yeah, that sounds like an awful time to live in this country.

I: Yeah.

J: So like, nothing is coming in.

E: Mmhm.

J: Australians are making no films.

[laughter]

J: And just to give like, a little bit of context again, this is kind of all happening in the same period where the United States and United Kingdom are actually beginning to talk about things like decriminalisation.

E: Mmhm.

J: So for example, in 1958, which is one year after the Wolfenden Commission which started investigation into decriminalisation in the UK, the New South Wales Police Commissioner described homosexuality as "the greatest menace facing Australia today."

I: Wow! Not Communism?

J: No.

E: [laughs]

J: This is 1958. Like, the Vietnam War has started.

I: Yeah!

[laughter]

I: I thought they had, yeah, other bugbears to shoot.

[laughter]

J: And then like, it's also worth saying that like, censorship and the kind of primary gay activist issues of the time, like decriminalisation, are really strongly linked as well. So visibility was the key project of gay activism in this period. It was a hundred percent about being out and visible...

E: Mm.

J: ...to people. So for example, the Wolfenden Commission which I mentioned just before, historians like Andy Medhurst argue that the film *Victim*, which was the first English-language film centring directly around homosexuality, actually like, greatly affected how that commission worked out, because a film that's like, a positive portrayal can be like, literally the only aspect of homosexuality that kind of the larger populace sees or hears about. So like, film kind of because really closely link to this, and becomes closely linked in terms of like, political projects.

So as you can imagine, by the 1970s our censorship situation was becoming increasingly ridiculous.

I: Yep.

E: So ideologically the left wing was becoming more sex-positive, and there was a real push for more diverse stories to be told, which included gay stories, and this is also the time when gay activist groups like Gay Liberation and the CAMP, which is the Campaign Against Moral Persecution – one of my favourite acronyms...

[laughter]

E: I love it when groups like that just work so hard to get the acronym.

J: I know! Like...

E: Yes.

J: It sounds really ambiguously actually, if it's just the Campaign Against Moral Persecution, but then you say "camp"....

E: [laughs] Yeah, and you're like, ah yeah, the gays.

[laughter]

J: Yeah.

E: Gays are here.

J: They were just starting up, so they were kind of beginning to sort of ignite these more political projects.

E: Mmhm.

J: On the other hand you've got like, film groups like Ubu Films that are also just starting up at the same time, and they're actively advocating for censorship reform in a more direct way. So Ubu said in their newsletter one time: "Lock the censors in their dark rooms with their painful erections. Let them rave and pronounce sexist sin, but ignore them."

E: Wow.

[laughter]

J: Which I love.

[laughter]

J: I have a lot of quotes about how bad censorship is, but they're quite swearsy so I didn't include them.

[laughter]

J: Historians like Scott McKinnon have done a lot of research into this, and collated all of the swearsy quotes...

[laughter]

J: ...if anyone would like to do future research. [laughs] And at the same time, Camp Ink which is the newsletter of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution, argue that censors are the very people who would keep homosexuals in the closets, so these like really linked issues.

E: Mmhm.

J: The tipping point more generally for censorship was definitely the film *The Detective*. I dunno if you guys know this film...?

E: No.

I: Not at all.

J: Okay. So *The Detective* was a film starring Frank Sinatra...

E: Okay.

J: ...from 1968. To understand what happened you need to understand that one of the favourite moves of a censorship board wasn't to ban something outright, but to cut it really liberally...

E: Mmhm.

J: ...and not tell anyone where they'd cut it.

E: Yeah, okay.

J: So basically *The Detective* was a story where Frank Sinatra was investigating the murder of a gay man. So any time anyone described what happened that meant they were talking about gay people...

E: Mmhm.

J: ...which...

I: And they cut it.

J: They cut it. It is literally, like, in Australia, it was a film of Frank Sinatra staring into the screen about to cut to a flashback, and then nothing.

E: So it's just incomprehensible at this point.

J: Incomprehensible.

E: I kinda really wanna watch this.

J: Like, I should say, it's a bad movie.

E: Okay. I mean...

I: Even the full cut?

J: The full cut is worse, 'coz it's actually quite homophobic.

I and E: Ah, okay.

I: Yep, yep.

J: Like, as a result we're all pretty glad it wasn't in there, but people were going to the cinema being like, "What is this movie?"

[laughter]

E: I'm just imagining like, the difference in run times.

J: Yeah.

E: Like a solid like, hour 45 minutes or something ridiculous.

J: Hm. It's like an aeroplane run of a movie...

E: Yeah.

J: ...and then you watch it years later and you realise it's way darker.

E: Yeah.

[laughter]

J: Yeah, that kind of stuff, especially as foreign press was getting more and more to Australia, just became completely untenable.

E: Yep.

J: So in 1971 the censorship board caved and introduced the R rating, which is the rating we have in Australia today for 18 and plus.

E: Mmhm.

J: So it's our highest rating.

E: Before that was introduced did we just have all the way up to MA, and that was fine?

J: No, this was our first rating.

E: Oh our first rating.

J: Yeah.

E: So it was like, everything, and then R movies.

J: Yes.

E: Alrighty.

I: So basically before that they just banned anything they looked at and they were like, I wouldn't be comfortable with my nine-year-old seeing this movie.

J: More or less, yeah.

I: Yeah, okay.

J: Yeah.

E: Okay.

J: The kind litmus test people talk about is "mum, dad and the kids."

E: Yeah.

J: So there were probably things that were more mature, but not so mature that you could imagine a kid accidentally walking in, kind of.

E: Okay.

J: Yeah.

E: So we have like, PG and R now.

J: Yeah.

E: Alrighty.

[laughter]

J: And like, imagine R on a much greater sliding scale than it is today.

E: Mmhm.

J: As you can imagine.

E: Can horror movies come to Australia now?

J: Yes. They did...

E: Yay!

J: They did lift the ban on horror movies pretty quickly.

E: Okay. That's nice.

[laughter]

J: It was a different time...

E: Yeah.

J: ...but calling people morons wasn't great.

[laughter]

E: I was gonna say, that's when the like big horror movie franchises are really starting to pick up...

J: Mm.

E: ... and I'm so sad for contemporary Australians who can't go and see like, *Nightmare of Elm Street* or whatever.

I: [laughs]

J: Exactly. But like, it becomes this really beautiful time just generally in Australian film history, because this ushers a real golden age for film in Australia generally. So you start getting films like *The Cars that Ate Paris* which is a really kind of classic horror movie, and Ozploitation as a genre is really influential later down the road to people like Tarantino – they reference a lot of the Australian films that come out of this time, so it is actually, yeah, a real golden age. It's very lucky that the R rating was introduced, and it's also lucky for us, 'coz I think this is where like, the series of events that leads to *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofers* getting made...

I: I'm going to laugh every time you say that title.

J: I know! It's just like every time, it's like in my head I'm going, "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry."

[laughter]

J: So I guess this is really important for this story because it's where everything that leads to *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofers* getting made starts. So the films that do well and are supported by gay audiences in Australia at this time have like a noticeably political bent.

E: Mmhm.

J: They are films that align really explicitly with projects of the groups like CAMP and Gay Liberation. As a country we more or less ignore the films that were made pre-censorship that we were only just seeing now.

E: Mmhm.

J: Like *Boys in the Band* because they were kind of like, seen as perpetuating this like, old-fashioned view...

E: Okay.

J: ...of what it meant to be gay.

E: Okay.

J: So in CAMP's magazine *Camp Ink*, which I mentioned before, they wrote "If you are one of the many homosexuals who say and enjoyed such films as *Boys in the Band*, think about what enjoyed most. Then think of your reasons for joining the CAMP. I doubt very much they will be the same."

[laughter]

J: No pressure!

E: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

I: That's... it feels very kind of like that, you know, "your fave is problematic"...

J: Yeah, it was the 1970s equivalent of like, "It's not without its problems..."

I: Yeah.

[laughter]

J: And I should probably add that when I say "aligned with the activist political narrative", their narrative was the very low bar of gay people are normal and human. [laughs] That was what they were going for. So if that is what a portrayal of a gay person was judged against in gay media...

E: Yeah.

J: ...they would imagine like, if this was the only portrayal of a gay person that a straight person ever saw...

E: Mm.

J: ...what would they think.

E: I mean I can see why you'd be a little like, "Uhhhh...." at *Boys in the Band*, if that's your agenda.

J: Yeah.

I: Can I just ask then – I don't know anything about *Boys in the Band*.

J: It's a movie that's centred around this one gay man's birthday party, and like, his old straight friend is invited but it is very campy and like, kind of plays to a lot of those, like, bitchy gay men stereotypes.

I: Okay.

J: So all of his friends are just kind of awful people. It's not a great film, but like, when it came out in the UK, it was a film with gay people...

E: Yeah.

J: ...because it was the 1960s and that was really exciting. But by the time it came to Australia everyone was very kind of politically literate and could just be like, this is so not on. And also it's probably worth adding as well, like, this is still... it's a low bar, but it's a pretty conservative agenda as well. So the films that you don't see coming up these spaces are also films like John Waters films which are more queer and kind of play with that politics of disgust in a more subversive way.

E: Mmhm.

J: Like, the films that come up talk a lot about gay people getting married and like, really great positive things, but there is this conservative bent where they're a bit exclusive towards people don't fit into that mould because those people are not currently political expedient.

I: Yeah, okay. So you end up basically with a very kind of, almost a heteronormative gay...

J: Yeah.

I: ...story.

J: Yeah, you get that kinda homonormativity.

I: Yeah, that's the word.

J: Yeah. [laughter] Which again like, it's 1971, the bar is set very low. This is a time when it is several decades before homosexuality will be decriminalised in all states of Australia, so we can offer them some allowances.

E: Yeah, well let alone before marriage is something that's seriously on the agenda.

J: Exactly, exactly. So like, I have to admit that when I was first watching these films I was surprised how kind of optimistic and ambitious they were about like, the space gay people would have in our culture, because I guess we're talking in a time that's been a little bit pessimistic in the lead-up to marriage equality, so it was really nice... But I just wanted to shout out that like, this is a really great and exciting time for gay film, but it's especially really great and exciting if you're one of the people it has been decided it is politically expedient to show.

E: Mmhm, yeah.

J: Yeah. So also, just because gay films came to Australia doesn't actually mean they were made particularly welcome. So states could still ban films for pretty much any reason, and Queensland often did.

[all laugh]

I: Queensland...

J: Indeed, Australia kind of has a problematic relationship with censorship for pretty much the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the best example of which has to be *Salò, or 120 Days of Sodom*.

E: Oh yes...

J: Which, as you can imagine...

E: Just imagine trying to cut that down to be good for your nine-year-old.

J: Yeah, this was one of those ones that was just banned.

E; [laughs]

J: But it was the last ever film made by Pier Pasolini, and it uses the narrative structure of Marquis de Sade's novel and recontextualises into like, a wartime Fascist Italy.

I: This sounds fascinating.

J: Look, I'm not gonna lie, it's a very hardcore film. Even by today's standards it is difficult to watch.

E: It's – I know people who have done film degrees, and they've been given it to watch, and no one in the class finishes it, and the tutor's like, "We kinda just wanted to see if anyone would actually get through it."

J: I was like, sitting at home watching it, like I was like, "It's finally time, I should watch this movie," and you know when you're by yourself, and you just go "Nope", and shut your eyes? Like no-one else was there, but you have to say it out loud because it's – it's a very confronting film. Like...

E: Yeah...

J: To give the censorship board all of the credit before I just throw them under the bus in about two seconds, it is a film you do kind of react against pretty viscerally.

E: Mm.

J: Unfortunately, a visceral reaction against a film was pretty much the standard by which the censorship board worked. If they thought something was icky, they tended to just ban it.

E: I'd like to know how far they got into that movie before they were like, "This isn't happening."

J: It could've been literally ten minutes.

E: It could've been.

[all laugh]

E: I can't imagine that they sat through the whole thing.

J: Yeah...

E: Like, "No no, maybe it picks up, maybe it's gonna be fine."

J: I should say that all we know about their logic for this banning was one word. It was banned for "indecenty". And that's it. That's all the information that you get about these bannings.

I: That's so mild.

J: I know...

I: After everything you've said about this movie it's like, "indecenty" ...

J: It's a very decent way to describe it, isn't it?

I: Yeah.

J: And I should add also, like, I say "bannings" because it was banned when it first came to Australia in 1976, but it was then unbanned in the '80s, but then it was rebanned in the '90s, and then unbanned again.

I: Oh wow. [laughs]

J: So it's currently not banned.

I: But we don't count on that lasting.

[laughter]

J: Look, nothing is forever when it comes to this film, is all I'm saying.

E: So, watch it quick.

I: [laughs]

J: But also the internet exists, so...

E: Yeah, yeah, banning things in Australia is pretty meaningless at the moment.

J: So even if a film could avoid being cut or banned, like, once it came to Australia or was made in Australia, questions of funding and distribution also threatened to be like, prohibitively difficult. So there are films that were made at this time who end up just shutting pretty quickly because they have problems with advertising, or problems with the cinemas... Which is where one of my favourite groups ever comes in, which is the Gay Film Fund. The Gay Film Fund were part of the Sydney Filmmakers' Co-operative, although I should say that throughout its lifetime, it actually doesn't do a lot of successful film fundraising.

I: [laughs]

E: Failed step one.

J: Yeah. [laughs] But what it sort of lacks in frugality, it totally makes up for in event planning.

[all laugh]

J: It's whole kind of...history is just a series of events, and, including in 1976, what actually may have been the first ever gay film festival.

I: Aww!

J: Yeah! Which is nice, I think, you know. So basically they ran a program of short films that kind of responded to all of the challenges that gay film was facing at this time, so they'd play Australia films like *Adam*, which is this like, trippy avant-garde portrayal of life a day in the life of a gay man in Sydney, and they also play Gillian Armstrong's film *Saturday Night*, which was one of her first films, and not very long after this she goes on to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes, so, you know, yay Gay Film Fund, is all I'm saying.

[laughter]

J: She does that for *My Brilliant Career*, which I just want to say, is like, the queerest straight movie ever.

[all laugh]

J: And this is at a time when like, mainstream distributors pretty much just ignore Australian films because it's much cheaper to get crappy American films that are getting made a lot distributed, so that was really important. It also included films like  *Holding*, which is a Canadian film that was supposed to be shown at the Women's International Film Festival the previous year but had been detained by the censor. So, it was directly responding to these kind of issues.

E: Yep.

J: The festival was super relaxed. It was a full house, so like, a lot of the audience was just lying on the floor, which I think was really nice.

I: Aww.

J: It was really social. Some people kind even found it to be a small dating network. Yep.

E: I was just—That's just so typical.

J: I know! And you can imagine it being like really 1970s as well, like they had this really plush carpet, and...

[laughter]

J: That kind of set the tone for all of the future Gay Film Fund events. They would usually show a few short films, whatever gay content they could get their hands on that month, and then they'd discuss the films over wine, which is my happy place.

I: [laughs] I'm so jealous.

J: Yeah. Often they like, literally couldn't get their hands on any new gay films, so they they would just like, hold a dance or a barbecue instead. [laughs]

E: We're playing into Australian stereotypes here, for our international listeners.

J: I knooooow. [laughs] So an event like a dance would make them like, \$80.

E: Okay.

J: Which is...not great, even by 1970s standards, if you're trying to fund a film, which is probably why *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofters* is the only film they ever fund as far as I can tell. Um, basically whenever anyone reaches out to them for funding, they say they have no available funds, and in one case they just gave them like a thorough telling off for how they addressed the letter asking for funds. [laughs]

E: Okay...

J: It's really cold. It's this group called the Young Gay Films Collective, and they sent this letter out asking for funding, and the letter they get back, like, the first line is literally like, "Dear Kevin, Are you a sexist?"

I: Wow!

E: Wow...

J: Yeah...[laughter]

E: What did Kevin do?

J: Well, Kevin addressed the letter "Dear Sir."

E: Ah, well, okay, I mean...

J: Yeah.

I: [laughs] All right, take that, Kevin.

J: So it's like a paragraph of you know, "51% of the population are women", you know, "I hope that the films you're hoping to make don't reflect this attitude of discrimination", and then like right down the bottom, "also, we're not funding any films at this time".

E: Ah, oh god.

I: Aww.

E: I can just see them getting the like, standard letter and then pressing enter fifty times like, "I have something to say!"

J: Yeah. [laughs] So, I was in the archive when I saw that, the Gay and Lesbian Archive, and I just kind of opened it up, and I just like...I felt so embarrassed for Kevin.

I: Aww.

J: [laughs]

E: Kevin's probably still around.

J: Yeah.

E: He could listen to this and be like, "I hadn't thought about that in years."

J: Justice for Kevin!

I: [laughs]

J: I should add that a lot of these people are still around.

E: Yeah.

J: And um, like, doing really interesting, really different work. Like, a lot of people are in that kind of artistic space still, so it's worth tracking these things down and having a look. Everything I'm talking about stands up quite well today, so it's worth saying, I think.

E: Mm.

J: Apart from the Gay Film Fund, other independent figures were also championing gay films. So, the Paris Theatre, which was a cinema in central Sydney just basically transformed into a gay friendly community centre because of their owner, which is Johnny Allen. Allen put on several gay film festivals throughout the 1970s, sometimes showing films that wouldn't have been seen in Australia for years. So for example, the Paris was the first theatre to show the Rainer Werner Fassbender classic starring a lesbian protagonist, *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*. As far as I can tell, that's just because Johnny Allan really liked Fassbender films.

E: Mmhm.

J: [laughs] So he would just make it happened. He was like, "It's my theatre!" So he would track it down, pay out of his own pocket to get it sent to Australia, and play this film and force everyone who went there to

watch it.

E: [laughs] That's nice.

J: Yeah, it is. Like, I think it's the dream, right?

E: Yeah.

[laughter]

J: So meanwhile, the Gay Liberation Movement in its most radical sense had more or less peaked. It maintained its alignment with leftist causes in Australia far longer than America or Britain did, but it was more or less spinning its wheels, and there was a sense that the movement was losing a bit of energy. Yet I do feel, and this isn't just because this is my special area of research, but I do feel that film has this special kind of radical power, as well.

E: [laughs]

J: Not like, I think, anything that has happened in like, any iteration of the gay rights movement over the past fifty years has been caused by a film, but it seems to have a power to affirm what people are thinking, which I think is really nice.

E: Mm.

J: Johnny Allen told a historian, Scott McKinnon, who I mentioned earlier, years later, he said, "The very fact that you could be in a decently sized cinema in a prime location with a dedicated openly gay program was in itself political." It was particularly important that people actually like, saw these films as well, though. So Dennis Altman, who was a reasonably well known cultural critic at the time in 1978 argued that almost any gay representation could be taken up by conservatives as a critical representation of homosexuality, so that going out and communally watching these movies and celebrating them was in itself an act of reclamation. Altman wrote, and this is a quote, "For the film festival is essentially a celebration, and to celebrate homosexuality is something that our self-appointed moral guardians cannot abide," and that gay film festivals were "one of the most important activities the gay movement could undertake".

I: I mean, I think a lot of this still kind of holds up today, like everything you're saying about that idea of having a kind of, almost like a dedicated gay cinema.

J: Mm.

I: Like, that would still be a radical move today.

J: Definitely, definitely, and like, the questions over safe spaces as well...

I: Yeah.

J: I think is still really pertinent today. So it's that kind of culmination of artistic expression and like a communal experience, with the overlay of this political context that I think is really important. Or you know, maybe it's just my area of research so I think it's really important. [laughs]

I: [laughs]

J: In 1978, the American film *Word Is Out* played at the Images of Gays Film Festival in Sydney, which was at the Paris. It was one of Johnny Allen's pet projects. The film is another one that stands up really well today, but the way, if anyone has time to track it down. It's almost three hours of interviews of a really genuinely diverse group of men and women. They talk about their pasts, their hopes for the future, and it's really moving. It also has one of my favourite lines, ever, in all of the films I've ever studied...

E: [laughs] Wow.

J: It's just really cute, I think. One interviewee says "I feel a responsibility to the other weird people of the world to be a representative intelligent weird person."

E: That's good.

J: Right?

I: That's....yeah, that's like, quite relatable, really.

J: Mm, yeah. Again, it probably is the closest the films I'm talking about get to representing people who didn't fit in to the acceptable mould. So it includes this huge age range of people, from people who are in university to people who are in their 70s and 80s. It includes people of colour. It includes people from all over America. It's just – it's this really empowering film, and yeah, I would really highly recommend people tracking it down.

E: That sounds excellent.

J: It is track-down-able.

E: Okay.

J: Like, you know, it was a pretty significant film, so it's definitely around... Particularly if you have a VHS.

E: [laughs]

J: [laughs] So the aim of the screening in Sydney was to raise money for the fourth National Homosexual Conference, and concluded with a discussion about the future of the gay movement. There's a gay magazine *Campaign*, and the editors were there, and they wrote about the reception of the film. I'm just gonna read this quote even though it's long-ish, because I think it really highlights what I'm kinda talking about. The editors wrote, of the people who were in the audience,

*It was an amazing human experience, a theatre chock-a-block full of gay women and men, hooting, laughing, cheering, 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. Yes, word is out that increasingly we are gaining confidence and pride to communicate more of our experiences, more of ourselves, to learn more about ourselves. A word is out on gay Australians. Yes, we'll give it a go. But first let's give ourselves a go. We've only just begun to be, but word is out that we're determined to get there.*

E: That's really lovely.

J: Right?

I: Yeah. [laughs] Aww.

J: Yeah, so it just captured how important shared emotions were.

E: Mm, yeah.

J: And very significantly, the article which I just quoted from ended with, "P.S. Sydney-siders can express their pride on the June 25 Solidarity Day. See you at the celebrations." Now that Solidarity Day – which was actually June 24. It was a misprint.

[laughter]

I: Whoops.

J: Was the first ever Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

I: Oh!

E: I hope their numbers didn't suffer because of that misprint.

J: I know! It's also like, every time I mention it, I have to say, "It wasn't the 25<sup>th</sup>, but okay." So yeah, I don't

wanna say film is like, the most important thing that's ever happened in gay history in Australia, but...

[laughter]

E: But, go on...

J: It's...pretty important. [laughs] So, on June 24<sup>th</sup>...

E: [laughs]

I: Not 25<sup>th</sup>?

J: Not 25<sup>th</sup>. Very important. A small film crew called One In Seven led by a woman called Digby Duncan, which is one of my favourite names ever—

E: Yeah, that's excellent.

J: —came along to film Australia's first ever answer to the Pride event. I should also add that most historians agree, films like *Word Is Out*, and another film which was released a couple of years earlier called *A Very Natural Thing*, may actually have included the first and only footage of a Pride event that the marchers at Sydney had ever seen.

I: Yeah...

J: So I don't wanna say that film is the most important thing that's ever happened in gay Australia....

E: [laughs]

J: [laughing] But it kind of...yup, reiterates the global nature of Pride.

I: Mm.

J: Like, it does kind of rely on these visual representations to define itself.

I: I'm gonna ask a weird question.

J: Yeah, go for it.

I: Why were they called One In Seven?

J: Well, you know how the statistic is, now days, people say like one in ten, people...

I: Yeah...

J: Are, like, on the Kinsey scale? Apparently another study thought it was one in seven.

I: That was my thought. I thought that's quite a large number for the 70s.

J: Yeah! Yeah. It's funny that you would think that number kind of had gone up over time, but...

I: Mm.

J: Yeah, they went with one in seven.

E: I like it better.

J: Yeah.

E: I don't have any science behind that, but I like it better.

[laughter]

I: Yeah same.

E: Mm. It is interesting to think about it in that time, though, because I have never really come across

anything talking about like, you know, a statistic like that, like numbers of gay people, but I've definitely seen like, perceived numbers of trans people, from that time. I read this book once, and I have no idea what it was, I'm sorry, but it made me laugh really hard. It was written around then. It was like, "There may be as many as three to four hundred trans people in Australia."

J: [stunned laughter]

E: So that's where like...you know, the mainstream was at with that, at the time.

J: Yep.

E: Which was just hilarious. I was like, I probably know more trans people, shut up.

J: Yeah, short of you telling me this was from a time when there were like, I dunno, a thousand people in Australia...

[laughter]

J: You should add, for people listening overseas, we have, you know, significantly more people than a prediction of three to four hundred trans people being appropriate or even close...

E: I'm in a group for like, trans men that has 600 people in it, and that's like...most of them are fairly local, so um...

J: So take that, statistics book from the 1970s.

E: Yeah, we're taking that real personal. You're irrelevant now, but we're mad anyway.

[laughter]

J: So the crew had been working on *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers* as a documentary on the persecution of homosexuals that went as far back as from the medieval era up to the present.

E: Mmhm.

J: That bit's still in the film, and it's not great.

E: Yeah, okay...

J: Like, it's ambitious, but it's not very well researched.

E: Looking at those, like, historical research research done by very well-meaning queer people is always just so difficult.

J: Yeah.

E: Yeah.

J: And like, they make the compelling argument that, in case anyone's been wondering this whole episode about the title...

E: Mmhmm.

J: It argues that like, women being persecuted as witches, and gay men being persecuted as faggots has been transformed in modern Australia to dykes and poofers.

E: Okay.

J: So that's why the title.

E: Okay.

I: That...is a fairly compelling connection I guess, that kind of witches in medieval times as a sort of queer or queer adjacent accusation.

J: Mm.

I: I can see how that would happen.

J: Yes, that is a very good way to put it. Unfortunately in the film they say "Lesbians were just called witches and burnt."

[laughter]

I: Ah.

J: The film gets much better from then on, is all I'm going to say.

E: Ok

J: So if you do track it down, persist.

E: So it goes from the medieval time to now. Does it pretty much talk about the medieval time and then it skips up more to the present, or does it try to cover a lot of the intervening time?

J: So it skips up.

E: Uh huh.

J: Apparently the original plan was to do it much more slowly, but what they ended up filming which is what I'm about to describe...

E: Okay.

J: ...ultimately takes up the vast majority of the film in the end.

E: Okay.

J: So basically the original plan was they were going to go down and they were going to film a Pride march and it was going to be kind of a bright, dress-up occasion for them to end their film on. Digby Duncan would later tell an interviewer "So we went along to have a good time. And after we'd had a good time, the police trapped us in Darlington Rd, and commenced to throw us into paddy wagons". They had basically captured footage of an ambush. As the marchers had been parading down like, through Darlington, police had been closing off side streets and herding the marchers north of Darlington Rd. One in Seven were capturing revelry and people dressing up and singing and chanting and waving at everyone watching from the bars, but as they reached the end of Darlington Rd they met a blockade of paddy wagons. One of the marchers, Rick Dowdell, described it as being "led to the slaughter, like sheep". Arrests quickly led to mayhem; Dowdell said, quote "Police attacked in a vicious and brutal way. I saw men and women screaming

in total chaos. Blood spilt as a result of being manhandled, kicked and thrown into paddy wagons. Anything that could be used as weapons was hurtled through the air”.

The protesters were arrested and taken to Darlinghurst police station near where the march had begun, and 53 people were arrested that night. Their arrests were protested in demonstrations that doubled as counter-protesting pro-life rallies. Local representatives were accosted at public forums and all told, over the space of a few weeks, 180 people were arrested and One in Seven filmed all of it.

I: I can see how they got to there and they were like “well this looks like it’s of historical significance, let’s ditch that other movie plan”.

E: Yeah.

J: Yeah, pretty much. So this is the vast majority of the film. It becomes this story.

E: The ABC’s got a like, docudrama thing. I think the ABC, coming out on this in the next few months about the first Mardi Gras-

J: Yeah.

E: -and what-not, and I’m very keen.

J: Yeah, you guys could do a whole episode on the history of Mardi Gras in Australia, it’s really really fascinating. Kind of brings in like a lot of sort of cultural stakeholders throughout its history I think.

E: Yeah we’re doing, well I’m doing like research on a like, long running like Australian history series for us at the moment and there’s just so many things, it’s like, “oh no this could become so much bigger than like-”

J: Yeah.

[laughter]

J: My particular pet hate is there is this whole controversy when they move it from June to the middle of summer. And people kind of talk about it as though that’s kind of the end of the like activist Mardi Gras because it was just a protracted excuse for people to get around in nothing but hotpants basically. And it became more commercial because bars wanted it to be in the summer and things like that. It’s a really interesting kind of period.

So, needless to say, Mardi Gras is probably one of the most important gay cultural events in Australia today, and *Witches and Faggots*, *Dykes and Poofers* is the key defining document of its origins. And that’s important, because straight media who were reporting on these protests at the time were not telling this story from the perspective of gay people. It’s a lot, like you can imagine today when police are caught up in violence, it’s very much told from their perspective and the message was getting really lost. But then you have this film.

E: Yeah.

J: That just showed what happened. Kind of in real time. And I think that was really important.

I: Did this film get, like I mean I guess you're going to tell us soon, like, what kind of release this film got, like, how well viewed it was, like...

J: Yeah so luckily for the Gay Film Fund, they had a cinema on side.

[laughter]

J: So it was shown at the Filmmaker's Cinema for quite a long time and it actually ended up going to a few international gay film festivals, which were starting up at this time. So it was shown in London and in a few cities in America, the names of which I have not written down. But it did enjoy quite a wide release, and it's kind of maintained a cultural importance. So at the moment funding has just been obtained to digitise all of the outtakes of this film. So like it's kind of had this enduring sense of historical significance. So yeah it was quite widely watched. I should also add that when I say it was financed by the Gay Film Fund, most of the members of the One in Seven club were founding members of the Gay Film Fund.

I: Ah.

[laughter]

J: And the fund covered less than a quarter of the film's total budget. It was actually financed by a government grant. So in contrast to kind of like, the government of the Menzies era of censorship, government grants played a really crucial role in all of the Australian films of this era, like it was a time of very generous experimental film grants, and a bit of a shout-out to all of the tax lawyers and accountants out there. Fun historical fact that until 2001 there was a bit of legislation called 10BA, which was basically for every \$1 a producer put into a film they would get \$1.50 back.

I: Yes, I've heard about this.

J: So 10BA, look probably made a few more bad films than it did make good films.

[laughter]

J: Because people would just make these elaborate films for the tax write-off. But it is kind of an indication that the government had a commitment to making films.

E: Yeah.

J: Like, they wanted to support this industry. And they did, so you do get these really classic directors coming out at this time, like Peter Weir for example, who goes on to be quite successful globally. So yeah, it's not all bad from the government's perspective.

[laughter]

And yeah I guess like everything I was talking about it just seems like it's a confluence of events that lead to the night that when that film is made. I just think a lot about like all of the things that had to happen for like

a film crew to be there documenting what happened to be a crucial moment. You kind of need this censorship reform and this funding, and you need films coming in that show you that you should be filming your Pride events.

E: Yeah.

J: And you need the kind of political movement. So I just think it's this really kind of crucial night in our history that was documented...[whispers] thanks to film being the most important thing in Australian gay history.

[laughter]

So I guess now I just want to talk about what happened after the film. So like I said it was filmed at the Filmmaker's Cinema and it was featured in a few international gay film festivals. Film festivals and special screenings of films in themselves really continue to occupy a radical space in Australian mass culture. They remained a target of conservative like inverted commas "moral guardians" actually well into the 21st century in no small part fuelled by the growing fear and discrimination precipitated by the HIV/AIDS crisis which you guys have talked about in the past.

I: Yes.

E: We have an episode on that in Australia if you want to listen to it. I think it came out about December 15th last year, which is 2017, if you are listening to this very far into the future.

[laughter]

J: So for example, in 1983 a Sydney activist group called the Stonewall Collective was banned from a council venue for trying to screen *Word is Out* which was the film I was discussing earlier. The Parramatta Council cited their responsibility to discourage the spread of AIDS and unprecedented rates of concerted indignation from local community groups over the proposed screening. Conservatives kind of maintain this crusade. In 1989 when the Australian Film Institute organised a gay film festival in Melbourne, notorious homophobe Reverend Fred Nile publicly stated, quote - you guys ready?

I: Oh no.

E: No I'm not, it's Fred Nile.

I: Yeah.

[laughter]

J: It's very Fred Nile.

E: Alright, we can do this. Go on.

J: "To have films like this in the midst of the AIDS epidemic is like showing people the advantages of smallpox during the smallpox epidemic".

E: Ok, sure.

I: I mean I don't know what I ought to say here really. I want to be angry at someone we're all angry at so...

E: Yeah.

J: Yeah.

I: I just don't know why anyone kind of thought it would make sense to be like, alright if we don't talk about gay people, they won't happen.

E: I mean I guess that had kind of worked for them for a while.

J: Yeah, well at the time there were other conservative groups kind of saying the same thing, including a right-wing group, the Women Who Want to be Women group, and they condemned the festival, saying gay film generally promoted and glamorised homosexuality to vulnerable and suggestible youth.

E: They definitely don't have a very good acronym.

J: No. The WWW....W. Is that too many Ws?

E: I have no idea.

I: There should be four. I think.

J: Yeah, there's four Ws.

E: I was going to pronounce it and then I was like don't do that to yourself, you're just going to embarrass yourself.

[laughter]

J: So, to continue this like, little tour of horrors.

[laughter]

J: In 1995 the Tasmanian state government attempted to ban unclassified films being shown at the Hobart Queer Film and Video Festival. And I should say unclassified films, they were films that the Tasmanian Government refused to classify.

E: Oh ok.

J: So they were just gay films.

E: Uh huh.

J: The Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights group who were running the event ignored the ban and the spokesperson for the group stated "I for one will risk persecution to defend my right to watch these films".

I: Fair, yep.

J: Yeah. And actually I have to say that in terms of progress beginning to be shown, this is probably the first event where the people banning the films came off much worse than the people attempting to show them. Because they did just show them, they just ignored the ban, and they just did it, and police kind of didn't arrest them, they were just kind of like "This isn't a crime."

E: Ok. Yep.

J: And everyone in the Tasmanian government ended up looking very silly.

E: Ok, so their bluff was successfully called.

J: Exactly. Which I find quite satisfying. Conversely if we want to bring it up to the modern period. In 2015, the documentary *Gayby Baby* was banned from screening in school hours in New South Wales after the Murdoch press accused the film of quote "embracing political propagandists and thought control".

E: Well it's nice to know that we have come so far and no longer have to deal with any of this stuff.

[pained laughter]

I: I just don't know what to say about someone who censors a film to avoid it doing thought control.

J: It's just so obviously a kind of dog-whistle for parents. Again, I think film kind of occupies this space where the idea of like communally watching a film has like, a lot of power and a lot of fear for conservatives and that definitely still continues today. But like, nevertheless annual queer film festivals are held all over Australia, and films like *The Sum of Us* and much more importantly in my opinion *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* actually led to Australia playing a crucial role in the gay film revival of the 1990s. So despite kind of constantly having this like problem with institutions of authority, Australia has really consistently had this strong presence in queer film since the 1970s.

I: It's kind of nice of me to know that this narrative kind of went alright, Australian films, rubbish for 70 years, now it's gay.

J: Yeah.

[laughter]

E: Ned Kelly, garbage, gay.

J: I don't want to say that gay films saved all of Australia or anything, but...

[laughter]

J: I think today as well, like lots of research has been done about the importance of queer representation being made by queer people, and I think that's a pattern that was quite strong in Australia for a long time as well, because it had these really grassroots associations with it.

E: Yeah.

J: And that's pretty much all I have to say.

I: I just honestly need to see more gay Australian films...

E: Yeah, yeah.

I: ...because I haven't seen like any. I mean I've seen *Priscilla* but...

E: Yeah. It's that thing I think in Australia where, and maybe it's because a lot of our films are apparently garbage for 70 years, that we don't tend to really like, promote our own media or feel very passionately about consuming Australian media.

J: Yeah. And like in our defence, I think something Australia really has to its advantage is because it was so bad and so isolated for so long, we're actually very good at taking on the media of other countries and adapting that story for our experience. So films like *Word is Out* is received in this really specific way to an Australian audience because we're highly literate in like consuming foreign films.

E: Yeah. We have to be.

J: Yeah, we have to be! So like by necessity, even in eras like you know Communist film festival eras, even though we're not making really good films, the people who go to those film festivals are really film-literate and they become these really film-focused festivals as well, because we have this appreciation for international film that we've kind of had to develop, and whereas like film festivals like perhaps the Venice Film Festival for example it's all about like, what celebrities show up. Australians like long ago made their peace with the fact that no celebrities are showing up.

[laughter]

J: So people go there for the films, and they go there in you know, socks and sandals because like, Sophia Loren's not going to come.

I: I do think you kind of notice that about the way Australians consume international media, is that we just as a nation seem a lot more comfortable with just kind of figuring out what's going on in like, an American TV context or something like that than you get from American audiences or from British audiences. I don't know why I think Australian audiences just seem more comfortable with hearing other English dialects and that kind of thing.

J: Yeah no I think that's definitely the case, and like I think it's definitely something out of necessity that we just got kind of good at it, which ended up kind of really working to our advantage in this particular case.

E: Yeah.

J: Because it meant we could look at like a Pride event from New York or San Francisco and kind of adapt that for what it needed to be in Australia really well.

E: I really like it when we do Australian history episodes, because I feel like there tends to be this kind of assumption that like, we've basically followed the general trends that like, America and what-not has. Like I

think that is broadly true in a lot of ways, but there's just so much stuff that happened here that people don't generally know about even if they do know about all of the like, you know they know about Stonewall and they know about the Reagan Era and everything like that.

J: Yeah. I think like Australians at a pretty young age are brainwashed into this assumption that Australian history is boring.

E: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

E: Like, even more than just normal history is boring, they specifically seem to think there's really not much to Australian history, which is very sad.

J: I also think there's something to be said for the fact that like if you look at history from the perspective of straight white men, Australian history is really boring.

E: Yeah. And also just frankly I think a lot of people don't want to think about that because it's uncomfortable for them.

J: Yeah.

E: Yeah.

J: But the most kind of interesting and compelling stories come from voices that aren't those. But unfortunately, because of how our history played out, those are the stories that are still really privileged.

E: Yeah.

I: Mm. Yeah no, there's definitely also, I think, there's a lot of interest in like, working-class Australian history which just doesn't really get spoken about when you're in school.

J: Mm.

E: Mm.

J: And like, things like our labour movement, our suffrage movement...

I: Yeah.

J: ...are incredible!

E: Yeah.

J: Incredible stories, that just don't get told.

E: No, absolutely not. None of that was ever even alluded to when I was in high-school...

I: Mm.

E: ...or obviously primary school. That would be a pretty great year six class.

[laughter]

J: Australian history is badly taught.

E: It is.

J: Yeah.

E: It's a real shame.

J: Mmhm.

E: Yeah. We got a review that other day that was like, "I always thought history was boring, but this is really fun!" and it's like, "Yes! You're correct!" And it's not even like, particularly gifted educators or anything...

J: Yep.

E: ...like that.

J: Yeah.

E: It's just history's really great.

J: it's like, we just stuck with it long enough for them to finally tell us the good bits.

E: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

[laughter]

E: And with that, we've been Queer as Fact. Thank you very much for listening. Once again, I'm Eli.

I: I'm Irene.

J: And I'm Jessie.

E: If you want to, you can find us Queer as Fact on Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook, and you can email us directly at [queerasfact@gmail.com](mailto:queerasfact@gmail.com). We're also on iTunes, again as Queer as Fact, so you can find us there. That seems to be the easiest for people. And if you do listen to us there, please leave us a review and a rating out of five stars. It really helps other people find us.

We'll be back on March 15th, with a bit of an unusual episode - there's not really a topic. It's gonna be a bit of an announcement episode. So we've got some exciting stuff coming for you in the near future. So we're not gonna say anything more than that, I think.

I: Yeah.

E: You'll just have to tune in on the 15th to hear what's happening, and our next normal episode will be

coming out on April 1st, and Alice will be telling us about Mary Shelley, the 19th-century writer of Frankenstein and hero of my goth teen years.

[laughter]

E: That'll also be our anniversary episode. We will have existed for a whole year, so....

I: Wow.

E: ...come and listen to that episode and we'll be like, slightly giddier than normal probably.

I: [laughs] We can have champagne.

E: Yeah, we'll have champagne, we'll be drunk as anything. So thank you very much for listening, and we'll see you on the 15th.

[music plays]