

Alissar Chidiac:

I got bored with traditional male left wing ways of working. Meetings, flyers, conferences. Women's street theatre was where it was at, and that started me in what we now call art, cultural action, community cultural work. So, that's where the passion was. And I still do have a love for telling stories in public spaces, and non-traditional sites of making work.

Justine Youssef:

Thank you Alissar, that was amazing. Can you break down your experiences with the 1978 Mardi Gras protests, and how it related to other political and cultural activations at the time as well?

Alissar Chidiac:

In '76, '77, '78, there was a whole landscape that was not only about the Gay Solidarity Group. Gay Solidarity Group was there, at City University there was a group called Ad Hoc, but they sound really daggy now. [inaudible 00:01:06] There was a very active feminist group. On City Road, there was Tin Sheds, where they printed posters. And people made multi screen posters that are now in institutions and galleries, but they were on the streets. They were on our fridges. They were on the walls. Right?

Alissar Chidiac:

So, you have a whole culture of anarchists, art, feminist politics around the Tin Sheds. You have women's publishing, you had ... there were things that came after '78, but you had networks that worked. Socialists, anarchists, communists, feminists. In Redfern, you The Settlement, which is a really strange name, when you think of it. But something in The Block in Redfern, called The Settlement, where a lot of activities happened with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal families. You had many, many intersections.

Alissar Chidiac:

Imagine a world where you don't have, not only no social media, but not even email, not even mobile phones. So, how did we know to go out in the middle of the night, when they were transporting Uranium Yellowcake for White Bay, through our suburbs? How did we know? Word of mouth. Word of Mouth. So, something like the 24th of June 1978, there had been marches before that for gay liberation. There've been years of marches for International Women's Day, which had a really strong focus on sexuality as well. So you've got many movements coming together.

Alissar Chidiac:

On the morning of ... Enoch you mentioned the night. On the morning of the 24th of June 1978, there was a march from Town Hall. I've spent so many years marching down that bloody bit of asphalt from Town Hall, to wherever.

Alissar Chidiac:

But there was a march in the morning. And we have got black and white photos from that morning where, that was the morning protest, that was in solidarity with Stonewall Riots from a few years before. So, we did have a whole network of political activism happening.

Alissar Chidiac:

There was a march in the morning, and then you had a march at night. Now, I luckily did not get arrested. It's really funny how your memory plays with yourself. Do I remember the real thing, or do I remember a film, or do I remember photos? What am I remembering? If I really think about it, I do really remember being in Kings Cross. Those really old fashioned boxlike paddy wagons, and I remember metal garbage lids flying. I think that's my main real memory. I was running, running, running with people I didn't know.

Alissar Chidiac:

What happened afterwards, was really what became Mardi Gras. We came to use the word in the '80's, far more than now.

Alissar Chidiac:

So many people were brutalized, so many people were arrested, that you had this duty. You spent days, and weeks, and months, to protest outside the courthouses. And you had really violent episodes outside the courthouses with police, protesting against the charges. And so, I do have photos, where you've got these little banners that say, "Drop the charges". And it's like, if I want to talk about broader politics ... I'll wind this up in a second ...

Alissar Chidiac:

One of the most familiar chants that I can remember ... see if you remember the end, "Stop police attacks, on Gays, Women and Blacks." It was the most common chant. Now, okay, these days we'd call that intersectional politics, wouldn't we? Then, "Stop police attacks on Gays, Women and Blacks." It was a real thing, in terms of ... they were separate movements, but they are movements that came together.

Alissar Chidiac:

Sydney, 42 years later, is far more segmented. Everyone with their own group, their own network, their own mob. There are other cities in Australia that are not like we are in Sydney. But, in the 70's, 80's people were far more connected.

Alissar Chidiac:

We also had a lot of fun. I can remember so many marches, whether it was International Women's Day, or whatever, where we just ... everyone was out all the time. We were going to each other's marches. And you knew people, you talked to people, it was all word of mouth. One stupid chant I can remember, when we'd go past Hyde Park and St Mary's ... and I used to love this, because that's my religious family's background. You'd say, 'Dykes and fairies hate St Mary's.'

Alissar Chidiac:

Really? What a stupid thing to say. I am not going to apologize for that stupid sounding language. But I just wanted to use this ... we had fun. It was like dancing and protesting, and you really believed you were going to change things. The more you marched, the more you believed things were going to change.

Justine Youssef:

Did you notice ... At what point did you find that things shifted? Like, culturally within that landscape? And, did you notice things changing as well? You believed that you could change things but could you see shifts in the social fabric? In the political landscape?

Alissar Chidiac:

I think that the bigger question ... there's so many shifts that I could refer to. Like, when HIV and AIDS hit people in the early, mid-eighties, that was a huge shift in terms of ... there was a sense of mourning, locally as well as internationally.

Alissar Chidiac:

Like I said to your question, in so many ways, there's shifts and there's shifts. Enoch started by referencing laws that changed. Those laws that criminalized so-called homosexuality, affected men. It's like there was this sense of all women are invisible, and we're not criminalized in terms of our sexuality.

Alissar Chidiac:

But, in the '80's, men were being beaten up. This sport was called 'The bashing'. I'm not going to reference violence, as you've said, "Be careful how you talk about this." But, there are many, many kinds of shifts that I could reference. But, maybe by the mid 80s ... I mean I stopped caring about Mardi Gras by the mid '80s, seriously.

Alissar Chidiac:

I care about Mardi Gras, or the broader movement when something hits me in the heart and the guts. That's why in the late '90's, the early 2000's where they were Arab queers marching, "Hey, this is exciting, I'll drop in for that." When there was a 30-year anniversary, a 40-year anniversary, "Yeah, I'll have a reunion with the old friends." But, I haven't cared about Mardi Gras for a very long time. But it still has meaning for a lot of people.

Justine Youssef:

Yeah, completely. I feel like I threw Enoch under the bus with our introduction to what we've heard happened in '78. I guess it speaks to what is documented, what's erased from history, what gets passed on, who gets centered in these conversations. So, thanks for making our understanding of that really complex and nuanced.

Alissar Chidiac:

Yeah, and in '78, I knew women of color. I knew Aboriginal women who were on that march. But you know what? In the '70's some Aboriginal women I knew, didn't know their heritage at that time. They learned later of their ancestry.

Alissar Chidiac:

In those days, you knew you were a WOG, you knew you were a person of color, but that was home. That was what you hid. You separated that. Total schizophrenia. You boxed your life very differently.

Justine Youssef:

Thank you so much Alissar. I just wanted to reference this image that you've shared with us, I think it was from International Women's Day, or the 1982 Women and Arts Festival. And I wanted to maybe hear about your ideas around how this movement and maybe others ... I mean we had a conversation about how these movements become corporatized or normalized, halted by more extractive structures. And I guess, I would like to hear your thoughts around this or anything you might want to point out from this image.

Alissar Chidiac:

There's nothing particularly special about this photo, except that it is outside of the Arts Gallery of New South Wales', mainstream, white cultural institution in Sydney. And this is a protest ... not actually International Women's Day. It was a protest by women activists and women artists, about the lack of representation of women in the arts.

Alissar Chidiac:

And so, it's like, "Okay, it's been a public ... it's taking over ..." And if I look at that photo, I recognize who some people are, in terms of artists and activists. And we had a furry black dog, as there is here tonight, on the far left as well. So, you know, you can't have a feminist, political event without your furry friend like right here.

Alissar Chidiac:

We do notice that, things that were radical in the '60's, and the 70's, and the 80's, become common language. And on some level that is a really important shift. International Women's Day used to be a really radical ... thousands and thousands of women marching on the streets of Sydney. Now, Google celebrates International Women's Day.

Alissar Chidiac:

There are very mainstream middle-class ways that things can get accommodated, assimilated, co-opted, but on some levels, there is positivity, on many levels, in terms of ... there never used to be SBS TV, and never used to be NITV. I'm sounding like a grandparent, right now, aren't I?

Alissar Chidiac:

But things that were perhaps radical, in fact there's a difference between re-forming something, and revolutionizing something. So, there's been a lot of things that have been accommodated, in our language about gender, sexuality, women, labor, class, health. A lot of things are being shifted in language.

Alissar Chidiac:

But it doesn't mean the structures of power have changed. It's a bit ... capitalism is very good at doing that. It's like, it's dressed up. But now, it's like ... I will listen to you very soon, when I keep quiet, about what are the things that are raw and radical and important now. It's a never-ending need to speak back to power.

Enoch Mailangi:

Thank you for that. We're going to speak to Ray now. And then ...

Ray Delaney:

Help me sit the ...

Alissar Chidiac:

Yes.

Enoch Mailangi:

And just before we speak with Ray, we are just going to share a video link of the first First Nations floats at Mardi Gras in 1988.

Ray Delaney:

Yeah, it was the first ...

Enoch Mailangi:

We will find the video, but this is one of the photos of that float.

Ray Delaney:

Yeah, and this was taken in 1988. A couple of us ... I just remember getting a phone call, and it was in '88, ... we just felt the need to do this at the time, that was also because of the anti-bicentennial 200th anniversary of White Australian History in this country.

Ray Delaney:

We just needed to have our voice be in at the Gay and Lesbian ... as it was just known then, Gay and Lesbian Community of Sydney. And we really needed to do this float, and just to have our say, and just to show that we were here. That we're much a part of the community as well.

Ray Delaney:

But also that year, I remember, there was a bunch of us women who used to hang out together, plus we had the best girls. And we could also ... We also, unfortunately, had a lot of violent interaction with other white lesbians on the scene. And, that was really nasty.

Ray Delaney:

Because we remember, the cops used to come in and pick up their payment. Because, we were wondering what they were doing behind the bar. Two of them would come in, and ... they stopped by to pick up their payment, and I think that that used to happen with other gay bars too, where they used to have to pay the police to leave them alone and that.

Ray Delaney:

I just remember that, especially at Neils, it was just sort of hanging out there, and all this fucking racism, but only towards us Indigenous lesbians. But I've been really trying to figure out where they were coming from with their anger, and I just couldn't understand it. So, but anyway.

Ray Delaney:

I was always one of those people who would snapback. And unfortunately, I really ... that was a great float, great people that worked on it, and unfortunately, most of them have now passed away. It's all right, we're not used to being emotional.

Justine Youssef:

Yes of course, this brings up so much. Thank you so much for being open to us here, thank you for sharing these images as well, and the video as well.

Ray Delaney:

Yeah, I always thought that it was [inaudible 00:16:33]. There was only one other person that survived, and the others ... I didn't mind but I always wondered why I was still living. But, I think our history is so important within the Gay and Lesbian Community. And that's just a little background of this past generation. I had a white, Dutch, full on Christian family that brought me up and eventually, I did get back to meet my family.

Ray Delaney:

And that would freak me out. But anyway, I'm getting back to being ... '88 was a really great year for me. That's when I started to identify ... I was really proud to be lesbian. And I didn't care what both families thought of me. I really stood my ground and that. And to this day I would, if you want to identify with the label ... I'm sick of these labels ... I'm non-binary, I'm not a woman that likes ... I don't mind wearing a bit of make-up, but I don't like dresses. Men won't buy me dresses. My foster mum always used to try and get me to wear dresses and pay me. And then I'd wear a dress.

Ray Delaney:

And, I'm still keeping contact with my white family, as well as my black family. But, they're still stubborn, I just don't mention certain things. Like at time, half of us, not me ... I was working at the time ... the rest, they were all students. Particularly the women I hung out with, a lot of them came from inter-state. That's what you did, you left your community. If you identified as gay, lesbian, trans, whatever, you left your community, and we either went to Melbourne or Sydney.

Ray Delaney:

So, I've lived in Sydney for 30 years now, I'm just really grateful ... everything is not perfect, you know, we're still ...

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Ray Delaney:

... is not perfect, you know? We'll still always be fighting. There's never going to be a perfect day. And so, you young people just keep fighting, just be yourself and you don't let anyone try and tell you how to be. You just be yourself. And if people don't like you, or how you look, or for who you are, just tell them to fuck off.

Ray Delaney:

And now that I'm older, I'm a lot more appreciative of my friends that have made it a bit easier, and they're as much family to me as blood family or blood relatives. And so after... are we going to show the video?

Justine Youssef:

Yeah, I'm just about to organize the video hook up.

Ray Delaney:

Okay.

Enoch Mailangi:

I think moving forward from the first First Nations float, are there other memorable events or moments that you would like to talk to?

Ray Delaney:

Yeah, I mean when I first moved down, I stayed with my cousin in Glebe, when it was really cheap to live in Glebe. And Glebe was the best. Glebe was like lesbian-ville.

Dj Gemma:

Our home.

Alissar Chidiac:

Glebe and Leichhardt.

Ray Delaney:

And then my cousin took me to Ruby Red's and there was one other Black, Indigenous woman. And she is still alive today, thank God. And I just thought Ruby Red's was the best. I used to go there four nights a week and you could get any fun there. I shouldn't start talking about stuff like that.

Alissar Chidiac:

It was smaller than this place

Ray Delaney:

Yeah it was smaller than this place, and you went up the stairs, and they had a female bouncer. You remember Erica? She was great and decent. A few years after that I met Dj Gemma, because on Mardi Gras night we used to all go down to Dj Gemma's house in Darlinghurst and party. And then I remember that we all used to walk up and watch the parade.

Dj Gemma:

That's a great memory.

Ray Delaney:

Yeah. So. Did you want to ask a question (Yul)?

Yul Scarf:

Yeah. That float. I just want to hear more about the making of that, because I know that you all struggled to be up the front?

Ray Delaney:

We had a bit of a tiff with Mardi Gras board about being up the front. We really wanted to lead the parade. And did we? Na. That was years and years later they let us lead.

Ray Delaney:

But also that will all come out next year; I'm doing a doco. I'm really looking forward to speaking to a few of the girls, catching up with them, and just getting their take on their experience. It's a pretty special thing. I think someone's actually got it in their house, that boat. It's a canoe. And so, you had everyone, there's Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks and I think it's Bligh, the other one.

Ray Delaney:

And also what's really special too is my sister was living in Sydney at the time, came in too and helped us out, even though she was straight. And they showed more of her there than me.

Ray Delaney:

Now, those costumes were a bastard to make, you know all the usual drama about costumes. And all the white young men, they were dressed up as convicts. I think there was about 20 of them that pulled the boat up through the parade, up the street. They volunteered to do that because they got it. They got the message. And we were all a bit freaked out thinking, they're not going to like this. But, no, it was well received. The feeling was pretty good.

Justine Youssef:

So this was the first First Nations float that was part of the parade from what I understand. Is that-



Ray Delaney:

Yeah

Justine Youssef:

And it was in the year of the bicentenary celebrations, and the reason that the parade float manifested in this way was to critique the arrival by boat and to critique the bicentenary celebration. Was that right?

Ray Delaney:

That's right. That year we went on a heap of demonstrations, went to Canberra, Brisbane and just did a heap of stuff and the activism and that was my first taste of politics. Because I really wanted to learn the truth, and I know my foster parents hid a lot of shit from me. Regarding my background and that, because they did it to protect me, but it didn't really.

Justine Youssef:

(Video changes) This isn't for us. Let's hop back to this image here. That is you up there?

Ray Delaney:

Yeah I was 24 then.

Justine Youssef:

And your part was I guess a sailer? Is that right?

Ray Delaney:

No, I didn't want to put on a costume. I just it didn't go well with me. I didn't like carrying stuff around. When you want to party, you don't want to carry all that around.

Justine Youssef:

I think one last question regarding this activation in this float. Can you maybe talk us through about what you remember from the organizing behind this? I think it was Josie -

Ray Delaney:

Yeah. There was Josie King, Janet Miller, but who spearheaded it was actually Malcolm Cole. He was dressed up there as Captain Cook. Most of us were students or working, and there was only a... we didn't realize there was actually... there's probably about 15 of us at the most, that used to get together and socialize together as well as... like that, because we had to. We had to for our own protection, because we had a hard time by the cops too, because the cops used to just, you know? The same story over and over again. But it was great to come together and to go, 'yeah, look, we've got to do this.' And hopefully maintain a visual for every year after that and for future generations, when they come out. And it is great.

Ray Delaney:

I have two little descendants in their late teens, that have just come out which is great. And they have said it is all because of me and so that is really great. I'm very proud of them. Because I've just told them, 'Just come out. Don't worry about what your family says.' You have just got to be yourself, you don't have to be what they want you to be.

Justine Youssef:

Thank you so much for trusting us with your stories.

Justine Youssef:

I think we can tie a conversation into what Dj Gemma has shared with us.

Justine Youssef:

I thought it might be nice to talk about the Women's For Survival group that you organized with. They had an office based in Chinatown. You work with them on activations around uranium mines, there was a story you have about a giant paper mache sculpture or a tampon. Do you want to talk to us about that sort of thing?

Dj Gemma:

Sure. Women were always very involved in all political movements, right through history. You look back and you go, 'wow, there they are again, there they are again, there they are again.'

Dj Gemma:

As much as we were very concerned about being gay and all the stuff around that, and all the human issues, we were very, very concerned about uranium. Back then uranium was, a very serious, and still is, an absolute threat to everyone. So, what the women did then, and this was before Priscilla, we organized all these buses to go across the desert from Sydney to Redcliffe, banners, children and women from all over Australia, to protest about the ships that were docked in Western Australia with uranium in them. The police were very heavy, okay, we had some serious injuries through all these protests, many jail terms, they had a jail that they had built in the desert that had no ceiling, so you had to deal with the sun.

Dj Gemma:

No newspaper ever reported all the stuff that happened ... All you saw was the motley crew, like Mardi Gras, motley crew. The people that went to Mardi Gras were the motley crew, nobody else wanted to go to the parade. You could just walk up there; there was no thousands of people. Nobody wanted to know about us. We were not 'in.' And lesos were at the bottom of the rung. We were at the bottom, bottom. Nobody wanted to know about lesos, we were the ugliest, the bottom of all the mob.

Dj Gemma:

It is such a different time, when I think about it now that I am talking, I'm feeling quite old. Because it feels like such a long time ago but those issues have never left, as we know. Mardi Gras was really relevant in the early '80s. Mardi Gras was really powerful, it had some serious people involved in changing things. But at every movement, International Women's Day, every movement, you get the next lot that wear suits, 'but they're also gay'. 'Oh but, I know we are kind of supposed to be similar but we are really different.'

Dj Gemma:

The suits came into Mardi Gras and started changing the initial way; that we were protesting. They wanted to become more subdued, and more in line with the government, and to be accepted. And I kind of get that but it started to become more and more conservative.

Dj Gemma:

And it used to be called the Gay Mardi Gras, and then the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras came in. I know that now the word 'queer' may not be acceptable, but back then for us, we just wanted to be called 'queer.' We wanted to be all inclusive, for us 'queer' we were retaking that name. We felt we were starting to get segregated and Mardi Gras started to become definitely more and more commercial. Which meant that they were toeing the line which meant that people like us were radical, and 'troubled'. "You are trouble, and you are trouble," and, "we can't have you, we can not have you, we can't have your voice." And we started to get really pissed off, because we are the people that set it up. We are all the people that started this. So, Mardi Gras event went through some big changes. We are sitting in an ANZ sponsored festival, which is an offense to someone like me who fought to never have these corporate companies come into our lives.

Dj Gemma:

In 1991 Mardi Gras became so conservative, in our view, that we decided to opt out of Mardi Gras and actually put on an alternative Mardi Gras, which caused a lot of problems. Not everyone was happy about that. "How dare you? How dare you split us up?" So I thought, "This is not the way we want to go, I don't want to talk government bodies. I don't want to ask for your fucking money. I don't want all this." We are supposed to be radical. We are supposed to fight, but we, so the group started to take us out of Mardi Gras.

Dj Gemma:

Women For Survival did actually survive until the late '90s I reckon. And then by that stage, things had changed so much that I think it dismembered itself. And we were all tired, people had ... we were so tired. And so I think it was just that. Eventually we just stopped paying rent in that room. I can't remember how it finished but I remember we moved out from there to Albion Street before ACON took it, that building there on the corner? And that was the last time Women For Survival existed.

Dj Gemma:

When you think back these were just people, there was no money involved. We couldn't ask for money that didn't exist. So it was actually done off their own backs. And to think that the computer is sitting there because they are going to switch it off. They're going to switch the phone off, they're going to switch the email off. How do we find each other? Because they're going to do it, and they're doing it, and we know that.

Dj Gemma:

So I think we need to remember, and we need to bring back all these memories for the next generation in order for us to find each other in ways. How are you going to find me? I mean, we didn't even have... like if you made a phone call back then and go, "let's meet on Tuesday at 11 o'clock at High Park" you would just do it. You'd remember it. It was not something... Because you need that in life, right? You would just remember that. You'd be like, 'Oh yeah Tuesday 11 o'clock. Blah blah blah.' Now you've got to look at your phone to remember anything.

Dj Gemma:

So, I believe that these movements that were created back in the day... and we need to always come back to the times that things are made. But sometimes we might look like we are really unsound and against you, against the next generation, or our voices seem to be really weird. We are not actually that different from each other. It's the same fight, we just have different names attached to it.

Dj Gemma:

And I think we need to find ways to find each other again, because they've got us. They know everything about us. They know what color hair... they know everything. They know what we eat. They actually do things that are made for us to fall into, the traps and I believe we fell into a lot of traps. We got more comfortable, we got more this, it was so sexy when we were illegal. I can't even tell you. It was hot.

Dj Gemma:

And the men walking around with the hankies which was the way you communicate what you were into, it was a very sexy thing. Oxford Street was very, very sexy. And it was a great place to go, because suddenly we had a place to go that was ours.

Dj Gemma:

And Ruby's which was a leso bar, on Crown Street, was great. We were there every night of the week, wearing pajamas, anything, doesn't matter. We were there all the time. Oxford Street was run by the bikies and the gay mafia, so it was actually really well run. The bikies would fuck the place up if you didn't pay them, of course, and gay mafia ran everything and everyone was happy. I think. Maybe.

Dj Gemma:

The leso bar, Dawn, who apparently is this golden Dawn, well she wasn't that perfect. So, Dawn was part of the gay mafia that ran The Imperial, the Newtown Hotel the Midnight Shift. You know the list goes on, right? Ruby's, Juliana, on the Junction, she had a lot of venues and a lot of money. The women's venues got nothing. We were the bottom rung, right? So, Ruby's was like this really shaggy bar that we really loved. And nobody else wanted to go there it was just us. Nobody wanted to know about us.

Justine Youssef:

Can you chat to us a little bit about the alternative Mardi Gras parties that you held (and still) and how they were a site to generate resistance, and performance, and other forms of cultural infrastructure as well?

Dj Gemma:

Yeah Okay. So, the first alternative Mardi Gras was a political movement. It wasn't actually, 'hey we are all putting on a party,' it was actually a political movement within the movement. We were fighting from within now, with each other. Which was a big concern, because Mardi Gras started to become, as I was saying, really, really conservative. And they would not let in radical floats in any more, and they were scared of having people that were [inaudible 00:35:48] away as it got more and more into the 90s.

Dj Gemma:

So we ran at the ball park across the road there was a golf club, and it used to be directly at the party so we went there to do it. And as much as we had a lot of people saying, "How dare you?" We managed to get 800 people who believed in it. And that in itself started a whole other way of thinking again. Like we had actually opened a whole other way like we don't have to come to this. This is all corporate now.

Dj Gemma:

And so the class issue I will come back to, because that issue actually underlies a whole lot of issues. So, the people on the frontline, and I have to say most of them were working class, the ones that took the blows, took the risks and a lot of Aboriginal women actually were on the frontline, for what it was, it's remember International Women's Day. And then we used to get told, as time started to progress and other people were coming in wearing suits that were coming into us and changing our radicalization going, 'that was a little too full on'. That was problematic. And all you can do is sit back and watch it. A lot of the time you are fighting within each other. You are actually looking at this going 'this doesn't look right. This is going to go down.'

Dj Gemma:

And then, for gay marriage thing. We were not into marriage; we didn't want to get married. We were going against the grain in society. Marriage for us represented the patriarchal systems that represented keeping the economy going.

Dj Gemma:

So for us it was very different time. And this is a very different time again. So, you can't really compare whether gay marriage is worth doing now or not. It's a different time. But back then it was seen as like 'nah, that is not us.' But somehow it was, right? There were some people saying 'that is us,' and some other people going 'well, we do not want that.'

Dj Gemma:

So, the alternative Mardi Gras was really about rethinking, 'where the hell are we going?' And how come we are marching now with the police in the march, marching with us, smiling at each other. How do I feel? I lived in paddy wagons. How do I feel. I went to jail. Why the fuck do I want to march with this cop here? The Liberal Party. Why the fuck do I want to march with them? What's going on here? Sure you could say, 'but isn't that a good thing? Look, they're finally with you.'

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Dj Gemma:

I don't know about that. I don't agree. I don't think they should be in it. I think ANZ, go fuck yourself. I think the whole thing should just go. I think the party should disappear, stop paying \$250 for a ticket. Street party take over the streets and that's it, we party together, right? For free. Done.

Justine Youssef:

So, for those of you who don't know, Gemma actually continues to run parties and club events to this day, mainly club events. One of which Beau performed in recently and also has an incredible wealth of, I guess, performance, activist ... a satirical practice that critiques all these questions that Gemma's kind of highlighted. And we'll bring up an image as well ...

Beau James:

I'll just grab a microphone. [crosstalk 00:38:58]. You go.

Justine Youssef:

I'm going to pull up some images and Enoch's got some questions for you too.

Beau James:

Yeah, sure. I'll just start by saying to women like Gemma and those women for me, were the women I sought out when I was younger. I grew up in Brisbane, Brisbane was very, very conservative at that time and even to be seen as a lesbian, let alone a butch lesbian, was hardcore. We were lucky enough to get some [inaudible 00:39:24] that did come Brisbane and those times they did come it was like, yes! It was great.

Beau James:

But from the moment I came out from my mother's womb, I knew that I had to take up space, I knew that I had to claim a space for the woman that I was and the woman that I still am today and I'm very proud of that woman.

Beau James:

We made a lot of noise. I can't remember a weekend when we didn't march about something. You know? Every weekend and the weekends when we did march, we'd all sit around, we didn't have tricky names, we were just the West End Lezzos. You know? We worked at Women's House. We'd sit around plotting the next thing or making our posters and sniffing the ink from your purple posters and stuff like that. And it's true.

Beau James:

But for me, and it still is, my performance has very much been based around pushing against that gender norm. I so do not connect with that, there is no connection there for me whatsoever and pushing against, and I don't want this to be a generalization of men because not all men are like that, I know some very beautiful, lovely men in the world. But this patriarchal system of privilege that the only way that I could find to get through it was through comedy. It was like throwing back in their faces

caricatures and sort of an anguished humor there, you know? Like yeah, here's a [inaudible 00:40:50] and they're all going, "Ah yeah, that's really funny", then all of a sudden slap them across the face with something really hard and going, you're actually fucked. You're fucked and you're [inaudible 00:40:58]. And then, hey, let's have a laugh again.

Beau James:

So bringing in that line, longing's a false sense of security. I spent many a time on the streets of Brisbane in physical punch-ups with men who could not, and I'm not a violent person, but there was a time in my 20s when I was very angry. Had any challenged me walking down the street just because I look a certain way or my masculinity threatens you, go home and fuck yourself. So, as Gemma said, it was built on constant fight, it was constantly reclaiming my values, women's marches. Rev. Nile coming and telling us that we were not allowed to have abortions. He has since been said, you look at him and say, well, what about the poor young girl who is raped, again, sorry for this if it's triggering for anyone, but is raped by her father and his response is, she shouldn't have sex out of marriage. You know, you're fighting against dick-knobs like that you just have no sense and it's just all about this power and masculinity that is vulgar and disgusting.

Beau James:

So those days, especially in Brisbane, we fought really hard. And I also climbed, learned to climb very well up on statues to hang banners. I was a statue climber. Hanging those banners and being on the front of the paper and getting arrested, constantly in the back of paddy wagons. And, "What are you arresting me for?", "Nothing but we'll hold you in the cells for the next eight hours while your friends are all outside, just because we can." "Oh, I need to piss", "Too bad". Sometimes you'd say, "I'll piss on the floor then", well, there's no escape, so then you kept in for an extra six hours. And your clothes are taken from you and stripped. So things were hard, things were hard.

Beau James:

But it made me go, "Fuck you" even more. "Don't even play that game with me, you haven't even touched the surface yet". So they were times of really participating in that, as Gemma said, we didn't have the internet but we had our communities, we knew where we all gathered and in Brisbane, especially West End and South Bank, we'd all gather. That's where we all were and that's where we hung out. We worked in a coffee shop on a Sunday morning where we'd discuss these issues, what are we going to do this weekend? What tricky banners are we going to make? What are these bits of cardboard that we got from the back of a shop and bits of dowel that we screwed them onto and stuff. I'm very proud of that and I still carry it very strongly in me today.

Beau James:

And as I said, it was always done through performance, throwing it back in their face, but just tricking them with that bit of comedy. Let's have a laugh about how you're not [inaudible 00:43:45] anyone.

Beau James:

This beautiful picture here was from Kooky this year. And that's me buried at the back there being a wombat. And again, this was us thinking about where we are, and the beautiful Emma May here who choreographed the whole thing, and these are the koalas and wombats and these are the animals and the spirits. And this year for us, it was really important, we'd just seen our Country burning because we hadn't taken care of it. And how do we bring that back? So this sort of ode to animals and our wildlife and Mother Nature, which was done to a beautiful song as well.

Beau James:

So I just wanted to put that image up there because it doesn't always have to be hardcore either. This was a very beautiful moment for Kooky and the Kooky spaces that are set up by Dj Gemma and her crew too, I don't think I've ever performed in a space where so much love is coming back at you. That feeling in the room of giving and taking and sharing. And it's for that responsibility. So that was a really lovely moment, so that's just a little picture of that. That's also two days into Mardi Gras, so we're looking a little bit crusty there.

Justine Youssef:

Yeah. Do we want to go to...

Beau James:

Look at the [inaudible 00:44:54] on that.

Justine Youssef:

Do we want to go to this image?

Beau James:

Yeah. So again, this image, coming back to Ray, when I first turned up to Sydney, the two places that I knew I could find my people, number one was Redfern with our community. Anyone who was Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Indigenous knew, when you came to Sydney, you went to Redfern because that's where you found your community, your people, and that's who you were proud of. And again, that's where those protests came out of. My heart still hurts to this today that what's happened to The Block now and the lack of protest and the very few protestors that stood there and went, "This is not right, this place is sacred." So that's another thing to fight. We sort of lost that fight for a minute.

Beau James:

The first Mardi Gras I did attend and again, not aware of, coming from Brisbane, so we'd see the program on TV, not aware of the corporate sponsorships and the things that went on. So I was very surprised when I first came here because the first float I went into was actually Dykes on Bikes and let's do it, let's make some noise and get our tits out. Got there, you're not allowed to get your tits out. I was like, "What? Are you serious? This whole thing has been built on that." Yet, again, men walking behind us with chests out and again, that's nothing against the men, that's against the fucking system. Like, what's the difference?



Beau James:

So that to me, first, was like, well, I won't go on another of those parades again. But I did ride the shit out of the bike that I had. So that was the first thing I thought, wow, that's really shit. Is that what this really is? Is that what everything that I've seen or everything that I believed was? And the great people I knew like Gemma, like "Wow, how are you guys even surviving or coping through that?"

Beau James:

So I didn't go on any parades for quite a while. There was another one I found which I did attend. I do, it's defending women in the community too, within the gay community that also have their own pressures, of not being gay because you're too pretty or you're not. We do have these silos within ourselves, which is really upsetting, we fight against our own mothers, why are you doing that?

Beau James:

But this one was my chance to go back and I had to really think about it. And it was through going back to the '88 bicentennial protest, I was asked to be on this float, this time to represent two different genders, not just gay and lesbian, I was asked to go on as transgender but I like to use the word gender affirming. So that was my place and we got the beautiful Malcolm Cole's costume back out, which for everyone who was on that float, and looking back at Ray and those who had marched before us and the reason why they had marched before us.

Beau James:

So it was a very very beautiful moment, there was a lot of consultation that went on with the family around that, and I believe at one stage, we nearly had Malcolm's twin brother wearing it. But it all got a bit too much for him as well. But again, the family granted us that moment to bring it out. And again, it was speaking up already because we knew what was coming this year in 2020. How many years ago was that? 30 years ago. And we are still, in two years time, going to celebrate...

Ray Delaney:

40.

Beau James:

Yeah.

Ray Delaney:

It's 40 years.

Beau James:

From your float, but from your float, that white colonial history in taking over our lands, invasion of our lands. So that was the other reason I hopped on that float. Hence why my performance stuff is so important, I can't speak with my mouth open, so I speak with my body and what I represent.

Beau James:

So for me, this was a great honor to be a part of this and follow Ray in the footsteps of you guys who created that moment. And it was very powerful and it was very strong. And we all got to the end of that parade and we felt every single one of those people that had walked before. And including before that first float and even that year, we actually led the parade but they wouldn't let us do a smoking ceremony. This year they've finally got their smoking ceremony. So we'd had to fight still within that system.

Beau James:

But even, I think it was before 1998, there was one year, I want to say '84 or '86, there was one lone man, last man who came, who walked down Oxford Street in the parade by himself carrying that Aboriginal flag to make everyone there remember whose land you're walking on. This space and who it belongs to. And again, so there were those moments. In '78 when that first riot happened, Aboriginal people that lived around that area, lots of them, when those batons came out and those police started fighting, the first people that came to the defense of those people were the Aboriginal people of that area. So they have always been there, even though their floats weren't there until later on.

Beau James:

And I say to you guys too, don't stop fighting. Fight every inch of it. Don't buy into it. Push against the machine. You guys are the next generation, you guys at the moment, we're passing the baton. Take it and run with it, and don't succumb to this norm. We want to bring it back to what it was, it was about people connecting, it's about sitting around and having these conversations and going, "What do you need? How can we all do this together and make a difference?"

Justine:

Thank you.

Beau James:

No worries.

Justine Youssef:

Thank you so much, Beau.

Enoch Mailangi:

Thank you, you've answered all of my questions before I could ask them ...

Beau James:

It's all good, enough from me.

Enoch Mailangi:

I think I will go to Yul Scarf from the Department of Homo Affairs. What was your role again, did you say?

Yul Scarf:

Officer name is Officer Cesar Central.

Enoch Mailangi:

So you were part of the DOHA action at this years' Sydney Mardi Gras, can you talk about your involvement?

Yul Scarf:

There's a few of us in the room that is from this Department of Homo Affairs. I'll give you a quick rundown first before we watch this. So we kind of grew out of a group of people, just a bunch of friends actually getting together, thinking about Australia's border politics and feeling frustrated. Like what you were saying, Alissar about marching down the same track of the street and feeling like particular modes of protest were not very activating.

Yul Scarf:

And so I wanted to pull it together, organize differently, and one officer, you know in 2018, we're thinking about this stuff and the Department of Home Affairs has just been invented and the Department of Immigration's gone, Manus Island's just been shut down without any plan or care. And it's also the 40th Mardi Gras. And the Liberal Party, they're celebrating, after this postal vote, they're celebrating what they have brought in [inaudible 00:53:03]. And they're going to march at the Mardi Gras and they're like, "Yeah! We've done it. Love us. Love us."

Yul Scarf:

Like what you were saying, Gemma too, for us, we're proud to be queers and we organize about our queerness, but not only our queerness. Our queerness is more than just our own affinities. And so, yeah, in 2018, with this Department of Home Affairs existing, we're like, "Okay, got it. We're Department of Homo Affairs and we've got our own jurisdiction, it's Mardi Gras. And we're going to turn back their float, we're going to turn back the Liberal Party float, and we're going to call out, in the Mardi Gras space, that there needs to be justice for refugees." While all the eyes are on Oxford Street, we want the conversation to [inaudible 00:55:11] because for us, that's not right.

Yul Scarf:

So yeah, so that was kind of how we began. That was our first action. And then this year, we've been thinking a lot about Gweagal & Bidjigal resistance, their call out for a big camp to happen in April this year in recognition of 250 years of resistance to colonization - thanks Justine - Because it's 250 years since Captain Cook first invaded Kamay and shot at the Gweagal people on his arrival. So that's been what we've been thinking about and we're like, Mardi Gras coming up again, Department of Home Affairs, let's go.

Yul Scarf:

Could I just say maybe while some of the Outwest Twenty10 people are leaving that it's a real pleasure to share this space.

Enoch Mailangi:

Could you maybe speak to sort of the role now of Mardi Gras?

Yul Scarf:

Yeah. Well, I think it's a real privilege to be in this room and to get a picture of something that begins without an audience, it's an active protest that demises into a corporate spectacle. But I think that we participate, still acknowledge the radical potential for Mardi Gras by engaging in it and we don't organize within Mardi Gras. But we see that there's really valuable organizing happening for radical groups using Mardi Gras, but that's not the way that--

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [00:57:04]

Yul Scarf:

--the way that we want to shift the conversation. We're still holding our belief in Mardi Gras, by interrupting it. You know? That's our way of saying, "We see the spirit in which this thing has begun and we want to honor that."

Recorded reporter:

What I think it is-

Justine Youssef:

So I might rewind this a little bit. This is the parade this year as a Liberal Party's float were making the way through.

Recorded reporter:

Here we have a Liberal Party travelling very closely behind what I think is a protest to the 250-year anniversary of the arrival of Captain Cook. 'Turn back the float', 'Wreck the Endeavour'. They are sending a clear message to Scono-

Yul Scarf:

So, the way that we organized ourselves this year was thinking about while all eyes are on Watson street, how do we draw the attention to this float that's two kilometers down the road. All right? Because that is the most significant story that we can help amplify. The way that we thought to do it was to talk about a replica boat, this replica Endeavour, by making a replica float. We made a replica Liberal Party float. We actually dressed up as the Liberal Party, and luckily enough we had a banner that they 'kindly donated' to us. That we would jam their messaging.

Yul Scarf:

We thought that, that was brilliant, because in case we couldn't manage to get into the parade right in front of the Liberal Party, at least we'd have our replica float and it would be great that that is what they are turning back. Luckily enough Liberal Party 'invited' us to walk in front of them. They did invite us. They did invite us, I'm sorry. We managed to get in front of them, but the replica Liberal Party float was able to provide the correct messaging for the real Liberal Party float. Was able to say, "Do you know what? Get this right. It's very, very, very complex."

Yul Scarf:

They were able to say, "We stand for violence and colonisation". What the actual Liberal Party float was saying was, "Hi, we're queers too and..."

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

"We're friends of the queers."

Yul Scarf:

Yeah. Yeah. That trap is the actual Liberal Party float, but we were able to have a banner and a few people walk in front of captain Cook and Scomo. Just making it clear what the values of that float was, and then the Department of Homo Affairs were there to go --

Recorded reporter:

What I think it is a protest to the 250-year anniversary to mark the arrival of Captain Cook. 'Turn back the float'. 'Wreak the endeavour'. --

Yul Scarf:

At this point when the focus leaves us and goes back on the Liberal Party, that's when some, a few people from The Department were arrested and that wasn't televised. I guess that's also part of Mardi Gras presenting a particular face, because it's a big part of the tourist industry. You know? It wants to be presentable and digestible.

Enoch Mailangi:

I guess I wanted to know a bit more about the costuming and all of the signage and stuff. How might this tie into the importance of art in activism for you.

Yul Scarf:

The importance of art in activism. I think that there's a lot of ways to do activism but I think that it's essential to have community and connection and vitality and generative modes of being together. Queer life is art, right? What the fuck? It's life. It's life. It's essential. Yeah, art's essential to activism.

Justine Youssef:

So I know that you were also involved in an activation in 2018. Because we get a little bit more focused on the stop the boat campaign. Do you want to chat a bit about that? It definitely tied into the earlier conversations tonight, was that the first time that DOHA intercepted the parade?

Yul Scarf:

Yeah, that's right. Yeah. That was the first action. And that was kind of the joke of this action too, was like, "Oh my God, we're doing a replica action?" A replica of a replica of a replica.

Justine Youssef:

You also sent through some images we can flick through to chat about a couple more things.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

I just want to say about this picture here, being able to jam the actual Liberal banner in 2018, and them having pretty much the exact same banner two years later because they're so 'creative and fun'. Except they changed their name from Liberal Team to Liberal Friends.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

Yeah, such a good, strong feeling when presenters just read our banner and thought we were the Liberal Party even though we looked very creepy and totally absurd. Like as we were coming down and like, "The Liberal Team, celebrating invasion!" And then they were like, "Oh." And then they saw the Department of Homo Affairs, uniforms and all that. "All right then! Give it up to the boys in blue!" And then they're like, "Oh. Okay, here comes the real Liberal Party! Oops! We just said that out loud." Yeah, just to go back to the mixing art and activism and jamming their banner. Yeah, I guess it's very powerful, because what we're doing is reflecting a mirror on them and telling the truth. And also, the Mardi Gras is imitating itself, because it's like, "Let's all be joyous and happy about invasion and celebrating it!" "Oh, we can't talk about politics? Oh, no! Let's just talk about corporate stuff. D'oh!" You know? So it got very awkward on live TV at the actual time.

Beau James:

Well, first time that it was broadcast live too. Very first time.

Dj Gemma:

So, I was at home, on the phone, watching the parade with my friend in Tareei, who's a '78er, and we're like "Ah, look at the parade! Oh, hang on a minute. What's going on now?" And we thought you guys were a float. We didn't realize the actually... Because back in the day you used to be able to walk in. It took us ages and we're like, "Wow, this is like the old days Iggy!" So you made us really happy, because we were actually sitting at home like this \*slouched posture\*, and when that happened it was like, "Oh God. Is this a float? What's going on?" So thank you very much, because it was really good.

Justine Youssef:

Do we have any... Does anyone want to ask any questions? Is there anything that we've not touched on that you might want to unpack? I will flick through some photos while we have a think. You were so close to the Liberal Party float I didn't realise just how close you were.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

Well, we tried to go back and join the Liberal Party float. I was on the little fake Liberal team. And I was Scomo, I tried to go back to my Liberal party, friends of queers. And I just kept getting told if I don't move on I'm going to get arrested. My natural instinct was like, "Arrested? I don't want to get arrested!" But in hindsight I'm like, "I'm Scott Morrison, I need to get arrested." I wanted to join our team, my friends.

Yul Scarf:

And that was maybe where we can pick this up, but...

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

Well, captain Cook got arrested.

Yul Scarf:

Finally.

Dj Gemma:

Yay.

Yul Scarf:

Right.

Dj Gemma:

Two people get arrested. And then they dropped the charge, or...?

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

Yeah, so it was just moved on.

Dj Gemma:

Did the cops come out and say, "We're going to arrest you?"

Yul Scarf:

It was like... At this point this is kind of in that intersection in Taylor Square. Yeah, at that intersection in Taylor Square. We're trying to hold that space for as long as possible, because that's where all the cameras are and everything, all the press. And yeah, the cops were like they're at Mardi Gras now. All the way along they're pretty much like marshals. Yeah, they definitely were telling us to keep on moving, but I think, yeah, we did not intend to get arrested. It seems that we were quite confident Monday night to hold the space. Which is good. This is the fun thing about creatives, activism too, is like he can make things that, if you're writing an article or something you've got to be very clear and precise. But what the fuck is a pony with the picture of captain Cook on its face? It's scary, it's weird, it doesn't really make sense, but it kind of makes really dark sense. Who knows what's going on? There's class narratives there. Anyway, the cops really wanted that pony, but they didn't get it.

Justine Youssef:

How long were you on the street?

Yul Scarf:

Probably... I don't know. Like five, ten minutes? Ten minutes. Five minutes of walking up, and then five minutes of holding the space. Something like that. Yeah, that's the other thing, is make some cheeky calls as well. Along with the Liberal Party now we actually had some cool thoughts of that awful campaign "It's okay to say no." [With colors and stuff, and we were like, "Hi, I don't know, can we jam this or not." A lot of us have really strong gut reactions to definitely not. But we did decide to use that tagline to remind people of the violence of the Liberal Party and not only the Liberal Party, right? But the set of values that they stand for. So 'It's okay to say no' to their violence. You know?

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

And it's okay to say, "No, you're not allowed in Mardi Gras after discriminating against kids. What are you doing here?"

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

And then joining in Mardi Gras.

Dj Gemma:

Yes.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

No need to do that.

Dj Gemma:

No.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

Same with cops.

Ray Delaney:

I don't care whether they're gay or lesbian cops.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

Yeah.

Alissar Chidiac:

Can you talk about the morning after? Because, it's not only about what happened and what was not visible on our TV, it's also the day after and that weekend. The Department of Homo Affairs was in the daily and national news. The usual reporting of how many billions of dollars New South Wales destination tourism got, side by side with this Department of Homo Affairs. You got a headline and that was something to be really proud of. You set the agenda for the whole week after that.

Yul Scarf:

Maybe that's like... If we're going to parallel this with arts practice, then maybe in an abstract way there's the behind the scenes party, where there will be all who were so crucial to that action's success, who were with us and who were on to the media and who remained on top of the media afterwards. I think without that it wouldn't have had as much reach. Yeah, that's a tricky role in the arts. In administration you don't get to be a performer, or...



Alex from the Department of Homo Affairs:

With the media, one of the flip sides of getting arrested, which we really didn't want to happen and felt shitty at the time, was that it made the headlines. The media loved our arrest and we just said that before about... What was that you were saying about arrests? When you got arrested? No, it was you, Gemma. Everybody ought to get arrested, that's how you get in the newspaper. It was like getting arrested and the stress of that was good media. But also something that's been great that's come out of it, is that we're contributing conversation about whether the police should be at Mardi Gras. NSW Police made a twitter post saying that they're disappointed in the Department's actions and that it was against the spirit of Mardi Gras.

Alex from the Department of Homo Affairs:

This huge backlash with people like, "Who the fuck are you to dictate what the spirit is?" "Hello! Like you dictated the spirit in 1978."

Dj Gemma:

All this trouble getting arrested and these fuck-wits walking free next to us.

Huckleberry Spin from the Department of Homo Affairs:

The cops got hammered on Twitter for this post and sparked a big conversation and we responded as well. Is that normal?

Alex from the Department of Homo Affairs:

We did this cheeky thing of like, "You don't get to decide what the spirit is, but hey, cheers for arresting Cook. It had to happen."

Yul Scarf:

Isn't it amazing that another replica theme is in our flies or whatever is Liberal Party's unauthorized entry into the parade. Cops is like, "We'll have a look at authorizations." Using the same language we use.

Speaker 14:

[crosstalk 01:10:49].

Dj Gemma:

Yeah exactly, 40 years later we are still struggling to pay the rent, so I want to say that nothing's been changed there.

Young person from Twenty10:

I just want to say that, speaking from the perspective of my school, oh my name is Sasha. We don't get taught any of this sort of stuff in school. I knew it was bad, but I had no idea just how awful it was those

times. Now I say that although [inaudible 01:11:12] for us, we are so lucky to have people and communities like this where we can all talk about being queer or being People of Color or anything and we can just be ourselves. I think that's really awesome.

Speaker 13:

[inaudible 01:11:32].

Yul Scarf:

Maybe we see you all at this, in April there's a call for solidarity with Gweagal & Bidjigal resistance. The Gweagal & Bidjigal Sovereign Elders Tribal Council are organising this. And they're calling for as much support as possible. If you think back to '88, all the amazing protests that happened at Black Rose there, that's the dream. But it's going to take a lot of energy from a lot of people now. Also, there's letters that you can send. There's a place that you can be, the museum, there's a Wreck the Endeavour connected to Redfern Tent Embassy.

Alex from the Department of Homo Affairs:

This Sunday it's going to be a soft-picket at the Maritime museum, organized by this group. And the fourth of April there's going to be a big rally there and an action.

Alissar Chidiac:

Of course.

Dj Gemma:

That's awesome

Alex from the Department of Homo Affairs:

At the Maritime museum.

Enoch Mailangi:

Thank you all for coming, thank you to our speakers.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:15:12]