

CHAPTER 1

Revolutionising the everyday: The transformative impact of the sexual and feminist movements on Australian society and culture

Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott

I don't know if you've seen photographs of it, from that time, and everyone from Margaret Whitlam on through, all the women of that time, there's a look on the face. That wide-eyed sort of bright and hopeful look, and it was that feeling, you know. There was a feeling of incredible anger, of course, when you're understanding all the ways ... in which women are oppressed. But at the same time, this sense of joy and power coming from this working together and working it out and the scales being taken from the eyes.

Sue Jackson, interview with Ruth Ford, 1997¹

From our contemporary vantage point, it's the sense of excitement and possibility embodied by the 1970s women's and gay liberation movements that is most striking. Activists in these liberation movements weren't just campaigning for equal pay or decriminalisation of homosexuality—though both of these campaigns were essential to achieving equal rights for women and gay men. Many of these activists wanted to remake their world, to transform society. Fundamental to this was a new understanding

1 Sue Jackson, interview with Ruth Ford, 3 November 1997, p. 4, cited in Susan Magarey, '1970: When It Changed: The Beginnings of Women's Liberation in Australia', in *Turning Points in Australian History*, ed. Martin Crotty and David Andrew Roberts (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 185.

of the divide between the public and the private spheres, and a new understanding of politics that took the inequalities and oppressions of the private sphere and everyday life seriously. ‘The personal is political’ has become a truism, but it remains a resonant way to comprehend the outlook of these social movements, and to understand just how radical their project was.

The rise of women’s liberation and gay liberation created seismic change in Australian public and private lives. Gay men and lesbians made the personal political by gradually embracing and asserting their sexual identity publicly. ‘Coming out’ as gay or lesbian was integral to 1970s homosexual politics. Dennis Altman declared in *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* that his homosexuality was ‘an integral part of my self-identity and that to hide it can only make my life, if less precarious, more difficult’.² Making the personal political was also a cornerstone of women’s liberation. Previously private experiences of oppression were given political meaning by being shared publicly through consciousness-raising. For example, by mid-1972 in suburban Diamond Valley, Melbourne, women had formed two consciousness-raising groups. While many of them informed their discussions by reading Germaine Greer, Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone and Friedrich Engels, others articulated their frustrations with their families, and the drudgery and boredom of a life of housework:

There was a feeling of having been duped. Most of us had looked forward to milestones in our lives such as getting married and having children but found the reality was quite different. We enjoyed the opportunity to whinge.³

Through these confessional discussions, women not only felt the catharsis of the ‘whinge’ but supported each other to help change their situation: whether it was making major life changes or working out ways to share their domestic chores. While for many women, participation in the group was transitory, its effect was to make life ‘more meaningful’. One woman recalled the buzz of consciousness-raising: ‘women’s lib was seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day’.⁴ Understanding that the personal was political could help people transform their lived experience into politics.

2 Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), 1.

3 Robyn Hartley and Dianne Parsons, ‘Women’s Liberation in Diamond Valley’, in *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, ed. Margaret Bevage, Margaret James and Carmel Shute (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982), 383.

4 *Ibid.*, 384.

Sue Bellamy, an active participant in the Women's Liberation movement since its earliest years, recalled that the movement's actions and perspectives were built on four core principles. 'These principles were: (1) sisterhood is powerful; (2) consciousness raising; (3) the personal is political; and (4) direct action. However, we struggled about them, we didn't always agree on what they meant.'⁵ These core principles would act as a springboard for social, political and cultural transformation across the 1970s and beyond. The women's and gay and lesbian movements transformed Australian politics through wide-ranging law and policy reforms. Indeed, the 'femocrat'—the feminist bureaucrat—was internationally recognised as an innovative response to the challenge of working with the state to achieve change.⁶ The women's and gay and lesbian movements created their own social services to respond to the needs of their distinctive communities: women's refuges, phone-a-friend and telephone counselling services, rape crisis centres, and places to meet and gather and foster a sense of community. These projects put 'the personal is political' into action.

The women's and gay and lesbian movements not only transformed Australian politics and social policy, they sparked far-reaching cultural and social changes. The notion that 'the personal is political' began to transform long-held ideas about masculinity and femininity, both in public and private life. Women's and gay liberationists also sought to remake the everyday, to transform ways of living, working, practices of childbirth, childrearing and motherhood.⁷ Gay men and women started to live openly with their same-sex partners, forging new kinds of intimate relationships in emerging gay communities that were both political and commercial, like the bar scene in

5 Suzanne Bellamy, 'Sexual Politics: The Women's Liberation Movement', in *A Turbulent Decade: Social Protest Movements and the Labour Movement, 1965–1975*, ed. Beverly Symons and Rowan Cahill (Sydney: Australian Society for the Study of Labor History, 2005), 31.

6 Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

7 Kerreen Reiger, *Our Bodies, Our Babies: The Forgotten Women's Movement* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001); Catherine Kevin, 'Maternity and Freedom: Australian Feminist Encounters with the Reproductive Body', *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 46 (2005): 3–15, doi.org/10.1080/0816464042000334492; Isobelle Barrett Meyering, "'There Must Be a Better Way': Motherhood and the Dilemmas of Feminist Lifestyle Change', *Outskirts* 28 (May 2013), www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-28/isobelle-barrett-meyering; and Isobelle Barrett Meyering, 'Liberating Children: The Australian Women's Liberation Movement and Children's Rights in the 1970s', *Lilith* 19 (2013): 60–75. On lesbian mothers, see Rebecca Jennings, 'Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s', *Gender and History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 502–17, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2012.01693.x.

Sydney.⁸ Numerous experiments in communal living, shared households, non-monogamy and rural self-sufficiency were shaped by the new feminist and sexual politics, as Carroll Pursell and Zora Simic's chapters in this volume demonstrate. Some lesbians lived out a separatist politics on female-only, utopian rural communities like Amazon Acres, in northern New South Wales.⁹ These communities represented a wholehearted embrace of the everyday revolutions of the era; others attempted to live out these new ideas in more tentative ways, as 'lifestyle change'.¹⁰ In the spaces between official discourses and everyday experience, many Australian men and women sought to revolutionise their lives, experimenting with new quotidian ways to be self-consciously egalitarian.

The surge in vegetarianism reflected concern with animal rights, and renewed interest in gardening and alternative agriculture. Negotiations over housework were part of contested sexual politics, and the move in group households towards individual bedrooms, even for those in couples, expressed desires for personal autonomy.

Some 'everyday revolutions' were made in public spaces and ordinary interactions across Australian towns and cities. Women in what were traditionally men's jobs, like car mechanics, or women insisting on chopping wood or using hammers and screwdrivers, challenged notions of women's abilities as circumscribed. Men who cooked, participated in childcare or took up 'women's' jobs like fashion or hairdressing, similarly pushed gender boundaries. Women who kept their own names when they married or demanded to be addressed as 'Ms', along with heated debates about sexism in language as discussed in Amanda Laugesen's chapter in this volume, brought ideas of change into kitchens, lounge rooms, offices, classrooms and pubs. In shops, streets, houses and yards, small acts and daily work heralded gender and social change, even as the counter-culture trumpeted it in publications and iconography.

8 On lesbian social spaces, see Rebecca Jennings, 'A Room Full of Women: Lesbian Bars and Social Spaces in Postwar Sydney', *Women's History Review* 21, no. 5 (2012): 813–29. doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2012.658185. The growth of gay male community spaces in 1970s Sydney is discussed in Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Sydney: A History* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2016); and Scott McKinnon discusses the role of cinema in fostering gay community and activism in 'The Activist Cinema-Goer: Gay Liberation at the Movies', *History Australia* 10, no. 1 (2013): 125–43, doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2013.11668449.

9 Rebecca Jennings, 'Creating Feminist Culture: Australian Rural Lesbian Separatist Communities in the 1970s and 1980s', *Journal of Women's History* 30, no. 2 (2018): 88–111, doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2018.0015.

10 Meyering, "There Must Be a Better Way".

The women's and gay and lesbian movements were both interwoven with, and sometimes in opposition to, the broader changes in sexual cultures and behaviour that are broadly referred to as the sexual revolution. The sexual revolution is a deeply contested concept and its origins and causes are much debated, but it seems clear that changes to sexual morality, attitudes and practices became visible in the West in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Old taboos about sex began to break down, and a new emphasis on sexuality as a form of self-expression and as a source of pleasure began to be articulated across many sites. Women's liberation and gay liberation each had their own, radical sexual politics, but new ideas about sex were also discussed in the mass media and in popular culture. As Donald Horne remarked, 'an open discussion on the right to sexual enjoyment was being accepted as a recognised item on the mass media menu'.¹¹ Yet remarkably, when one considers the body of scholarship on the sexual revolution in other nations, there has been no comprehensive historical account of Australia's 'sexual revolution', especially as it impacted on heterosexuality.¹² Lisa Featherstone's important history of sexuality in Australia ends with the advent of the contraceptive pill, often regarded as the beginning of the sexual revolution.¹³ Frank Bongiorno's *The Sex Lives of Australians* traces the many changes in Australians' ideas about sex from the 1960s onwards, including the introduction of the contraceptive pill, the slow introduction of sex education, women's liberation's construction of male heterosexuality and the struggle to decriminalise abortion, prostitution and homosexuality, suggesting that on balance, the sexual revolution offered many Australians a new sense of 'freedom, pleasure and belonging'.¹⁴

11 Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966–72* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980), 21.

12 On the sexual revolution elsewhere, see, for example, Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception: 1800–1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Matt Cook, 'Sexual Revolution(s) in Britain', in *Sexual Revolutions*, ed. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), doi.org/10.1057/9781137321466_7. There is a large literature on the sexual revolution in the United States, see Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Elaine Tyler May, *The Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and John Heidenery, *What Wild Ecstasy: The Rise and Fall of the Sexual Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

13 Lisa Featherstone, *Let's Talk about Sex: Histories of Sexuality in Australia from Federation to the Pill* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

14 Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2012), 258.

Some smaller-scale studies have shed light on the ways that Australian (hetero)sexual cultures began to change, like Yorick Smaal's study of sex in the 1960s, based on oral history interviews with people who were teenagers and young adults in the 1960s. Smaal found that while the availability of the pill may have increased public discussion about sex, most people still had little access to sexual knowledge, and pieced together this knowledge from fragments available in the wider culture.¹⁵ The interviewees in the Australian Lives project conducted recently at Monash University offered evidence of changes in attitudes to sex, as well as revealing a greater frankness in talking about it.¹⁶ Stephen Angelides has also addressed the question of teen sexuality in the 1960s, as changing sexual mores produced a transnational moral panic around teenage sexuality.¹⁷ Some of the best work on changing sexualities in the 1970s has been found in the now extensive scholarship on the emergence of homosexual cultures in the decade, as noted above. Explicit discussions of how gay and lesbian sexual cultures emerged in the decade, however, have been sparser, though Clive Moore has outlined the long history of homosexual beat sex in Queensland, and Kimberly O'Sullivan has examined the ways in which understandings of lesbianism as a political and/or a sexual identity began in the 1970s, though her work focuses on the 1980s, as does Sophie Robinson's significant work on lesbian sex radicalism in the 1980s.¹⁸ Much of the work on gay and lesbian sexual cultures documents and analyses the period from the 1980s onwards; more work needs to be done on tracing the emergence of these subcultures in the 1970s.

15 Yorick Smaal, 'Sex in the Sixties', in *The 1960s in Australia: People, Power and Politics*, ed. Shirleene Robinson and Julie Ustinoff (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 79.

16 Anisa Puri and Alistair Thomson, 'Intimate Relations', in their *Australian Lives: An Intimate History* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 249–65.

17 Stephen Angelides, 'The "Second Sexual Revolution", Moral Panic, and the Evasion of Teenage Sexual Subjectivity', *Women's History Review* 21, no. 3 (2012): 831–47, doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2012.658169.

18 See, for example, Wotherspoon, *Gay Sydney*; Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*; Clive Moore, 'Poofs in the Park: Documenting Gay "Beats" In Queensland, Australia', *GLQ* 2, no. 3 (1995): 319–39, doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2-3-319; Kimberly O'Sullivan, 'Dangerous Desire: Lesbianism as Sex or Politics', in *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures*, ed. Jill Julius Matthews (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997), 114–26; and Sophie Robinson, "'The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution': Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s', *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 4 (2018): 475–92, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2018.1522654.

Some of the most thoughtful work on the ways that the sexual revolution transformed heterosexuality in Australia has emerged outside histories of sexuality: Megan le Masurier's careful readings of *Cleo* magazine (including in her chapter in this volume) have revealed the broader purchase of new ideas about sex amongst heterosexual men and women.¹⁹ Many scholars agree that popular culture, in the early 1970s in particular, was one of the most potent sites for discussing and showing new cultures of sex. Alan McKee argues that the notorious 1970s television soap *Number 96* was an 'important part of the trickle down [of the new permissiveness] in Australia, bringing the ethos (if not the explicitness) of the R rating in to the homes of Australia'.²⁰ Several critics have read the films of the Australian film revival of the 1970s not through a lens of nationalism, but as commentaries on the strained and dysfunctional state of heterosexual relationships in 1970s Australia.²¹ Nicole Moore's comprehensive history of literary censorship in Australia offers another way to trace changes in attitudes towards sex and its literary representation, particularly the ways that Australia's censorship apparatus was gradually dismantled by the early 1970s and replaced by a system of classification for film.²² These works examine cultural production (and the regulation of this culture) as a site where we can observe changes in sexual cultures, attitudes and conduct. Historians writing histories of the sexual revolutions of the 1970s need to take culture into account.

The women's and gay and lesbian movements were not just social and political, they also had profound cultural manifestations. In 2004, Susan Magarey suggested that women's liberation was a 'cultural renaissance', committed to 'disorderly rule-breaking' and change.²³ Margaret Henderson extended this analysis a few years later, arguing that the women's movement was a rebirth of women's cultural production that can be best characterised as avant garde. Thinking of the women's movement as a cultural avant garde, Henderson suggests, has the potential to expand

19 Also see Megan Le Masurier, 'Reading the Flesh: Popular Feminism, the Second Wave and *Cleo's* Male Centrefold', *Feminist Media Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 215–29, doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2010.521628.

20 Alan McKee, 'Number 96: Speaking Sex and Showing Sex', in his *Australian Television: A Genealogy of Great Moments* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

21 See, for example, Meghan Morris, 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality', in *The New Australian Cinema*, ed. Scott Murray and Peter Beilby (West Melbourne: Nelson, 1980), 133–51; Jack Clancy, 'Australian Films and Fantasies', *Meanjin* 38, no. 2 (July 1979): 193–205; and Catharine Lumbly, *Alvin Purple* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2008).

22 Nicole Moore, *The Censor's Library* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012).

23 Susan Magarey, 'Feminism as Cultural Renaissance', *Hecate* 30, no. 1 (2004): 236, 244.

our understanding of the feminist project. 'It is more than legislative or campaign defeats or victories; indeed, it is a force that used an expansive range of tactics to attempt a social revolution—a project in which cultural activism was intrinsic.'²⁴ Magarey and Henderson drew scholarly attention to the scale and scope of cultural activities happening beyond the political world of demonstrations and organising in the 1970s. Women in the women's movement created performances, music, writing and art about their experiences.²⁵ Culture was important: feminists believed it could raise consciousness. The National Advisory Committee for Australia's celebrations of International Women's Year in 1975 funded numerous cultural and creative activities as part of their commemorations. Indeed, Elizabeth Reid's three key aims for International Women's Year were to change attitudes towards women, to lessen areas of discrimination and to encourage women's creativity.²⁶

Women in the women's movement produced newspapers and periodicals like *Mejane*, *Refractory Girl* and *Vashti's Voice*, which contained poems, drawings and other creative works.²⁷ They made films, picked up spanners and established printing presses.²⁸ Activists saw film as a tool,

24 Margaret Henderson, 'Wonders Taken for Signs: The Cultural Activism of the Australian Women's Movement as Avant-Garde Reformation', *Litrib* 17/18 (2012): 116.

25 See, for example, on performance, Suzanne Spunner, 'Since Betty Jumped: Theatre and Feminism in Melbourne', *Meanjin* 38 (September 1979): 368–77; and Claire Dobbin, 'Women's Theatre and the APG—Australian Performing Group', *Meanjin* 43, no. 1 (1984): 129–39; on music, Kathy Sport, 'Below the Belt and Bleeding Fingertips: Feminist and Lesbian Music in the late 1970s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (July 2007): 343–60, doi.org/10.1080/08164640701364703; on writing, see Ann Vickery and Margaret Henderson, 'Manifesting Australian Literary Feminisms: Nexus and Faultlines', *Australian Literary Studies* 24, nos 3–4 (2009): 1–19; Ann Vickery, 'The Rise of "Women's Poetry" in the 1970s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (2007): 265–85, doi.org/10.1080/08164640701378596; and Zora Simic, "'Women's Writing" and "Feminism": A History of Intimacy and Estrangement', *Outskirts* 28 (May 2013), www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-28/zora-simic; on art, see Janine Burke, *Field of Vision: A Decade of Change, Women's Art in the Seventies* (Ringwood: Viking, 1990); Sandy Kirby, *Sight Lines: Women's Art and Feminist Perspectives in Australia* (Roseville, NSW: Craftsman House, 1992); and Emery and Moore and Speck's chapters in this volume.

26 Hon. E. G. Whitlam, *International Women's Year: Priorities and Considerations*, statement prepared for the information of the Parliament and tabled by the Prime Minister, 4 December 1974, p. 18.

27 Mary Spongberg, 'Australian Women's History in Australian Feminist Periodicals 1971–1988', *History Australia* 5, no. 3 (2008): 73.1–73.16; Paula Byrne, 'Mabelled', *Hecate* 22, no. 2 (1996): 87–100.

28 On feminist filmmaking in the 1970s, see Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg, eds, *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia* (Richmond: Greenhouse Publications, 1987); and Mary Tomsic, *Beyond the Silver Screen: A History of Women, Filmmaking and Film Culture in Australia, 1920–1990* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2017). On women's entry into male-dominated occupations, see Georgine Clarsen's chapter in this volume. On feminist presses, see Diane Brown and Susan Hawthorne, 'Feminist Publishing', in *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, ed. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheehan-Bright (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006); as well as Trish Luker's chapter in this volume.

and made historical documentaries and feature films not only to counter a heterosexual male screen culture, but also to advance women's culture and history. Popular feminism also operated in a cultural realm, as shown by le Masurier's convincing argument about *Cleo*, and Michelle Arrow has suggested that Helen Reddy's anthem 'I Am Woman' spoke to women outside and beyond the organised women's movement.²⁹ Feminists worked within educational institutions to challenge sexist stereotypes and to teach feminist perspectives in women's studies courses.³⁰ Women's liberationists challenged 'man-made' norms and masculinist language both within and beyond the academy, and they sought to recover lost histories of female achievement and cultural endeavour. These acts of recovery would animate and transform a range of academic disciplines into the 1980s, 1990s and beyond, especially history, literary studies and art history.³¹ Recovering women's long history of cultural production, and challenging the relative obscurity in which it had long languished, became one of the most powerful legacies of the 1970s women's movement. Restoring the forgotten women of the past to history was part of women's liberation from the very beginning.³²

While the cultural dimensions of the Australian gay and lesbian movement were perhaps not as wide-ranging in the 1970s, gay men and lesbians sought to foster community identity through producing specialist gay and lesbian magazines, and the commercial bar scene, in Sydney, was a particular focus of gay social life (and, later, political life)

29 Megan Le Masurier, 'My Other, My Self: *Cleo* Magazine and Feminism in 1970s Australia', *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (July 2007): 191–211, doi.org/10.1080/08164640701361766; and Michelle Arrow, "It Has Become My Personal Anthem": "I Am Woman", *Popular Culture and 1970s Feminism*, *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (July 2007): 213–30, doi.org/10.1080/08164640701361774.

30 On education, see Julie McLeod's chapter in this volume, and Lyn Yates, 'Feminism's Fandango with the State Revisited: Reflections on Australia, Feminism, Education and Change', *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 5 (1999): 555–62, doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(99)00061-8. On the growth of women's studies in Australian universities, see Alison Bashford, ed., 'The Return of the Repressed: Feminism in the Quad', special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* 13, no. 27 (1998).

31 For example, works such as Drusilla Modjeska's *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers, 1925–1945* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981) and Joan Kerr's, *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book* (Sydney: Art and Australia/Craftsman House, 1995) stimulated scholarship in their respective fields.

32 See Spongberg, 'Australian Women's History in Australian Feminist Periodicals'. There were also four key works of feminist history published in Australia by the mid-1970s: Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975); Anne Conlon and Edna Ryan, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975); Beverly Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Women at Work in Australia* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1977); and Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1778 to 1975*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1976).

from the 1970s onwards.³³ Lesbians were, of course, a crucial part of the feminist cultural renaissance and there was considerable crossover between women's liberation and lesbian and gay liberation, particularly in the early years.³⁴ Even if there was not a large gay and lesbian film-making scene in Australia in the 1970s, films like the One in Seven collective's *Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers* (Digby Duncan, producer), a 1979 documentary with a particular focus on the lesbian experience in Australia, was a ground-breaking cultural intervention, particularly valued today for its footage of the very first Gay Mardi Gras in 1978.³⁵ Music was an important site of lesbian feminist cultural production, and feminist and lesbian dances were crucial for both fundraising and socialising.³⁶

Gay and lesbian writing began to emerge in the late 1970s, flourishing as a subgenre of literature by the 1980s in Australia.³⁷ Similarly, gay theatre companies and plays with gay themes became increasingly common by the mid-1980s.³⁸ The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, which began in 1978, always incorporated costumes, music, dance and other cultural expression. Celebrating gay and lesbian identity through culture was a political act. Gay artists like David McDiarmid and William Yang also started to make art that explored their sexuality in the 1970s, though both these men, and many others, would become more prominent in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and beyond. The cultural responses to this crisis, rather than gay culture in the previous decade,

33 On gay and lesbian magazines, see Bill Calder, *Pink Ink: The Golden Era for Gay and Lesbian Magazines* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); and Garry Wotherspoon, 'Telling It Like It Is: The Emergence of Australia's Gay and Lesbian Media', in *Acts of Love and Lust*, ed. Lisa Featherstone, Rebecca Jennings and Robert Reynolds (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

34 Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015), ch. 4; Sophie Robinson, 'Bar Dykes and Lesbian Feminists: Lesbian Encounters in 1970s Australian Feminism', *Lilith* 22 (2016): 52–65.

35 Scott McKinnon, 'Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers', in *Making Film and Television Histories: Australia and New Zealand*, ed. James E. Bennett and Rebecca Beirne (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 225–30.

36 Sport, 'Below the Belt and Bleeding Fingertips'; Nick Henderson, 'Feminist Rockers You've Never Heard About', NFSAs, accessed 9 July 2018, www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/feminist-rockers-youve-never-heard-about.

37 Michael Hurley, 'Gay and Lesbian Writing and Publishing in Australia, 1961–2001', *Australian Literary Studies* 25, no. 1 (2010): 42–70, doi.org/10.20314/als.c2b14e180e.

38 Larry Galbraith, 'Gay Theatre', in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995), 242; Bruce Parr, 'Peter Kenna's *Mates*: Camping It Up', in *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III*, ed. Garry Wotherspoon (Sydney: Department of Economic History and the Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney, 1996), 71–89.

have been the focus of historiography.³⁹ Much more work remains to be done on tracing the ways that the gay and lesbian movements engaged in cultural production, and in particular the ways in which these movements were the crucible for a wide range of cultural activity that stretched well into the 1980s and beyond.

Magarey pointed out in 2004 that ‘cultural disruption as a dimension of second-wave feminism [... had] gain[ed] little, if any attention in any of the histories written to date’.⁴⁰ Margaret Henderson contended too that ‘the analysis of women’s movement culture is left to the various realms of cultural criticism—literary studies, film studies, and so on ... a broad ranging cultural history of the Australian women’s movement remains to be written’.⁴¹ Indeed, most of the major histories of these movements have not investigated cultural aspects of this disruption in detail as they foreground the activism, campaigns and achievements of the women’s and gay and lesbian movements. This volume builds on that important scholarship and makes a valuable contribution to the histories of women’s liberation and the gay and lesbian movement in 1970s Australia by exploring the wide range of ways, from the quotidian to the cultural, that these movements transformed Australian society.

This book emerges at a time when we are paying renewed cultural attention to the social and cultural transformations wrought by the sexual and feminist revolutions of the 1970s. The 2017 postal survey on same-sex marriage and the successful passage of legislation to permit same-sex couples to marry in December that year prompted many to reflect on the significant changes to gay and lesbian life since the 1970s, but also to question the narratives of progress that were used to frame these changes. In 2018, there was a wave of public memorialisation of the gay and lesbian movement. The year marked the fortieth anniversary of the first Gay Mardi Gras (later known as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras), a street march that ended in violence but which blossomed to become an internationally significant celebration of the LGBTIQ

39 Sally Gray, ‘America and the Queer Diaspora: The Case of Artist David McDiarmid’, in *Transnational Lives: Australian Lives in the World*, ed. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), doi.org/10.22459/TT.12.2008.16. On William Yang’s work in the 1970s, see Russel Storer, ‘William Yang: Diary of a Denizen’, in *Up Close: Carol Jerrems with Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and William Yang*, ed. Natalie King (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing, 2010): 213–31. On the artistic response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Australia, see Ted Gott, *Don’t Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1994).

40 Magarey, ‘Feminism as Cultural Renaissance’, 235.

41 Henderson, ‘Wonders Taken for Signs’, 107.

community. The anniversary was flagged as a significant national event, marked not just by exhibitions, but also by the ABC, which commissioned a feature film about the events of 1978, *Riot*. Somewhat astonishingly, *Riot* was the first feature film that directly depicted Australia's social movements of the 1970s. The film sketched a genealogy of the Mardi Gras by situating it in a longer history of gay and lesbian protest in Sydney.⁴²

Yet, given the strength and enduring influence of women's liberation in Australia, it's remarkable that there has not yet been a feature film or documentary treatment of the Australian women's movement equivalent to the American series *Makers* (2013) or the film *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* (2014), although film-maker Catherine Dwyer is currently developing a feature documentary, *Brazen Hussies*, about women's liberation in Australia.⁴³ In Australia, the only historical treatment of the women's movement in the 1970s is the one offered somewhat tangentially by the ABC miniseries about the birth of popular feminist magazine *Cleo*, *Paper Giants*. Other historical depictions of the period have dramatised the lives of pre-feminist women, like the Network 10 series *Puberty Blues* or the Nine network series about a Kings Cross hospital for relinquishing mothers, *Love Child*.⁴⁴ Stephan Elliott's 2018 film about suburban 1970s life, *Swinging Safari*, presents an image of the 1970s that is at once nostalgic for the freedoms enjoyed by the gang of children who all live in the same beachside cul de sac, and also condemns the self-absorption of their sexually experimenting parents. These two perspectives on the 1970s—was it a decade of liberation or one of destruction?—continue to colour contemporary Australian cultural debate today. We still live with the legacies of these changes, and we will be debating their impact for many years to come.

42 Michelle Arrow, 'History-Making at the 2018 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras: *Witches, Faggots, Dykes and Poofers*, The Museum of Love and Protest, the 2018 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade, and Riot', *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 4, (2018): 493–500.

43 *Makers: Women Who Make America* (2013) Ark Media; *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* (2014) dir. Mary Dore. Catherine Dwyer is working on *Brazen Hussies*, see Documentary Australia Foundation, accessed 25 January 2019, documentaryaustralia.com.au/project/brazen-hussies/.

44 *Paper Giants: The Birth of Cleo* (2011), Southern Star; *Love Child* (2014–17), Playmaker Media; *Puberty Blues* (2012–14), Southern Star. On the postfeminist politics of these series, see Margaret Henderson, 'A Celebratory Feminist Aesthetics in Postfeminist Times: Screening the Australian Women's Liberation in Paper Giants – The Birth of Cleo', *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 77 (2013): 250–62, doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1166559; and 'Retrovisioning Chicko Roles: Puberty Blues as Postfeminist Television Adaptation and the Feminization of the 1970s', *Continuum* 30, no. 3 (2016): 326–35.

Everyday Revolutions

Everyday Revolutions brings together new research on the cultural and social impact of the feminist and sexual revolutions of the 1970s in Australia. This book is unique in its focus not on the activist or legislative achievements of the women's and gay and lesbian movements, but on the pervasive cultural and social dimensions of these revolutions. The chapters in the book are concerned with a range of themes including education, popular culture, film, art and publishing, alternative lifestyles, and moves to transform gendered norms in work and language. It is a diverse and rich collection of essays that reminds us that women's and gay liberation were thoroughly revolutionary movements.

This book emerged from the successful and well-attended conference 'How the Personal Became Political: Re-Assessing Australia's 1970s Revolutions in Gender and Sexuality', held at The Australian National University, 6–7 March 2017, funded by the ANU Gender Institute. One of the most fascinating aspects of this conference was the ways it fostered interactions between several generations of scholars and activists. The event brought together many of the women and men who fought for change in the 1970s alongside a younger generation of researchers for whom these events are history. As early career researcher Chelsea Barnett commented on the Australian Women's History Network's VIDA blog after the conference, 'it was exciting to see so many Ph.D. students and ECRs have their work embraced by established academics and second-wave feminist activists, suggesting that this moment in Australian history remains rich with potential'.⁴⁵ This book is just one sign of this 'rich potential', as emerging scholars ask new questions about the decade and activists turned researchers reflect on their experiences in new ways.

It is worth noting that the collection reflects the papers offered for the conference: it is neither fully comprehensive nor exhaustive in its coverage of the period. Much more needs to be written on the ways the 'everyday revolutions' of the 1970s were, for the most part, enacted by white women. The notion that 'the personal is political' also assumed, to some extent, that the personal was universal, and it could work to conceal differences between women. Just as the men and women of the

45 Chelsea Barnett, 'How the Personal Became Political', VIDA Blog, accessed 2 December 2017, www.auswhn.org.au/blog/personal-became-political/.

1970s liberation movements struggled to come to terms with difference, so too we historians must continue to acknowledge the importance of intersectionality, and the very real effects of racial inequalities for example, when we write our histories of these movements. Nevertheless, this book offers a kaleidoscopic array of angles from which to view the profound social and cultural changes of the 1970s. And it demonstrates, yet again, the feminist theoretical insight that gender and sexuality are inextricably intertwined.

The chapters

Everyday Revolutions is divided into four sections, each investigating a different aspect of the ways that the mantra ‘the personal is political’ revolutionised all aspects of contemporary life in 1970s Australia. Our opening section, ‘Everyday gender revolutions: Workplaces, schools and households’ investigates attempts to transform dominant ideas about gender in three key sites: male-dominated trades, the education system and in alternative households.

In her chapter, ‘Of girls and spanners: Feminist politics, women’s bodies and the male trades’, Georgine Clarsen notes that women’s attempts in the 1970s to move into male-dominated trades have been largely forgotten and overlooked in histories of Australian feminism. These occupations have proven remarkably resistant to feminist campaigns for change: today, less than 2 per cent of women are working in construction, electrical and automotive trades. The ongoing marginalisation of women in such non-traditional jobs has significant financial consequences for women and gender pay equity, Clarsen observes: ‘the average weekly earnings of a hairdresser, for example, are approximately half that of a carpenter, mechanic or electrician’. Yet she also suggests that this work was not only significant for its economic impact, but also for its transformative effects on women’s embodiment—this was a politics of *doing*. Georgine herself was one of those women who ‘picked up a spanner’ in the 1970s, and she writes warmly and thoughtfully about her experiences of finding pleasure and empowerment in the bodily competency these trades offered. Women’s aspirations to trade work, Clarsen notes, simultaneously constituted a politics of space and embodiment.

Julie McLeod's 'The discovery of sexism in schools: Everyday revolutions in the classroom' offers a fascinating account of the intersections of two social movements of the decade: the women's movement and the radical, de-schooling movement in education. In contrast to Clarsen's focus on male-dominated trades, education employed far more women and feminism gained considerable influence in education across the 1970s, through the development and implementation of formal policies on equal opportunity and non-sexist education. The Australian Schools Commission's landmark 1975 report *Girls, School and Society* was one high-profile manifestation of feminist activism in education, but McLeod points out that feminists also undertook considerable grassroots activity in schools. Meanwhile, movements to democratise schooling, to make it less hierarchical and more participatory, were also seeking to transform education. As McLeod notes, the stories of these two movements are typically told separately, but she brings them together in this chapter, reading them against and with each other to suggest new links and connections between them.

Carroll Pursell's chapter also investigates the intersections between social movements, examining the gender politics of the 'back-to-the-land' movement in the 1970s. Pursell draws on two key Australian alternative living publications, *Grass Roots* and *Earth Garden*, examining letters and articles written by both men and women to consider the implications of this lifestyle for both gender relations and gendered roles. The back-to-the-land movement had a complex relationship to women's liberation: on the one hand, lesbian separatist communities like Amazon Acres set out to create female-only feminist utopias through sustainable living; on the other hand, it is clear from Pursell's research that for many men and women, this lifestyle entrenched existing gender role differences. Pursell's fascinating chapter opens up an under-examined facet of alternative lifestyles in the 1970s for further research.

Section Two is 'Feminism in art and culture'. Ever since the publication of Linda Nochlin's groundbreaking 1971 essay 'Why have there been no great women artists?', the exclusion of women artists from galleries and museums, and the under-representation of women in art history has come under sustained attack from the women's movement. Women's and feminist art has flourished, and the lives and works of women artists have increasingly been restored to art history and museum collections, though as the ongoing work of the feminist collective Guerrilla Girls demonstrates, the project of promoting diverse female artists remains

incomplete.⁴⁶ Catriona Moore and Catherine Speck's chapter 'How the personal became (and remains) political in the visual arts' offers a large-scale overview of the ways that this iconic phrase reshaped art history and practice from the 1970s onwards. Women's liberationists sought not only to create their own art and gain greater recognition for female artists, past and present, they wanted to trouble the ways that artistic canons were structured to exclude women in the first place. 'Feminist insistence upon the personal as political challenged the public/private divide and knitted together art and domestic spheres in new ways', Moore and Speck write, but they also note the ways that Indigenous artists and artists from non-English-speaking backgrounds challenged the notion that the 'personal' could offer a unifying female perspective. Their fascinating essay shows that the 'personal is political' remains a useful concept in feminist art today.

Elizabeth Emery's 'Subversive stitches' delves into one aspect of 1970s feminist art practice: the reclaiming and refashioning of needlework by Australian feminist artists. Historically, needlework had long been part of women's domestic craft, signifying at once 'the despised domestic feminine, while simultaneously representing women's resistance to and subversion of male dominance'. Feminist artists of the 1970s took up needlework, making 'the domestic visible in visual art', as Emery writes. Needlework drew on different traditions of women's creative work, and constructed an alternative feminist art heritage that celebrated the creativity of 'ordinary' women. Emery notes that there was resistance to reclaiming the kinds of creative works produced in the domestic sphere: did celebrating the making of doilies, for example, merely perpetuate women's subordinate social position? Yet she also argues convincingly that Frances Phoenix's 'disobedient doily' artwork, *Kunda*, for example, was both subversive and powerful, making a personal and domestic object political. Both Emery and Moore and Speck's chapters convey the tremendous energy and experimentation of the feminist art scene of the 1970s.

Feminist presses were crucial to the creation of a feminist literary culture in late twentieth-century Australia. Trish Luker's chapter, 'Women into print', situates the rise of women's presses from the 1970s onwards against the backdrop of the women's liberation movement's fostering of women's writing and feminist readers. In light of the move towards digital

46 Guerrilla Girls, www.guerrillagirls.com.

publishing, and a corresponding archival turn in feminist scholarship, Luker examines the role of feminist print and publishing cultures. Underscoring the importance of print media to the dissemination of feminist ideas, feminists took control of the means of book and periodical production when they established feminist presses such as Sybylla Co-operative Press, Sugar & Snails (which produced feminist children's books), Everywoman Press and Women's Redress Press. Luker's chapter is a valuable reminder of the importance of print culture to women's liberation, not just in Australia but transnationally.

Women's liberation sought not only to remake art, but also to create new kinds of writing and literature that reflected women's experiences. Zora Simic's chapter on Helen Garner's famous debut novel *Monkey Grip*, "Unmistakably a book by a feminist", deftly places this groundbreaking work in its feminist contexts. Using a wide range of textual records generated by the women's liberation movement, Simic carefully traces the ways that *Monkey Grip* has been read as a feminist book since its publication in 1977. *Monkey Grip* was released in the late 1970s, a time when feminism was widely regarded to be in crisis or retreat, but it also ushered in a wider interest in Australian women's writing and feminist publishing, which flourished in the decade following *Monkey Grip*'s release.

In Section Three, 'Redrawing boundaries between public and private', we have three chapters that trace the ways that the women's and gay liberation movements prompted new divisions between public and private worlds. Catherine Freyne's 'A phone called PAF' examines the history of pioneering gay organisation CAMP's 'Phone-A-Friend' service, which started in 1973. By investigating the ideology and practice of phone counselling, based in deep archival and oral history research, Freyne offers new insights into the history of gay and lesbian activism and its complex and changing relationship to the public/private divide within gay and lesbian politics. By the mid to late 1970s, PAF was impacted by larger conflicts within CAMP, which was increasingly riven by competing ideas about its primary purpose: was it to provide private counselling and support to lesbians and gay men, or was it to stage political actions? However, as Freyne notes, this was not a case of the personal 'gazumping' the political, because the 'very existence of a gay counselling service was politically productive'.

The gay liberation movement, as Leigh Boucher shows, developed over the course of the 1970s and comprised multiple currents. A central focus was the demand for decriminalisation of homosexuality on the basis

of liberal democratic rights (and for it to go beyond consenting adults in private). But there was also the fraught issue of homosex in public. Focusing on the gay rights movement in Victoria, Boucher productively examines the spectacular 1979 ‘kiss-in’ held to protest two men’s arrest for ‘offensive behaviour’ for kissing in public. He puts this carefully managed media event in fruitful tension with the movement’s ambivalence about beat sex. By its very nature, beat sex subverted distinctions between public and private, personal and political. Boucher convincingly argues that the ‘kiss-in’ was a neatly contained event that can be read as an instance of celebratory liberation, but seeing it in the context of the unsteady political discourse around beat sex makes the movement seem less certain.

Catherine Kevin’s ‘Creative work: Feminist representations of gendered and domestic violence in 1970s Australia’ takes up Magarey’s call to consider the cultural output of the women’s liberation movement as intrinsic to its political activism. Her chapter makes a nuanced contribution to our understandings of the ways that the women’s movement reshaped the meanings of domestic violence in the 1970s. Examining cultural representations of violence against women in film, poetry, fiction and visual culture, Kevin points to the power of artistic and cultural representations of domestic and family violence to help convey feminist interpretations of such violence. The chapter demonstrates that careful readings of feminist culture, especially visual culture such as cartoons and posters, can enlarge our understanding of the impact of the women’s movement in transforming social attitudes towards women.

In her intriguingly titled “Put on dark glasses and a blind man’s head”, Nicole Moore scrutinises Australia’s first and only successful defamation case about poetry. Brought against the writer Dorothy Hewett by her first husband, Lloyd Davies, the case involved a number of offences and charges relating to Hewett’s portrayal of Davies’s family and their prior sexual history. It raised landmark questions about freedom of expression, but also about privacy. As Moore notes, the notion of privacy and the private sphere had been extensively critiqued by the women’s movement; indeed, the notion that ‘the personal is political’ was a succinct statement of this critique. In her careful reconstruction of this complex case, Moore suggests that it can be read as a microcosm of larger cultural debates provoked by feminist cultural production in the 1970s, in particular the question of feminist art’s access to the private sphere of intimacy and sexuality.

The final section of the book is titled ‘Re-gendering language, authority and culture’, and it contains three fascinating essays that together reveal some of the ways in which feminism and gay liberation challenged conventional understandings of masculinity in Australian cultural life. Amanda Laugesen’s ‘Challenging “man made language”’ charts the ways in which language became a contested domain in 1970s culture. As she points out, the cultural nationalism of 1970s Australia saw a new celebration of ‘Australian English’ and ocker speech, but it was also a period in which language was newly scrutinised and contested for its deeply embedded sexism. Laugesen examines ‘feminist linguistic activism’ in the 1970s and 1980s: not only the ways in which women’s liberationists sought to reclaim language previously deemed ‘unladylike’, but also the campaigns to remove sexist terms and phrases from Australian cultural and social life. As she notes, while much has changed, gender-neutral and non-sexist language can still provoke strong reactions today.

In ‘A race of intelligent super-giants’, Bethany Phillips-Peddlesden considers the ways that gendered bodies and ideas of masculinity worked to shape notions of power within mainstream electoral politics. Gough Whitlam captured the national mood when he was elected in December 1972, and Phillips-Peddlesden argues that part of his electoral appeal was his particular brand of embodied masculinity. Whitlam’s height, voice and middle-class status were all crucial to shaping perceptions of his leadership, especially when juxtaposed with his political opponent, the Liberal Prime Minister William McMahon. Phillips-Peddlesden then considers the ways in which gender shaped the ALP’s political messaging in 1972. The campaign deployed the charismatic and ‘modern’ Margaret Whitlam to woo progressive female voters. Phillips-Peddlesden suggests that, even as social and cultural expectations of women were changing in the 1970s, political authority was still gendered masculine, and to a significant extent it remains so.

Megan le Masurier presents a compelling account of *Cleo* magazine’s contribution to Australia’s sexuality revolution in the 1970s. Aimed at younger women, not or not yet political activists, this new magazine merged women’s liberation with sexual liberation. *Cleo* encouraged women to become sexually active, informed about their bodies and assertive in their pursuit of erotic pleasure. In le Masurier’s words, it pushed ‘the sexual politics of the fair go’. *Cleo* made up for the absence of sex education in schools and elsewhere, helping women overcome shame, ignorance and guilt. And it actively supported the burgeoning feminist

health advice literature, as well as emerging women's reproductive health centres. Featuring letters from women readers that were often very graphic about their bodies and experiences, the magazine was an influential forum for discussion of female orgasm.

In 'Male chauvinists and ranting libbers', Chelsea Barnett examines the popular men's magazine *Pix* (which became *Pix/People* in 1972) to investigate changing attitudes towards single men in the decade of women's and gay liberation. Barnett notes that, while the unmarried man has long been a figure of cultural and social significance in Australian history, the place of the bachelor in postwar Australian culture has been relatively unexamined. She suggests that the magazine encouraged single men to embody the label of 'male chauvinist' in response to the challenge of the women's liberation movement. In a decade in which an assertive new national identity was typically articulated through a brash, ocker masculinity, there was little place in *Pix* for a femininity shaped by feminism, Barnett argues. Her reading of letters and articles in the magazine helps shed light on 'ordinary' people's responses to the revolutions of the 1970s.

Everyday Revolutions brings together fresh, interdisciplinary approaches to the history of the transformative revolutions of the 1970s. Our contributors have foregrounded not the activist or legislative achievements of those revolutions, but their ubiquitous cultural and social dimensions. Collectively, they remind us that change happens in multiple sites, and that cultural production and fostering new modes of community were significant forms of social change. Several chapters in the book also remind us that gendered ways of viewing the world that entrenched the dominance of heterosexual masculinity have been stubborn, and difficult to change. We hope that this collection will stimulate more scholarship in this field, from a range of disciplines. Applying a diverse array of disciplinary lenses reminds us that women's and gay liberation were revolutionary movements with powerful effects and legacies, even as much more remains to be done.

This text is taken from *Everyday Revolutions: Remaking Gender, Sexuality and Culture in 1970s Australia*, edited by Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/ER.2019.01