

Acts of Love and Lust

Acts of Love and Lust:
Sexuality in Australia from 1945-2010

Edited by

Lisa Featherstone, Rebecca Jennings
and Robert Reynolds

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P U B L I S H I N G

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We are delighted that this book brings together esteemed professors and early career researchers, and shows the dynamic state of the history of sexuality. We especially thank the contributors. Each contributor has been a true pleasure to work with throughout the long process of making a book.

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INTRODUCTION

ACTS OF LOVE AND LUST

REBECCA JENNINGS, ROBERT REYNOLDS
AND LISA FEATHERSTONE

Since the pioneering work of scholars and activists in the 1970s, the history of sexuality has blossomed into a thriving international field. The now wide-ranging literature reflects detailed and ground-breaking empirical research and is characterized by an enthusiastic engagement with new theoretical and methodological approaches to the exploration of sexual identities and practices in the past. Australian historians have made important contributions to this scholarship, tracing shifting attitudes toward sex and sexuality through topics as diverse as sexuality in the female factories of the convict era; early twentieth-century debates about venereal disease; the same-sex desires of an interwar woman garage-owner and her friends; and the homosexual subcultures of twentieth-century Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.¹

Lesbian and gay historians have played a key role in shaping and driving the development of the field in Australia as elsewhere, and this vibrancy is reflected in the literature, from classic studies such as Garry Wotherspoon's *City of the Plain* and Clive Moore's *Sunshine and Rainbows*, to the nuanced analysis of shifting ideas of homosexuality teased out in Robert Reynolds' *From Camp to Queer* and the detailed examination of gay activism in Graham Willett's *Living Out Loud*.² Major studies have also explored the role of the law, the medical profession and the church in constructing normative sexualities and opposite-sex desire.³

However, the field in Australia has remained largely divided in its focus, with few scholars seeking to explore the interconnections between normative and transgressive forms of sexuality.⁴ This lack of cohesion in the scholarship reflected a parallel segregation in scholarly networks and conversations, with conferences focusing either solely on lesbian and gay histories or examining sexuality within the broader scope of women's and gender history. It was with some excitement then, that the conference from

which this collection is drawn sought to bring together a broad range of historians working on issues relating to sex and sexuality in Australia and further afield, in the hope of identifying common threads and concerns.⁵

This collection, therefore, represents both an attempt to bring into conversation new research into a broad range of Australian sexualities, and an exploration of some of the current preoccupations of Australian historians of sexuality. In reviewing this recent scholarship, it is immediately noticeable that many scholars continue to be concerned and engaged with cultural representations of sexuality. The pervasive influence of Foucauldian approaches, which urge historians of sexuality to reflect upon the ways in which sexual identities and practices have been articulated and constituted through discourse, remains apparent in the interests and approaches of many scholars. Historians have analysed a diverse range of cultural media as texts depicting sex and sexuality and as cultural products consumed by sexual subjects in the enactment of an array of sexual practices. In this volume, authors consider pornography, film, the gay press and the mainstream media, alongside a diverse range of other cultural texts.

These essays also indicate an increasing fascination of historians with the changing role of the state in endorsing certain models of sexual identity and proscribing marginalised forms of sexual practice. A growing body of scholarship has identified the post-war development of new relationships between late modern liberal democracies and their sexual citizens, noting the ways in which the state has been reshaped by powerful claims articulated in a language of sexual and intimate citizenship. In debates as diverse as abortion rights and marriage equality for lesbians and gay men, scholars have pointed to the increased tendency of activists to direct their political claims toward the state and to regard the state as a political vehicle for recognizing collective rights and enacting social change. Scholars such as Wendy Brown have suggested that in the late twentieth century, such claims were increasingly articulated through a language of pain, forcing states to mediate between an array of 'wounded subjects.'⁶ This theme is developed in some of the work here, in relation to the Royal Commission on Human Relationships, the relationship between the state and activists which emerged during the HIV/AIDS campaigns, and the role of the state in shaping responses to cultural media through censorship.

Jill Julius Matthews begins the collection with her survey of the exhibition of pornographic films in Australia. Despite extensive research, Matthews unearths very little evidence of the exhibition of pornographic films, although what she does glean is fascinating. She finds the earliest

complaint about obscene films in April 1901 when a concerned Sydney resident wrote to the Lord Mayor complaining of soft-porn pictures on show in Haymarket. This complaint resulted in police action just as in Melbourne in 1944 when Police and Customs officers raided the Rainbow Hall in Prahran and found 200 men watching what the authorities described as “disgustingly obscene” films. This particular gathering was a fundraiser in aid of one of the man’s daughters who was a contestant in “the Jewish Queen Carnival”. As Matthews notes, these kinds of police actions became ‘the blue movie raid of popular Australian memory’. For the most part though, the first six decades of the 20th century appear to have been a pornographic film waste-land in Australia. Matthews concludes very few Australians partook of pornographic films until the sexual, censorship and technological landscape changed in the 1970s.

An important product and component of changes in sexuality during the 1970s was the Royal Commission on Human Relationships, the subject of the next chapter by Michelle Arrow. The Commission was established by the reformist Whitlam Labor Government in 1974 with the ambitious brief to inquire into the “whole human condition”. Arrow charts how the Commission, under the guidance of Elizabeth Evatt, received 1264 submissions and heard 374 formal witnesses as well as soliciting opinions from the hundreds of people who attended open house sessions or were part of the Commission’s research projects. These hearings and testimonials, Arrow suggests, ‘contributed to a more pluralistic and open discussion of sexuality and intimacy through its emphasis on gathering evidence of “ordinary” people’s experiences, rather than simply experts’. Arrow demonstrates how the Commission, in effect, helped to create the idea of intimate citizenship in Australia through challenging the divide between public and private. Of course, this shift was already underway with the emergence of second wave feminism and gay liberation, but the Royal Commission on Human Relationships extended some state legitimacy to the process even as its findings became caught in a swing to the right in Australian politics.

Lisa Featherstone and Haylee Ward return to the topic of pornography, picking up where Jill Matthews concluded in the 1970s. Their interest, however, is how Australian feminists responded to the proliferation of more easily available pornography, especially with the advent of home video cassette recorders in the late 1970s. In the United States, debates about pornography were central to the feminist movement as the glow of second wave feminism faded. By the 1980s, a sharp divide had emerged in North American feminism between those who theorized pornography as central to women’s oppression and those who rejected this world-view.

Australian feminists, Featherstone and Ward argue, took a more nuanced position. They were well aware of the American debates, but for the most part did not uncritically import them. Australian feminists in the 1970s were more exercised by the material oppression of women: equal pay, childcare, women's shelters, and prostitution and abortion rights. When questions of representation gathered pace in the 1980s, it was around women's gendered role in advertisements that Australian feminists were more likely to agitate, not pornography. For Featherstone and Ward, the recent history of pornography in Australia 'offers an excellent example of the sophisticated internationalism of local feminisms, which proved neither parochial nor imitative'.

In his review of the development of the lesbian and gay press in Australia, Garry Wotherspoon nominates a number of important functions this diverse collection of publications has served since the first Australian magazine appeared in 1970: nurturing individual homosexual identities, especially for those who lived far from queer inner-city enclaves; assisting in the creation of group identities and communities; and providing a platform for political mobilization. Wotherspoon casts his eye over forty years of activist newsletters, community and bar newspapers, glossy magazines, radio shows, and even academic journals. He details a long and impressive list of publications from the fleeting to the durable, and concludes his survey with the statement that 'the fastest growing area is in the electronic media'. How this might reshape lesbian and gay media remains to be seen.

Scott McKinnon continues this investigation into queer life with a thoughtful study of how the notorious 1980 American film *Cruising* was received in Sydney. *Cruising* was set in the gay leather clubs of New York, starring Al Pacino as an undercover policeman intent on catching a serial killer who was murdering gay men. Hugely controversial in New York, gay activists in Sydney readied themselves to protest at the homophobic leanings of the film. And yet, through archival research and oral history interviews, McKinnon unearths a more varied reception. Whilst some gay men were horrified by the film, others found the representation of gay male sexuality enticing. McKinnon demurs from deciding whether the film was homophobic or not; far more interesting, he argues, is tracing how the film was received and what that might tell us about gay male identity in the early 1980s. Through oral history interviews he also considers how the film has entered gay collective memory and decides that 'what is recalled is a far less diverse and far more cohesive gay male community than that which had so actively debated *Cruising* in 1980'.

McKinnon's chapter concludes on the cusp of HIV/AIDS emerging in gay communities in the early 1980s, which is where Shirleene Robinson begins her chapter. Robinson contrasts governmental responses to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s in Britain and Australia. The Australian response to HIV/AIDS has won plaudits internationally for the way in which federal and most state governments collaborated closely with effected communities to tackle the spread of the epidemic. In contrast, the Thatcher government was at first slow to respond the threat HIV/AIDS posed to gay communities and far less consultative. Robinson then analyses the official HIV/AIDS campaigns run by the respective British and Australian governments in 1987. Both campaigns had similar drawbacks, most notably exaggerating the threat of HIV to heterosexuals. Robinson suggests that the relatively muted gay community criticism of the 1987 Australian Grim Reaper campaign was a product of the good working relationship between government and the gay community; British gay activists were less inhibited.

Like Garry Wotherspoon, Yorick Smaal's archive is the gay male press in Australia. Unlike Wotherspoon, Smaal concentrates on one magazine, *OutRage*, over a period of ten years, 1989-1999. As we know from Wotherspoon's chapter, *OutRage* evolved from the earlier publication *Gay Community News* (GCN). GCN was a left-wing, Melbourne activist magazine. In contrast, *OutRage* was a national publication which by the 1990s was a glossy, gay life-style magazine. We might suggest this evolution reflected larger shifts in gay life during the late 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, Smaal considers how the commercialization of gay male identity played out in the pages of *OutRage* both at the level of consumerism and the notion of the desirable gay male body. He then extends this analysis of the commoditization of gay life into a close reading of personal classifieds in *OutRage*, finding both continuity and change.

In her survey of the politics of homosexuality during the Prime-Ministership of John Howard, Barbara Baird considers the 'strange historical coincidence of progressive law reform for lesbian and gays with deeply conservative times'. Baird's chapter unpacks this paradox. She points to the different levels of government in Australia which lent activists some counter-weight to the dominance of Howard, and the degree to which the social conservatism of the Howard Governments actually incited lesbian and gay activism. Ultimately however, through an analysis of the same-sex marriage campaign, debates over lesbian motherhood, and a High Court ruling which effectively drew on Homosexual Advance Defence (HAD), Baird comes to an uncomfortable conclusion for

progressives: lesbian and gay rights continued apace during the 2000s because they did not trouble ‘the mainstream white Australia crafted under Howard’.

In the final chapter of the collection, Caroline Symons and Matthew Klugman turn their attention to the dynamics of masculinity, heterosexism and homophobia in Australian Rules football. They begin with the media firestorm that began when a well-known and controversial heterosexual footballer declared that elite Australian Rules football was not ready for gay players. They trace the debate that raged in newspapers, talk-back, and internet forums and conclude with a mixed report card. Many voices were raised in protest at the assumption that the Australian Football League was not equipped to deal with openly gay players; other voices pondered why no elite player had declared himself as gay. The game’s ruling body, after initial supportive statements about tackling homophobia, fell quiet. Symons and Klugman set out to consider why this may have happened. Like Baird, they question easy notions of progress. Against an optimistic reading that hegemonic masculinity is becoming less homophobic, they wonder if ‘the dominant form of masculinity can take on and borrow other forms of masculinity without giving up the power it has over these forms of masculinity (as well as over femininity)’.

These chapters seek to illuminate multiple and complicated sexual identities and sexual practices in postwar Australia. To do so, they interrogate the complex sexual cultures of Australian life, examining both mainstream and alternative archives. Read together, they tell a story, not of progress but of sharp shifts and ruptures, and in many ways the final articles end less optimistically than those based on the heady days of sexual revolution. Despite the fact that they are at times unsettling, the articles tell rich stories of past lives, which both intrigue and surprise.

Rebecca Jennings (Macquarie University)
Robert Reynolds (Macquarie University)
Lisa Featherstone (University of Newcastle)

Notes

¹ For example, Joy Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Georgine Clarsen, “‘The Woman Who Does’: A Melbourne Motor Garage Proprietor” in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, eds Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 55-71.

² Garry Wotherspoon, *‘City of the Plain’: History of a Gay Subculture* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1991); Clive Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press in Association with the API Network, 2001); Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Re-making the Australian Homosexual*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Allen & Unwin: Sydney, 2000).

³ Stefania Siedlecky and Diana Wyndham, *Populate and Perish: Australian Women’s Fight for Birth Control* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990); Kay Daniels, *So much hard work: women and prostitution in Australian history* (Sydney: Fontana/Collins, 1984); Raelene Frances, *Selling sex: a hidden history of prostitution* (Sydney : University of NSW Press, 2007); Barbara Sullivan, *The politics of sex: prostitution and pornography in Australia since 1945* (Cambridge ; Melbourne : Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴ Lisa Featherstone, *Let’s Talk About Sex: Histories of Sexuality in Australia from Federation to the Pill* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: CSP, 2011); Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2012).

⁵ Histories of Sexualities Conference, Newcastle Australia, 21st and 22nd July 2011, hosted by the University of Newcastle and Macquarie University.

⁶ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 1995).

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY OF THE EXHIBITION OF PORNOGRAPHIC FILM IN AUSTRALIA

JILL JULIUS MATTHEWS

At that time [the late 1960s] a number of 8 and 16 millimetre prints were being imported from Sweden. A fund-raising scheme was being run where clubs [usually local football clubs] would hire these promoters to show porno films and that would be followed by a striptease artist. Usually we would get a phone call from a mother or a wife of the club members, of the intended show. We would then raid the premises.

We were to seize the film and interview the operator. Of course the audience didn't know that ... when we burst in the local hall [whilst the show was running] and announce our presence. It was usually pandemonium with people diving out the doors and windows. The seized film was then taken back to the police station, which was the old North Fitzroy Police Station where we had a small theatrette. We would view the films there, for evidence purposes.¹

This is the blue movie raid of popular Australian memory: the football club, the clandestine screening in a local hall, the women's outrage, the pandemonium of the raid. It is a memory whose aura is one of amused tolerance, the naughty old days before we were overwhelmed by the ubiquity of sexual and pornographic imagery on domestic screens and on public display.

In this article I shall present the historical evidence for the events of which this memory is the residue: the distribution and exhibition of pornographic films in Australia across the period during which film was the dominant medium, from the end of the nineteenth century until the rise of video in the 1970s. My interest is very specific to film and does not encompass pornography in its coeval forms—postcards, photographs, magazines, books, pictures, live performance—nor its successor forms of video, DVD and internet. I address the deliberately limited question of the

nature and extent of evidence of films produced solely to induce sexual titillation and arousal that were secretly screened to predominantly male audiences during the first eight decades of the twentieth century.

In 1978 Michel Foucault's pathbreaking work *Histoire de la sexualité, I: la volonté de savoir* was published in English translation as *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*.² Eleven years later Linda Williams published *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*.³ These two books established the legitimacy of pornographic film as a subject of academic research in the English-speaking world.⁴ Williams herself had published a number of articles addressing pornography before *Hard Core*, and afterwards she produced the edited collection *Porn Studies*,⁵ followed by *Screening Sex*.⁶ Williams recounted that the starting point for her research was an interest in exploring "the pleasure in looking at human bodies in movement" and the film genres that focused on particular kinds of body movement which in turn "moved" the bodies of viewers.⁷ Consequently, her approach to pornography was through the films themselves, as artefacts. This textually based approach has been the most common method of writing about the history of pornographic film and, more broadly, adult film, both before⁸ and since⁹ *Hard Core*. Some of these works provided significant historical context for the films, especially around production and to a lesser extent around exhibition; for example, those by Jack Stevenson, Thomas Waugh and Eric Schafer. There is also some research that has been done on reception, but most of this is theoretical or contemporary and the very little that is historical involves hypothesised rather than empirical audiences. The related but distinct field of the history of censorship of film has tended to provide an historical account of legislative and regulatory regimes and to emphasise the censorship of specific films.¹⁰

While there is thus a considerable international literature on the history of pornographic films themselves, there is less on the history of their audiences and the reception they gave the films. There is, however, a tangential literature that can be added to the mix to help identify those audiences, dealing with nineteenth and early twentieth century urban masculine sub-cultures. These have been identified in the US¹¹ and elsewhere.¹² The focus of the historians of these sub-cultures has been on sporting life and its press, but there is a little material touching sexuality and pornography.

Despite the limited evidence, a plausible story about the distribution and exhibition of pornographic films can be constructed from this wide range of sources. In the first decade or so of cinema, before the introduction of censorship, risqué, smutty and bawdy films were as much

part of the standard repertoire as travelogues and civic spectacle, and were not designed for a niche audience in a special venue. Early cinema exhibitors, and most of their audiences, seem to have felt there was nothing either improper or incongruous in such a combination. Hard-core pornography (films featuring non-simulated sex acts) was another matter. Such blue films were screened in clandestine venues within a pre-existing men's culture that supported their aesthetic, including cabarets and music halls, smokers, private societies, men's clubs and brothels. There is some evidence that women were present at some of these venues and that some of the films had homosexual content. German film historian Gertrud Koch claims that "film pornography was already in full bloom in Germany by 1904",¹³ and she quotes from contemporary descriptions of screenings of such films, hidden from police surveillance, in Berlin and Buenos Aires.¹⁴ The oldest surviving hard-core film is the 1907 Argentinian *El Sartorio*.¹⁵ Screenings of blue movies were common enough before the First World War to have a name: "black evenings" or "serate nere" in Italy, "noir soirée" in France, "Herren-abende" (evenings for gentlemen) or "Parisien-abende" (Parisian evenings) in German-language nations,¹⁶ and "stag parties" in America.¹⁷ Many such "gentlemen only" screenings were organised by travelling movie entrepreneurs.

The two foremost places in Europe and America that concentrated men together and permitted blue movie screenings—the regulated brothel and the college fraternity house—had no equivalents in Australia. Moreover, Australian historians know very little about whether a male sub-culture existed here, and if so, its nature and extent.¹⁸ While there has been a lot of research on mateship, there has been little on its sub-cultural qualities. There has also been very little research on the early exhibition of film in Australia, and none at all on pornographic film and its audiences.

The most significant condition affecting the possibility of such historical research is that screenings of pornographic films were illegal. In addition to the long-standing law against obscenity, Commonwealth and State governments passed legislation in the years before the First World War prohibiting the screening of scenes suggestive of immorality, indecency and debauchery, and the motion picture industry undertook to clean up its act in the interests of public decency and long-term profit. Legitimate film producers, distributors and exhibitors jostled with public officials and morality campaigners across the rest of the twentieth century over where to draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable representations, but all sides were united against blatant and unapologetic "filth". Under these conditions, the public exhibition of pornography had to be a strictly clandestine affair until the 1970s when proliferating sex and

adult shops around Sydney's Kings Cross began screening pornographic films, and later moved into private cubicle video machine exhibition. Such screenings were illegal and were occasionally prosecuted, but the Vice Squad had limited interest in them, unless there was a media exposé or a flurry of public outrage. Over the next decade, such public screenings were gradually overtaken by private screenings on home video machines, which were made legal in 1984 when the Commonwealth Government introduced the X classification permitting explicit sexual content in films for personal use. The story of blue movies ends at this point, when pornography became legal, video replaced film as its medium, and public and social screenings were superseded by private.¹⁹

What then is the evidence that "black evenings" or "blue screenings" were ever held in Australia? Let me begin with the hard evidence: pornographic films themselves. *A Free Ride*, known as the first and most famous American stag movie (dated 1917-19 by the Kinsey Institute²⁰) is known to have made its way to Australia. The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia has in its collection three fragmentary versions of *A Free Ride*.²¹ The provenance of these fragments is unknown. It is not known whether they are copies of a one single print smuggled in, or evidence of three different smuggling operations. It is not known when they were brought in. All that is certain is that each came as a part of a different collection variously found abandoned or donated to the Archive by a later generation of relatives. The Archive also holds a hard core American stag film from the late 1920s, several American burlesque and comedy strip tease films from the 1930s to the 1950s, explicit French porn probably from the 1930s, amateur nude-posing art films from the 1950s and 60s, sex party home movies from the late 1950s-1960s, early 1960s Soho and Danish porn, and locally produced amateur strip tease and explicit porn from the same period. The very existence of these films, found and collected in Australia, is evidence that they were produced locally, or smuggled in, by somebody at sometime and screened somewhere.

Then there is the documentary evidence of the distribution and exhibition of pornographic films, which I shall present chronologically. The earliest complaints about obscene films, leading to police investigation and prosecution, concerned soft-core rather than hard, and Mutoscope²² rather than projected films. In April 1901, a citizen wrote to the Lord Mayor of Sydney complaining of the pictures on show at a Mutoscope Picture Show at the Haymarket with titles including "Living Beauties Special, no children allowed. 12 acts", and "Harem Beauties". That same month the Honorary Secretary of the Sydney University City

Lads' Club presented to the Lord Mayor a "Report on Pictures Exposed in Belmore Markets" asserting that a Mutoscope operator was "pandering to the lower tastes & instincts of the public" by displaying "coarse & suggestive" pictures of nudes. While a sign on the display declared "*positively no children* are allowed to see them", the show was well patronised by boys between twelve and seventeen. The City Council took counsel from the Police, who did not find the films illegal, and the matter was dropped.²³ There were further complaints about Mutoscope exhibitions over the years, with a Council official indicating in 1908 that "these exhibitions are strictly under surveillance of the police, who never fail to prosecute when circumstances warrant".²⁴

During the same period, Melbourne police assessment of obscenity was more sensitive. A Mutoscope exhibitor, Frederick Wilson, was arrested for "having obscene pictures in his possession" and exhibiting them for gain. Police seized four reels: *The Temptation of St Anthony*, *Why Marie Blew the Light Out*, *Peeping Tom*, and *Behind the Scenes*. The offence was proven, largely because the wrong sort of people had been allowed to look at the show, with the Crown Law Prosecutor declaring that "[t]he worst feature of the place was that to enable children to look at the pictures a small platform for them to stand on had been built in front of the machine."²⁵ Wilson was fined £10, but the conviction was later quashed on appeal. Rather than face court on a similar charge, the Victorian Mutoscope Company pleaded guilty, was fined a nominal £2 and had its pictures destroyed.²⁶

During their investigations for the book *Australian Film 1900-1977*, Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper received a letter from a correspondent, reminiscing about his father who had opened a picture show in Melbourne in the early 1900s. He recounted that,

Two shows were given a day and the whole thing quite a failure financially. Ultimately certain pictures were obtained from Paris and shown exclusively to students only and in this way all the debts were paid and the show faded.²⁷

In November 1931, the Honorary Secretary of the Children's Cinema Council of Victoria complained that an indecent picture was being screened after midnight in suburban theatres to men only audiences.²⁸ The Collector of Customs responded that an investigating officer had learned that the obscene film was being exhibited in private homes but he had been unable to locate it. The Collector added that smuggling films into the country would be comparatively simple.²⁹

On 14 August 1944, Police and Customs officers raided the Rainbow Hall in Prahran, Victoria, where about 200 men were gathered. They had each paid £1 for supper and entertainment, with proceeds going to support a committee man's daughter in "The Jewish Queen Carnival". The entertainment consisted of nine "disgustingly obscene" films, including *Balloon Dancer*, *Streamlined Cuties* and *Strip Bridge*. Some had been smuggled in from overseas, some had been made at the Melbourne Nudists' Club.³⁰ The function's caterer was also the projectionist, who was subsequently fined £100 and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, which was suspended.³¹ Further investigations were hampered by a "reluctance or refusal on the part of various persons to give information",³² but they did eventually result in the seizure of another 60 obscene films and the prosecution of two other men, one of whom was a Sydney photographer. The Chief Censor was at pains to point out that, "[n]either the actors nor the persons concerned in the production and exhibition of these films were connected in any way with the Motion Picture Industry".³³

During the Second World War, there were occasional reports in newspapers that films that were "filthy from title to fade-out" were being shown in military camps, especially in Queensland where considerable numbers of American GIs were stationed. People in the legitimate movie industry swore they knew nothing about such screenings, but "there had been rumours".³⁴ Immediately after the war, in 1946, a Melbourne salesman was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for having made and screened a series of indecent films over a period of some 10 years, some at the clubrooms of the Victorian Amateur Cine Society. Documentation seized at the salesman's studio showed he had distributed these films for hire in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. When queried about this distribution, he indicated that "there were others in it besides himself".³⁵

Around the same time there was another little flurry of prosecutions of Mutoscope operators. By now, the peepshows were strictly a fun parlour entertainment which meant that their clientele was predominantly children. It also meant that the content of the films was merely titillating not hard core. Nonetheless, in 1948 police seized films and machines in both Glenelg, SA, and Manly, NSW. The Glenelg films were of "scantly clad women" and the exhibitor had been showing them for 13 years. Two of the six films seized in Manly were Australian made, and involved a local nudist.³⁶

Six years later, more locally made films were seized, and it is unclear whether they were hard core or not. A Sydney fitter was charged with exhibiting "'filthy' and 'utterly degrading'" films in his flat.³⁷ "Mixed

parties” paid five shillings a head to see the films some of which had been made in the flat, others were imported from America. The man was fined £100 and received a six months suspended sentence.³⁸

There is also evidence from the 1950s of a much more furtive production of amateur pornography, not designed for public screening. In 1952, a postal employee was arrested on charges of gross indecency with two other men at an Adelaide beach. Police searched his home and found an obscene movie of the three defendants.³⁹ The National Film and Sound Archive has in its collection a heterosexual film of similar nature. Made in the late 1950s-1960s, it is catalogued as “Amateur pornographic film featuring people wearing sunglasses”.⁴⁰ It is amateur footage of a very explicit sex party in which the fashion of the sunglasses worn by the performers is the only clue as to production date.

All amateur and commercially produced pornography was made on sub-standard gauge film (16, 9.5 and 8mm rather than the theatrical 35mm). Sub-standard or miniature films for home and amateur use were imported into Australia from their development in the early 1920s.⁴¹ Imported by companies with names such as Home Cinematograph Agencies and Home Recreations Ltd., as well as by reputable photographic companies, they were primarily used for advertising, educational and religious purposes, but also included serials and shorts for theatrical release, and some home recreational screening. While Commonwealth Censorship was primarily concerned with 35mm theatrical release feature films, these miniatures were routinely examined, with small but increasing numbers rejected or subjected to cuts.⁴² The Censors later reported that privately imported and owned 16mm and 8mm films, many “poorly produced” and containing “objectionable material”, increased in number from the 1930s into the 1960s.⁴³

After World War Two the popularity of 8mm among tourists led to a dramatic expansion in the number of miniature films brought into the country, creating a bottleneck in censorship examination. In his 1952 Report the Chief Censor vigorously defended the routine examination of such privately owned films, “[o]wing to the number of attempted imports of most objectionable types of films by private individuals”.⁴⁴ But Customs and Censors were faced with a flood: in 1955 almost 10,000 miniature films were imported, half of which were private films taken by travellers. All were examined and nine rejected.⁴⁵ The consequent tirade of complaints about delays led to the regulations being changed in 1956. Thereafter, only periodical checks and only of commercially produced films were made.⁴⁶

In the period leading up to the discontinuation of examination of private films, there are three newspaper reports of attempted smugglers being caught with obscene films in their luggage, in 1952 and 1953. One smuggler claimed the film was evidence to support a divorce case,⁴⁷ another had declared a number of films but had hidden two other reels in his luggage⁴⁸, the third simply admitted he should have destroyed the film.⁴⁹ Unknown numbers of such films evaded censorship through successful smuggling and disguised as tourist travel footage. In 1962, Customs officers in the States forwarded for examination by the Censorship Board a considerable number of commercially produced 8mm and 16mm “stag” films. “These are poorly produced films, invariably exhibiting girls stripping. Of 289 examined, 50 were rejected as indecent.”⁵⁰ These were the types of film presumably involved in the next incident.

In December 1961, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Police and Customs officers had raided a Chinese restaurant in Haymarket, Sydney, and seized “enough obscene films to fill a utility truck”. The men controlling the racket were alleged to have smuggled the negatives in from Japan, then made numerous prints for distribution interstate. The Chinese restaurant itself held screenings of the films before it opened for meals, charging patrons five shillings to watch an hour’s screening. The newspaper commented specifically that these audiences included teenagers.⁵¹

Five years later, in 1966, the *Sunday Mirror* carried a bold headline on page 2: “Sex scandal in city hall to be probed”.⁵² The story involved a community hall in Surry Hills owned by the Sydney City Council, which had been hired by a social club from an Eastern Suburbs hotel for their trophy night. About 150 men attended the event. During the evening pornographic films were projected, followed by a live strip show by two young women. The *Mirror* reported that it had received complaints: “[a] number of men who saw the films and the girls later professed to be disgusted”, and “[i]t is known that the wives of a number of men of the party are furious over the incident”. The Town Clerk investigated and received reports from the cleaner on duty, the secretary of the social club, and a city alderman who had been present in an official capacity. Although there was a film projector in the hall positioned for the showing of films, nobody saw anything. The investigator reported that there was “no reason to doubt the statements tendered”, that “the Council does not stand to achieve anything by pursuing the matter further”, but that in future, “as a precautionary measure” all people hiring Council halls would be questioned about the nature of the entertainment planned including whether films were to be shown, and if so, “what is the subject thereof”.⁵³

My final stories come from the 1970s, a time of transition in both technologies of exhibition and discourses of pornography. In 1974, the porno chic movie *Deep Throat*,⁵⁴ which had screened in mainstream theatres across America, was rejected by the Film Censorship Board of Review as “hard core pornography”. The following year, when a distributor sought permission to import the edited soft-core version, he complained that the banned original is being shown several times each evening in the Kings Cross area where the public are freely admitted and has been screening there for at least the past 6 months... The writer has knowledge of many screenings having taken place in licensed clubs, and an unofficial survey in the Sydney area alone indicates that at least 25% of all licensed clubs in the Sydney metropolitan area have shown this film to their members. The film was also circulating widely in country areas and was, in fact, being shown at a Leagues Club in a large NSW country town while [he] was visiting there.⁵⁵

The NSW Minister for Police subsequently indicated that at least two 16mm copies of the film had been confiscated and destroyed and their exhibitors prosecuted, but he admitted that “because screenings of the film are being conducted in a clandestine manner, detection is, understandably, difficult”.⁵⁶

From the mid-1970s, inspectors from the Sydney City Council and police from the Licensing Division began reporting that adult shops were setting up in Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and elsewhere, with some screening 8mm pornographic films in small adjoining exhibition rooms, while others had coin-in-the slot video (“movie cassette”) machines on the premises.⁵⁷ From this date, semi-public screenings of pornographic films began to be taken over by private viewings of videos.

It is only after this that pornography and its relation to violence against women became an issue for Australian feminists and other community groups, in the wake of earlier concerns in America.⁵⁸ In 1980, two feminists undertook an investigation of pornography in Sydney. They reported finding “films and video cassettes showing sadism, rape, torture, and bestiality” for private sale, but

we discovered that what you can walk off the street and see (running from 10a.m. to midnight except at Kings Cross where they start and finish a little later) is 4 or 5 very short movies or two longer ones interrupted, completely arbitrarily, by at least one live “erotic act”. The shorter movies make no pretence at having a story line... Most of the movies simply depict frenzied sexual activity... [N]ot unexpectedly, in all but the theatre which was showing soft core pornography, we were the only women present.⁵⁹

What is significant about this somewhat long recitation of incidents is that it is not a selection. It is exhaustive. That is all I can find. I have scoured the records of the Commonwealth Film Censor and the Film Board of Review, the NSW Police Department, the Sydney Central Magistrates Court, NSW Theatres and Public Halls Licensing Board, the Sydney City Council, the NSW Police and Justice Museum, the National Film and Sound Archive, the National Library's Trove database of digitised newspapers, and the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University. The records relating to pornographic film deposited in and retained by these various repositories are seriously incomplete. NSW Vice Squad records are closed for 100 years. The Index Books for Sydney Magistrates Court depositions have all been lost "in flood or fire" apart from a sole book, covering the years 1977 to 1982. Indexes of Customs' registration of imported films cover only 1917 to 1935. The Film Board of Review papers of chairman Stanley Hawes deal only with the 1970s, and other Censorship Board papers do not seem to exist. The National Library's Trove database of digitised (and hence searchable) newspapers stops at 1954, and covers a selection of metropolitan and regional papers, but not urban scandal-sheets like *Truth*. While the National Film and Sound Archive has a small collection of pornographic films, until recently it had a policy of refusing such donations, arguing that they fell outside its collecting mission.

My extensive searches have unearthed this very tiny amount of evidence. What patterns can be discerned in the substantive accounts; what is the meaning of there being so few records at all?

Between the 1910s and the 1970s, film production in Australia was very limited, and the local production of pornographic film was infinitesimal. Most films screened during those years were in 35mm and 16mm format, imported in hard-to-hide large cans by a relatively small number of import and distribution companies. Under these conditions, Australian Customs Censorship worked effectively to keep out cinematic pornography. There was very little public concern about this censorship compared with regular protests against the censorship of paper-based materials—books, magazines and photographs.⁶⁰ No matter what the medium, however, such protests were primarily concerned with artistic material. There was also some little support or tolerance for material that, while not artistic, was amusingly vulgar and harmless enough as part of lower class and ritualised masculine entertainment. In the case of moving pictures across the century, this seems to have involved representations of women disrobing or being nude.

At issue in community protest about pornography was whether the line between obscene and acceptable (artistic or harmlessly vulgar) material

was being properly drawn, and whether sufficient protection was in place for people deemed vulnerable (women, indigenous people, children). The historic space across which these lines shifted—between art and obscenity, and harmless vulgarity and filthy smut—constituted a liminal zone in which social values were debated. In general, there was considerable tolerance of and lack of concern about people's interest in materials of this zone. When the private tolerance of raised eyebrows moved on to public protest, the broad community became more actively involved. Whenever there was a public flurry about whether or not a particular item was pornographic, some would condemn it without personal knowledge; but there would also be long queues of people seeking to read or see it in order to make up their own minds, or to be legitimately titillated by a not yet or no longer pornographic work.⁶¹

There was no question of properly drawn lines when it came to obvious trash and filth. Nobody ever protested against clearly obscene material being censored. Soft core material might be liminal, hard core was not. The men's groups that in other countries constituted a possible audience for pornographic film exhibition—sporting clubs, returned servicemen's associations—might hover in the liminal zone but were intolerant of illegal behaviour. The evidence indicates that across the twentieth century there were a very few Australians who were interested in hard-core pornographic film and were willing to risk what they acknowledged as fully justified prosecution to obtain, exhibit and view it. Only a tiny number were involved in very limited underground distribution and exhibition networks governed by a criminal code of silence.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, all this changed. New marketing of technologies put the capacity to make and view sexual material into the hands and homes of ordinary people, beyond the ability of Customs to censor and the police to conduct raids. New discourses of sex gave legitimacy to previously unacceptable behaviour and representations. The liminal zone of debate over social values shifted to cover what was once generally recognised as intolerable, most clearly manifested in very substantial changes to censorship law from 1972. It is from this period that our collective memory of pornographic films emerges.

I began with a question about the extent of screenings of pornographic films in Australia during the first eight decades of the twentieth century, before video and the internet made pornography legal and accessible. My answer must be that there were very few.

Jill Julius Matthews (Australian National University)

Notes

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- ³ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
- ⁴ Jill Julius Matthews, "The Lust of the Eye and the Thrill of the Flesh," *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 5 (2) (August 2011): 193-202.
- ⁵ Linda Williams (ed), *Porn Studies* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
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- ⁸ Joseph-Marie Lo Duca, *L'Erotisme au Cinéma*, 3 Vols, (Paris: Pauvert, 1958, 1960, 1962); Michael Milner, *Sex on Celluloid* (New York: Macfadden, 1964); William Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema* (New York: Penthouse/Ballantine, 1973); Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema. American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* (New York: Praeger, 1974); Al Di Lauro and Gerald Rabkin, *Dirty Movies: An Illustrated History of the Stag Film*, (New York: Chelsea House, 1976).
- ⁹ Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); David Flint, *Babylon Blue: An Illustrated History of Adult Cinema* (London: Creation Books, 1998); Eric Schaefer, "Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!" *A History of Exploitation Films 1919-1959* (Durham: NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Eric Muller and Daniel Faris, *Grindhouse: The Forbidden World of "Adults Only" Cinema* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996); Jack Stevenson (ed) *Fleshpot: Cinema's Sexual Myth Makers and Taboo Breakers* (Manchester: Headpress, 2002); Dave Thompson, *Black and White and Blue: Adult Cinema from the Victorian Age to the VCR* (Toronto: ECW, 2007); Jeffrey Escoffier, *Bigger Than Life: The History of Gay Porn Cinema from Beefcake to Cheesecake* (Philadelphia PA: Running Press, 2009); Jack Stevenson, *Scandanavian Blue: The Erotic Cinema of Sweden and Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2010).
- ¹⁰ For Australia, the definitive work is Ina Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978).
- ¹¹ For example: Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex 1790-1920* (New York: Norton, 1992); Katherine Snyder, "A Paradise of Bachelors," *Prospects*, 23 (1998): 247-284; Howard Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Sub-Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Jay A. Gertzman, *Bootleggers and Smuthounds: The Trade in Erotica 1920-1940* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

¹² See, for example: Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Lisa Z. Sigel, *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England 1815-1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Nicole Canet, *Maisons Closes 1860-1946: Bordels de Femmes, Bordels d'Hommes* (Paris: Galerie Au Bonheur du Jour, 2009).

¹³ Gertrud Koch, "The Body's Shadow Realm: On the History of Pornographic Films: Cinema in Brothels, Brothels in Cinemas, Cinemas in Place of Brothels", Translated by Jan-Christopher Horak and Joyce Rheuban, *October*, 50 (Autumn 1989): 3-29. A slightly different translation by Jan-Christopher Horak is found in *Jump Cut*, 35 (1990): 17-29.

¹⁴ Curt Moreck, *Sittengeschichte des Kinos*, 1956, quoted in Gertrud Koch, "The Body's Shadow Realm", *October*, 4-6.

¹⁵ "1907, October 8—Premiere of 'El Sartorio'."

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¹⁶ Michael Achenbach and Paolo Caneppele, "Born Under the Sign of Saturn: The Erotic Origins of Cinema in the Austro-Hungarian Empire", *Griffithiana*, 65 (1999), 129.

¹⁷ Di Lauro and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*.

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¹⁹ Jill Julius Matthews, "Blue Movies in Australia: A Preliminary History", *NFSA Journal*, 2 (3) (2007): 1-12.

²⁰ *Free Ride* (other title, *Grass Sandwich*), 16mm film, Bloomington-Kinsey Institute Library (B-Kinsey) 001652.

²¹ *A Free Ride*, c.1925, National Film and Sound Archive (NSFA), Canberra: Title No.8010. Also *A Free Ride [Fragment]*, c.1925, NSFA: Title No.244861. There is also a fragment in another collection in-process.

²² The Mutoscope was an early peep-show device using reels of sequential photographic images on cards rather than film. Invented in America in 1895, it was soon known in England as the "What the Butler Saw" machine. The machines were introduced into Australia in 1903. Chris Long, "Australia's First Films", Parts 1, 2 and 18, *Cinema Papers* 91 (January 1993), 92 (March 1993), with Bruce Klepner 109 (April 1996).

²³ "University Lads Club. Alleged Exhibition of Indecent Pictures, Belmore Market", City of Sydney Archives (COS): Town Clerk's Correspondence, 1901/1289.

²⁴ Comptroller of Assets and Stores, "Indecent Pictures Shown in Belmore Markets", COS: Town Clerk's Correspondence, 1908/2162.

²⁵ "Mutoscope Pictures", *Argus*, 12 March, 1904, 16, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article10603054>.

²⁶ "Mutoscope Pictures", *Argus*, 16 April, 1904, 18, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article10314862>.

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- ²⁷ Letter from Harold A. Brewster to Ross Cooper, 13 August 1968: NFSA Title No. 0602036, Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, Papers relating to Individual Personalities and Organisations, Item 47.
- ²⁸ “An Indecent Picture”, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 20 November, 1931, 6. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article61066159>.
- ²⁹ “Indecent Pictures”, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 21 November, 1931, 11. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article61063786>.
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- ³² Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Customs and Excise, Commonwealth Film Censorship Board, Report for 1946.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ “Quiz on Obscene Films in Camps”, *Courier-Mail*, 13 April, 1945, 3. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48941066>.
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- ³⁶ “Peepshow Films Seized”, *The Mail* (Adelaide), 3 January, 1948, 3.
- ³⁷ “Indecent Film Showing”, *Canberra Times*, 4 December, 1954, 4, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2899132>.
- ³⁸ “Man Fined £100 Over Films”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December, 1954, 6, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18458377>.
- ³⁹ “Three Committed”, *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 24 July, 1952, 5. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47428356>.
- ⁴⁰ [*Amateur pornographic film featuring people wearing sunglasses*], c.1955, NFSA: Title No.47821.
- ⁴¹ 17.5mm was introduced in 1915; 9.5mm in 1922; 16mm in 1923, and 8mm in 1932.
- ⁴² Registers of Applications made under the Customs (Cinematograph Films) Regulation, 1922-27, NAA: SP348/1.
- ⁴³ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Customs and Excise, Commonwealth Film Censorship Board, Report for 1962-63.
- ⁴⁴ “Private film censorship”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March, 1953, 1. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18362625>.
- ⁴⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Customs and Excise, Commonwealth Film Censorship Board, Report for 1955.
- ⁴⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Customs and Excise, Commonwealth Film Censorship Board, Report for 1956.
- ⁴⁷ “Had Obscene Movie in Possession”, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2 August, 1952, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article63551871>.
- ⁴⁸ “Obscene films cost him £100”, *Argus*, 8 July, 1953, 7. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article23254580>.
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⁵² "Sex Scandal in City Hall to be Probed", *Sunday Mirror*, 3 July, 1966, COS: Town Clerk's Department, 3615/66.

⁵³ "Anthony Doherty Community Centre and Recreation Hall, Crown St. Newspaper article regarding alleged lewd behaviour and screening of pornographic films", COS: Town Clerk's Department, 3615/66.

⁵⁴ *Deep Throat* (USA: Gerard Damiano, 1972).

⁵⁵ Stanley Hawes Collection, Box 16, Film Censorship, Films Board of Review: "Deep Throat", NFSA: Title No.358643.

⁵⁶ John L Waddy, NSW Minister for Police and Services, to the Hon. K E Enderby, Attorney General of Australia, 26 Sept 1975, Stanley Hawes Collection, Box 16, Film Censorship, Films Board of Review: "Deep Throat", NFSA: Title No.358643.

⁵⁷ NSW Records Office, Series 15318, Files relating to Theatres and Public Halls Licence Applications, Licensing of premises used for public entertainment and public meetings; NSW Records Office Series 3427, Depositions [Central Court of Petty Sessions] 1977-1982; COS, Series 34, Town Clerk's Department Correspondence Files.

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⁵⁹ Wills and Stevens, "Women and Pornography", 3.

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