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Between 1999 and 2002, queer anti-capitalist collectives operated in four major Australian cities: in Melbourne, Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism (QUEER); in Brisbane, Queers Against Corporate Exploitation (QuACE, pronounced ‘quake’); in Perth, Queer Radical; and in Sydney, two groups, Collective Action Against Homophobia (CAAH) and Gays and Lesbians Against Multinationals (GLAM). These groups emerged from a strand of anti-capitalist thought in gay, lesbian and queer politics that extended from gay liberation through radical HIV/AIDS activism and post-modern queer politics to collide in the early part of this decade with a growing movement of global activism most commonly termed anti-globalisation. This strand can be evidenced in early gay liberation writings from the 1970s, such as those of Dennis Altman, in the radical anti-corporate activism of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) in

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1 Various terms have been used to describe these movements, including anti-capitalism, alter-globalisation and others. This essay will primarily use anti-capitalist to describe the queer groups in question, as they were explicitly opposed to capitalism in a way that other groups within the broader movement were not. The term anti-globalisation will be used to refer to the broader movement within which these groups operated (despite legitimate criticism of this terminology by the movements themselves), largely due to the absence of a broadly acceptable alternative. See Verity Burgmann, Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 244–47, for a discussion of activist critiques of the term ‘anti-globalisation’.

2 Dennis Altman, Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971). While this book was influential in establishing gay liberation ideas, Altman’s politics underwent a significant revision over the decades since writing Homosexual. Later works, such as The Homosexualization of America: the Americanization of the Homosexual (New York: St Martin’s, 1982) and Global Sex (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001) demonstrate a shift towards perceiving the relationship between capitalism and sexuality as more complex and ultimately less uniformly negative.

3 Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, AIDS Demo graphics (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 114–19. ACT-UP is a radical AIDS activist group formed in New York in 1987 before expanding to many other cities, including Melbourne.
the 1980s, and in the ‘culture-jamming'\textsuperscript{4} activism of Queer Nation in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{5} I do not argue that the entirety of these social movements were anti-capitalist in orientation. Rather, I argue that the nature of capitalism, and its relationship to sexuality and gender, has been a central concern in all of these movements, and that the anti-capitalist strand running through these movements was a core reference point for the new anti-capitalist queer groups.

The term ‘queer’ was used by these groups to reflect a conscious separation from the existing ‘gay and lesbian’ movements, which were seen as primarily oriented towards legislative reform. It was also used as a means of encompassing a broader cohort of sexual and gender identities, including bisexual, transgender and intersex, and, to some extent, others who expressed solidarity with queer political movements. The groups also largely avoided differences on uses of ‘queer’ as a deconstructive tool. While there was no consensus on exactly what ‘queer’ meant, the term reflected a useful way for these groups to position themselves in opposition to mainstream gay and lesbian groups, while largely avoiding the difficult debates around identity that divided much early 1990s activism.\textsuperscript{6} This will be discussed in greater detail below.

This paper will start by outlining the origins, membership and anti-capitalist politics of the east coast groups\textsuperscript{7} before examining their relationship to the past as a key determinant of their political ideas and practices. I argue that the groups from Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney exhibited a progressive or ‘radical nostalgia’\textsuperscript{8} for the past. By looking back at past political groups, ideas, and periods, these groups lamented lost revolutionary ideals and practices, while drawing inspiration from past actions and protest strategies in the development of their political praxis. The groups drew heavily on what they saw as an anti-capitalist tradition weaving its way through the queer histories of Gay Liberation (particularly Stonewall and Mardi Gras) and the HIV/AIDS crisis. In some cases, particularly in terms of QUEER and ACT-UP, actions, activist motifs and strategies were directly reproduced from

\textsuperscript{4} Culture-jamming, popularised by groups such as Canada’s Adbusters, is the process of changing commercial media images and text, such as advertisements, billboards or corporate logos, to subvert the original meaning and include a radical or critical political message. See for example, <www.adbusters.org>.


\textsuperscript{6} Robert Reynolds thoroughly covers these debates in the epilogue of \textit{From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual} (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 158–168.

\textsuperscript{7} The decision to focus on east coast groups was made for three reasons. First, Queer Radical in Perth existed prior to the various east coast groups and was involved in various art and activist projects from the mid-1990s. While always radical in bent, the anti-capitalist focus was less pronounced, and certainly secondary to broader radical art and activist orientations. Secondly, material on the east coast groups is much more readily available, through mainstream gay and lesbian publications, personal archives and a strong archive of materials, particularly on QUEER, held at the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA). Finally, there was limited interaction between Queer Radical and the east coast groups, resulting in varied political priorities and tactics. The work of Queer Radical is deserving of its own study, given its alternate origins, approaches and politics, and its geographic isolation from the other groups.

\textsuperscript{8} For a discussion of the concept of radical nostalgia in a different context see Peter Glazer, \textit{Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America} (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005).
earlier protest movements, with the aim of reinvesting queer historical events with a new or updated political message.

This paper is based on a review of political tracts, campaign material and other ephemera produced by the groups themselves, material about these groups published in gay community and mainstream newspapers in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, and articles in student newspapers from universities in each region. I was also a participant in these groups, primarily QuACE, and held a national position in the National Union of Students (NUS), allowing for regular travel between these three cities. My personal observations are therefore also a component of the research.

**Origins and Constitution**

The large and diverse protests at the meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle on 30 November 1999 precipitated the arrival in the developed world of a growing global protest movement against the free trade policies of the WTO and their effects on communities and the environment. Colloquially dubbed N30 (an abbreviation of the date), the protests featured up to 100,000 protestors concerned about everything from Third World debt, to environmental destruction, labour rights and corporate exploitation of the poor. After N30, a series of similar large-scale protests occurred around the world, developing into what became known in the media as the anti-globalisation movement.

In Australia, the late 1990s featured a revitalised student movement. Mass student upheaval over government plans to introduce up-front fees and Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) resulted in a large-scale turn to strategies of mass direct action, with student occupations of university administrations and Liberal Party headquarters, and mass mobilisations of students in various parts of the country. A significant outcome of this upturn was that several student associations and state branches of NUS came under the control of sectors of the non-Australian Labor Party (ALP) left. Control of these organisations resulted in access to resources for left activists, including funding for publications or editorial control of student papers, and a degree of confidence in articulating a left perspective on issues of identity and sexuality.

At this time, the student movements were also broadening their scope, becoming active in a range of protest movements. Of particular note was the

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9 Activists in developing countries had been protesting against the WTO’s trade and economic policies for many years, but the Seattle protests were the first large-scale manifestation of resistance to these policies in the developed world. See for example, Dave Stockton, Richard Brenner, and Richard Harvey, *Summit Sieges and Social Forums: a Rough Guide to the Anticapitalist Movement* (London: The League for the Fifth International, 2004).

10 Ibid.

11 VSU was a conservative political campaign to overturn decades of universal student unionism and financially and organisationally cripple left-wing student unions. VSU was finally implemented in 2005, over the protests of students and university administrations, by tying universities’ federal government funding to the abolition of universal unionism.
large-scale coalescing of environmental, student and indigenous rights activists around a proposed uranium mine on Aboriginal land at Jabiluka in the Northern Territory in 1998, which forged links between previously disparate groups of people. Verity Burgmann has argued that the market, rather than activism, led to the closure of the mine project. Nevertheless, the connections established between different protest groups and the successful outcome provided confidence to activists.

Growing links between movements within Australia, along with the inspiration of the Seattle protests, led to plans for a large protest at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Asia/Pacific Summit in Melbourne from 11–13 September 2000. As was the case in the Seattle protests, the action took its name from the date, S11, and was organised around broad concerns about the agenda of the WEF, described as ‘a means of promoting economic and social policies that will benefit the rich and the powerful at the expense of the majority of the world’s people and the environment’.

In the lead-up to this protest, several queer anti-capitalist groups formed in various parts of Australia. Most prominent, at least initially, was QUEER, which formed with the goal of attracting queer people to the S11 demonstrations, a large convergence of campaigns, groups and individuals aimed at preventing the summit from being able to meet. This convergence took the form of mass protest and physical blockading of the summit venue, Crown Casino.

QUEER formed five weeks before S11, in early August, and was made up primarily of students frustrated with the Victorian Cross-Campus Sexuality Network, which, as a semi-official arm of NUS, was tied to the factional and at times party political activities of NUS. The members of QUEER felt that the progressive and activist motivations for meeting with students from other universities were being lost, as the Network became ‘a vehicle for self-promotion and career enhancement’. Despite its origins in the student movement, QUEER aspired to a broader membership, growing after S11 to incorporate members of trade union queer groups, other community organisations, and broader community members. With another queer group, the S11 Deviant Division, QUEER organised a pre-S11 action of mainstream gay venues in Prahran, which, according to participant Brad, featured ‘tribal drums, which I don’t think have ever been

12 Burgmann, Power, Profit and Protest, 188.
14 Adrian Makohon, ‘Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism’ in Querelle, eds Mark Pendleton, Nathanwi Smurph and Justine Clark (Brisbane: QUT Student Guild & Griffith University Student Representative Council, 2001), 44–5.
16 ‘Tribal’ drums, usually referring to West African djembe drums, are a visual and auditory marker of cultural difference, contrasting an alternative or ‘hippy’-like culture with the commercial and pop/dance music orientation of much of mainstream gay culture.
heard along Commercial Road before’. QUEER also organised a convergence day of speeches and preparation for the protests on September 10, and the Queer Bloc at the S11 blockade itself. According to published reports, these various activities attracted between 4018 and 10019 people.

QUEER described itself publicly at the time as composed of ‘progressive queer activists concerned about the impact of globalisation upon the gay community’, which planned to be involved in ‘blockading and banner drops’. Within the progressive queer politics of QUEER were a range of ideologies and political affinities, including socialist, feminist and anarchist ideas. While various members were affiliated with socialist or other left organisations, political diversity was actively encouraged, particularly in the early stages, and subsumed under an all-encompassing banner of ‘anti-capitalism’. QUEER member Brad even argued that ‘people shouldn’t think they have to be a “hard core activist” to join the S11 protests’.

This diversity of politics in QUEER also extended to a range of political positions on sexual and gender identity, and the use of the term ‘queer’. Elizabeth Humphrys argues that these groups were all motivated by a ‘growing dissatisfaction with identity politics [and] queer theory’, but there appears to be a greater degree of ambivalence and ambiguity than she allows. Certainly there were people, such as Tash Moore and Jess Latimer, who argued that ‘[q]ueer theory does nothing to analyse oppression, opportunity and power within society and therefore does not challenge the status quo’. In contrast, however, were those such as Jonathan Wilkinson, who saw ‘[q]ueer as a form of personal identification, political organising, and a theory … ’. Wilkinson argued that Moore and Latimer misunderstood ‘queer’, which to him was a ‘politics that … works to remove the oppression of all marginalised sexual identities’. The groups also had differences on questions of transgender and drag, and underlying queer ideas of power, autonomy and performativity, which reflected the diverse political backgrounds and ideologies of participants. While these divergent positions may lead some to see their use of ‘queer’ as what Robert Reynolds has described as ‘a catchy term to describe a

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18 Ibid.
21 McKenzie, ‘S11 Queers Demand New World’, 3.
23 McKenzie, ‘S11 Queers Demand New World’, 3.
27 Ibid.
contemporary politics of homosexuality’, the groups consciously used ‘queer’ to
differentiate themselves from mainstream ‘gay and lesbian’ politics and struggled
with ‘queer’ as an alternative identity politics. Differences on these points, while
actively discussed, were largely seen as secondary to a more unifying anti-capitalist
politics. Ultimately the groups sought to ‘organize around a common political
focus, not apolitical identity politics’.29

QUEER’s anti-capitalist politics often focussed on the phenomenon of the
‘pink dollar’: the largely mythical belief that gays and lesbians have high disposable
incomes due to the propensity of same-sex couples to have dual incomes and no
children.30 Prominent QUEER member Jonathan Wilkinson described QUEER’s
formation as a reaction to gay conservatism and capitalist exploitation:

So many queers’ desire to revolt has been assuaged by the thin veil of tolerance
provided by the ‘pink dollar’, the male privilege that gay men enjoy, sitting on the
laurels of past achievements, general apathy and disengagement from the political
process, and the all-pervasive ‘lifestylism’ that dominates the queer community.31

Wilkinson also saw the formation of the Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney groups
as simultaneous and mutually reinforcing, positioning QUEER’s creation as a
result of both the forthcoming S11 protests and ‘a growing movement around the
country, including CAAH in Sydney, and QuACE in Brisbane, who had started up
radical, grass-roots queer activist collectives’.32

Brisbane’s QuACE formed in mid 2000, aiming to ‘build and promote S11;
work with the Brisbane S11 Alliance, and; send as many queer people to Melbourne
for the protests as possible’.33 It also had broader aims of:

rais[ing] awareness amongst the queer community as to why our identity is so often
constructed around the dollar; highlight[ing] corporate dominance and its impacts
on lesbian invisibility, body image, the pink dollar and issues of race, gender, and
class as related to queer; [and] build[ing] community links with queer community
groups and lesbian and gay caucuses of unions.34

QuACE’s membership was also largely drawn from queer student groups, with
limited broader community membership. QuACE was active throughout 2001,
organising a range of specific queer actions and queer contingents in broader
anti-globalisation protests.

28 Reynolds, From Camp to Queer, 168.
29 Makohon, ‘Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism’, 45.
31 Makohon, ‘Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism’, 45.
32 Ibid., 44.
34 Ibid.
Sydney did not have an explicitly anti-capitalist queer group at the time of S11. Slightly earlier than these other groups, in 1999, CAAH had formed in Sydney to organise a response to a conference of Christians involved in ‘ex-gay’ ministries (Liberty Christian Ministries) at Sydney University’s Moore College. Ex-gay ministries such as Liberty espouse the belief that queer people can and should be cured of their ‘unwanted same-sex attraction’.35

Approximately 100 people from a broad cross-section of Sydney queer communities attended the initial public meeting that launched CAAH and were involved in the campaign to shut down the conference, resulting in CAAH having the least-student dominated membership of the three groups. Over the next year, CAAH co-ordinated a variety of actions including a picket of the Liberal Party state conference at the University of New South Wales and a large rally of over 400 people recreating the route of the first Sydney Gay Mardi Gras in 1978.36

Despite this latter action’s relatively uncontroversial demands of ending homophobia, youth suicide, homelessness, sexism and racism, advocating an equal age of consent, and demanding increased funding for people living with HIV/AIDS,37 the radical and nascent anti-capitalist orientation of CAAH was made obvious, with organiser Andrew Wong lamenting the need for ‘money to access the scene’38 and calling for radical grassroots action.39 This particular protest event will be explored in further detail below as it represents one of the clearest examples of how these queer groups referenced the past and updated it with contemporary political messages.

Due to a lack of those willing to take on coordination roles, CAAH ceased functioning in its original form soon after this rally. Several of the members of CAAH continued to be active, particularly in the lead-up to the S11 protests, but Sydney remained without a formal grouping like Melbourne’s QUEER or Brisbane’s QuACE until early 2001, when student activists got together to form Gays and Lesbians Against Multinationals (GLAM) to organise a float for the Mardi Gras parade in March, themed Cheerleaders Against Capitalism.40 GLAM continued to meet regularly throughout 2001 and into 2002 and involved itself in a range of political actions and activities.

After GLAM’s demise in 2002, a new CAAH was formed, with the slightly, yet significantly, altered name of Community Action Against Homophobia. This

38 Ibid.
39 Many of the anti-capitalist groups referred to this problem of access and money, highlighting the expensive nature of many of the public gay community outlets, such as parties, bars and other commercial activities. These critiques will be explored further below.
second CAAH traces its origins to the original CAAH, but would prove to be quite different in political outlook, eschewing an explicit anti-capitalism for a radical liberal activism; advocating for same-sex marriage rights,\textsuperscript{41} for example. CAAH continues to this day and is involved in a range of activities, including participating in the ‘Stop Bush’ protest against the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Sydney in September 2007. CAAH’s major motivation for participating in this protest was US President George Bush’s opposition to same-sex marriage rights,\textsuperscript{42} a marked departure from the politics of the earlier groups.

**QUEER ANTI-CAPITALISM—DEMANDING ‘A WHOLE NEW PIE’**

The groups in all three cities shared similarities in membership and origins, with student participation and opposition to S11 as common features of their early constitution. They also shared a core belief that homophobia is created and perpetuated by the economic system of capitalism. Capitalism, they argued, both created the material conditions for the creation of a public homosexual identity, and simultaneously the conditions for a reactionary homophobia. In this, they drew heavily on the work of US gay historian, John D’Emilio.

D’Emilio’s landmark 1983 paper ‘Capitalism and Gay Identity’\textsuperscript{43} discussed the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on the family and individuals’ sexual lives. He focused on how the move in the West (under capitalism) from a society based on large families that owned and worked their properties to one where individualised urban dwellers sell their labour power to survive led to a reconceptualisation of the family. Further, this capitalist progression also began to whittle away at the belief that sexuality was simply a means to procreate. When these factors were combined with the improved individual economic conditions of the new urban middle class, some men and women were able to attain the individual power to order their lives around their sexual and/or emotional interest in the same sex.

At the same time, and while the material forces of capitalism were undermining its very centrality, D’Emilio argued that the nuclear family was enshrined as a core societal institution in capitalist ideology, ‘the source of love, affection and emotional security, [and] the place where our need for stable, intimate human relationships is satisfied’.\textsuperscript{44} This internal capitalist contradiction impacted on the emerging gay and lesbian identity by developing a belief in the superiority of heterosexuality and the nuclear family to the exclusion of other relationships and family structures and

\textsuperscript{41} Community Action Against Homophobia website, available from <www.caah.org>; accessed 3 June 2007.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 108.
guarantees: for D’Emilio, ‘capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexualism and homophobia’.45

Writing in 1983, D’Emilio may have underestimated the flexibility of capitalism, as the recent rise of movements for same-sex marriage, adoption, surrogacy and other reproductive rights have shown that it may be possible to reproduce children, and ultimately workers, without the formal need for a male-female nuclear family. As materialist feminist academic Rosemary Hennessy has argued, ‘just because capitalism made use of heteronormativity does not mean that it is necessary for capitalist production … what [capitalism] does require is an unequal division of labour’.46

Regardless, D’Emilio’s ideas were of central importance to the anti-capitalist queer groups. Meryan Tozer in Brisbane explored D’Emilio’s ideas at length in a post-S11 article which argued that ‘[q]ueer people, who do not recreate the family structure and roles, do not have automatic value in capitalist societies’.47 Similarly, I argued in a review of the work of these groups that D’Emilio’s arguments were significant and central.48 A QUEER pamphlet distributed for a relationship rights rally in early 2001 also argued that ‘[s]ociety and the family structure are fundamentally based on the institution of heterosexuality, which excludes all those who won’t conform to the ideal of the nuclear family’,49 and in Sydney, GLAM member Josh W wrote a stylised Picture Book of Oppression that included the line: ‘the poofs and dykes and AC/DCs and trannys were upset because they were forced into HETEROSEXUAL relationships, forced to sustain the economy by breeding’.50

Despite these critiques of the role of the family in capitalist society, the groups uniformly campaigned for relationship recognition and reproductive freedoms, often utilising the opportunity to bring a radical perspective to a broader audience. In Brisbane, for example, QuACE was central in organising a large public meeting, an occupation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices in Brisbane, and a 150 person rally in protest at the 2001 Howard Government decision to deny access to in-vitro fertilisation technology to single women and lesbians.51 QUEER also used relationship recognition campaigns to push a radical position, arguing in the flyer mentioned above that:

Heterosexual values dominate everything from the law to the church, science, medicine, education, the social security system, the mass media and our culture as a whole. This is heterosexism.52

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45 Ibid., 110.
49 QUEER pamphlet ‘Queers and the Family’ (2001), personal archive.
51 Pendleton, ‘Queers, Anti-capitalism and War’, 2.
52 QUEER pamphlet ‘Queers and the Family’ (2001), personal archive.
The pamphlet goes on to call for a rally at state parliament to demand ‘the end of the Liberal Party’s capitalist agenda of homophobia, sexism, racism, exploitation of workers’.53

This planned rally was the culmination of several months of interactions between the Liberal Party and Victoria’s queer communities. The Liberal Party began to actively court the queer vote with an advertisement in the 2001 Midsumma program in which twenty Liberal members of state parliament, including deputy leader Louise Asher and the only openly gay member of parliament in Victoria, Andrew Olexander, were photographed with the slogan ‘We’ll fight for you’ emblazoned across the bottom.

By April, just two months later, the Victorian Liberal Party had voted to oppose the state government’s plan for same sex relationship recognition, causing QUEER to link up with other community groups to organise protests and media actions to highlight this hypocrisy. While the ensuing controversy garnered much mainstream media attention and commentary, QUEER again used the opportunity to inject a radical position into mainstream debate. Spokesperson Jess Permezel commented, ‘This is a further regressive move by the Liberal Party, becoming more conservative to pander to the likes of big business and corporations. Not passing this legislation will contribute further to the oppression of queers on an economic basis’.56

The anti-capitalist queer groups’ belief in the economic basis of homophobia also included a detailed analysis of the commodification of queer identity. As the liberalising of legislative restrictions on queer sexuality has continued, the promotion of the ‘pink dollar’ has grown. Various studies have demonstrated that the ‘pink dollar’ is a myth, and have shown that same-sex couples (women particularly) have lower disposable incomes than heterosexual couples.57 Regardless, there is a growing middle and upper class in queer communities, and these communities are structured primarily around commercial outlets. This has been identified as a prospective market by corporate interests. As Michael Warner has argued:

[In the lesbian and gay movement, to a much greater degree than in any comparable movement, the institutions of culture building have been market mediated: bars, discos, special services, newspapers, magazines, phone lines, resorts, urban commercial districts … This structural environment has meant that the institutions of queer culture have been dominated by those with capital: typically, middle class white men.58

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53 Ibid.
54 Midsumma is Melbourne’s major gay and lesbian community festival, held in January and February each year.
56 QUEER Media Release (undated, 2001), personal archive.
57 Badgett, Money, Myths and Change.
58 Michael Warner, Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xvii.
This domination and market mediation has been a political debate in queer and gay/lesbian politics since at least the early 1980s, but by the early 1990s, this manifested in a postmodern culture-jamming approach to activism, most clearly demonstrated in the example of US activist group Queer Nation. Queer Nation devoted much of their time and resources to the goal of cultural representation and visibility actions. Actions included reclamation of space through kiss-ins at straight venues and altering of corporate logos to make affirmative statements (such as replacing the P in GAP with a Y). The goal of these styles of action was to demonstrate that ‘the commodity is a central means by which individuals tap into the collective experience of public desire’ and to ‘disrupt the heterosexual presupposition on which that desire rests’. Berlant and Freeman argue that queering commodities ‘[makes] queer good by making goods queer’.

The anti-capitalist queer groups rejected the notion that cultural disruption in the form that Queer Nation expressed itself was a sufficient means of achieving social change. Their analysis saw the commodification of queer identity and the ‘pink dollar’ phenomenon as an extension of capitalist exploitation and argued that the only way to remove this would be resistance to capitalism as a whole, and a revolutionary change to society. While the anti-capitalist queer groups at times utilised cultural means—such as in the use of kiss-ins and pop culture references—this was not enough. QuACE activist Emilie Awbery outlined their revolutionary politics in a speech to the S11 queer convergence:

What does it mean to make the ‘r’ in queer stand for revolution? It means identifying the structure and ideology of capitalism, analysing that social structure and finding within it the means of exercising resistance and dissent and developing a strategy for changing the way society works.

She also carried this message outside the convergence, in gay newspaper BrotherSister, saying ‘Gay Liberation will not be brought about in this society because oppression is inherent to the (capitalist) system. We don’t just want a piece of the pie. We want a whole new pie.’

QUEER summarised the politics of these groups in a flyer for the 2001 Melbourne Pride March:

The material conditions of queer people will never improve from the ‘pink dollar’ and consumer power alone. Our rightful place in society cannot be bought, and liberation from violence, discrimination and heterosexism will not come from

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60 Berlant and Freeman, ‘Queer Nationality’.
62 Berlant and Freeman, ‘Queer Nationality’, 168.
63 Emilie Awbery, ‘Queer Convergence’, in *S11 and Beyond*, 63.
64 McKenzie, ‘S11 Queers Demand New World’, 3.
consumption. Our struggle can never be left to multinational corporations, to politicians or major political parties. We are here because we believe in activism, and empowering individuals to work together at a grass roots level to fight for our rights and self-determination as queer people.65

For these queer groups, the political rhetoric of anti-capitalism was clear and regularly articulated. In putting this politics into action, ideas were drawn from a range of sources. As we have seen above, queer groups intervened into broader anti-globalisation protests such as S11. However, when these large convergences were not occurring, the queer groups looked at different sources for inspiration for action. Overwhelmingly, this inspiration came from looking back to past queer activism, as far back as the summer of 1969.

**LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD: A QUEER RADICAL NOSTALGIA**

New York, 27 June 1969. A small homosexual bar in Greenwich Village is raided by police. Not an unusual occurrence, but one made unique by the patrons’ fight-back and subsequent riot. This one incident at the Stonewall Inn is popularly seen as the birth of Gay Liberation, or the ‘hairpin-drop heard ‘round the world’.66 Yet as many historians have shown, this was not the first, the most militant, nor the best organised of actions.67 Stonewall became central to the collective memory of queer cultures because it was commemorated.

In their study of the way in which Stonewall became so significant in queer history, Elizabeth Armstrong and Suzanna Crage discuss several key markers of commemorability. They argue that the key factors in determining which events are worthy of memory are whether or not they are viewed as ‘dramatic, politically relevant or newsworthy’.68 Stonewall certainly met those criteria and, while it was not the first commemorable event:

[I]t was the first … to occur at a time and place where homosexuals had enough capacity to produce a commemorative vehicle—that is, where gay activists had adequate mnemonic capacity. That these conditions came together in New York in 1969, as opposed to other cities at earlier times, was a result of historical and political processes; time and place mattered. Gay liberation was already underway in New York before Stonewall, which enabled movement activists to recognise the opportunity presented and to initiate commemoration.69

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65 QUEER Pride March Flyer (20 January 2001), personal archive.
68 Ibid., 726.
69 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
The centrality of the Stonewall legend is replicated, and enhanced, in the Australian context by the Sydney Mardi Gras, currently referred to as the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. Itself a commemoration of Stonewall, the first Mardi Gras in June 1978 saw a similar manifestation of mnemonic capacity, and its own traditions of commemoration, as the nascent Gay Liberation movement was able to make Mardi Gras central to Australian discourses of homosexuality. As was the case in the United States, Mardi Gras was not the first piece of gay activism in Sydney, with direct action recorded as early as 1971, but as with Stonewall, the necessary conditions for commemoration were present. The ‘outrageous police action together with the unusually broad community base represented on that march’ brought the needed combination of commemorability and the ability to commemorate, something Sydney did with the decision to hold annual marches.

Ultimately the tensions between those espousing movement politics and those preferring a community celebration collided with the (Australian) mid-winter timing of the Stonewall protests, and resulted in a shift in priorities and a change of timing to the current late summer/early spring in 1981. Despite this shift, the ongoing commemorative and celebratory focus of Mardi Gras continues to this day, with a regular nod to history in Mardi Gras programs and official events.

However, in a similar way to Stonewall, the Mardi Gras commemorative process elided and obscured the ongoing and predating work of gay liberationists that had occurred in various parts of Australia. In addition, as the focus of Mardi Gras shifted, the original political orientation was clouded, with the event not always being positively portrayed in official Mardi Gras paraphernalia. The low point appeared when the 1995 Mardi Gras organisers dismissed the 1978 Mardi Gras as ‘a motley, illegal little street demonstration’.

The celebratory and consumerist orientation of Mardi Gras accelerated in the 1990s, with a 1998 economic impact statement identifying a regional impact of $98.8 million. Accordingly, an increasing number of corporate sponsors, expensive party tickets and shopping sprees came on board, causing some community dissatisfaction, which spilled over into the mainstream Sydney press:

The price of the tickets sends its own message: this has become an event for well-heeled, middle class gay men and women. It is exclusively for the professional

76 Haire, ‘Mardi Gras’, 222.
members of the gay and lesbian club—lawyers, architects, doctors, designers, public servants, entertainment and travel agents, public relations people—who are celebrating their sexuality at a private knees up.77

For the queer anti-capitalist groups, their relationship to the mythic origins of queer activism is complicated by this change to the nature of Mardi Gras and their orientation to the market mediation of much of queer culture. Much of the early rhetoric of these groups drew on an historical referencing of the original Mardi Gras or Stonewall protests. In CAAH’s march along the original Sydney Mardi Gras route in 2000, these features were highly prominent, with organiser Andrew Wong highlighting a contrast between the original protestors and the new Mardi Gras elite:

They [the 1978ers] weren’t lawyers or politicians. They were ordinary people in the community who took it into their own hands to fight against homophobia. This rally will remind lesbians and gay men that they have the potential to continue the fight against homophobia.78

The 2000 rally featured original ’78er and prominent Sydney community figure Craig Johnston, who constructed his speech in three parts—New York 1969, Sydney 1978, and Sydney 2000—anchoring the protest and the participants to Stonewall and the original Mardi Gras. He explains this strategy by describing the importance of noting:

moments of significance for what they were, and what they contributed to where we are today. To recognise the power of signs. And to flip the coin, to ask what are the events that our society celebrates. The birthdays of kings and gods. Stonewall and the first Mardi Gras were performed by ordinary people, ordinary people in struggle. Why cannot ordinary people celebrate their own?79

This connection to ‘ordinary’ people and strategies of commemoration is reminiscent of Peter Glazer’s concept of radical nostalgia,80 a process of remembering the past as inspiration and motivation for the future. In situations where community history is ignored or bypassed in official histories, as in Glazer’s case with Spanish Civil War Veterans in the United States, communities are involved in the creation of their own countermemories81 or ‘communities of memory … that carry a context of meaning that turn us towards the future’.82

78 Rodger, ‘Back to Our Roots’, 12
80 Glazer, Radical Nostalgia.
That nostalgia can be radical, or even progressive, is an idea that cuts across much of left political thought, including that of Karl Marx. Marx’s revolutionary ideals held no time for the past, arguing famously that ‘[i]n order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead’, and moreover, the revolution ‘cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past’. Nostalgia was seen as reactionary, conservative and counter-productive. In recent decades, nostalgia has undergone a significant revision, with David Lowenthal, amongst others, arguing that nostalgia needs to be understood as a diverse political form. Nostalgia does not reflect a desire to return to the past, but actually requires a critical distance from a past that is lost. And this lost past is something that was, at times explicitly and at others implicitly, acknowledged by the queer anti-capitalist groups.

In an introduction to the 2001 *Querelle*, a national journal of queer student writing, as the then NUS National Queer Officer I described 1970s Gay Liberation as ‘providing a challenge to the system rather than simply pushing for cosmetic change’ and contrasted this with ‘a queer movement (or what remains of one) that seems solely interested in pursuing legislative changes … [aimed at] accessing straight institutions such as marriage’. The parenthetical aside highlights the perception of a lost liberatory dream. Yet, as Elizabeth Humphrys has argued, the queer groups identified their contemporary movements as connected to, but critically distant from, this past, providing ‘an opportunity to reshape the radical gay and lesbian agenda’ and potentially to reintroduce a liberatory ideal. Multiple writings at this time used a trajectory of history to legitimise, contextualise and radicalise contemporary political actions and ideas. Liz Shield, for example, argued that despite the fact that the ‘social movement for the rights of the GBLIT people has been active since the 1970s and the Stonewall riot … [there is a] long road still to go for GBLIT [Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Intersex and Transgender] Liberation’. How accurate these groups’ referencing of the past was is possibly a matter of debate, but they can certainly be seen as markedly different from Robert Reynolds’ characterisation of 1990s queer activists as ignorant of history, ‘believing they were the first to imagine a world with radically different sexual categories, boundaries and identifications’.

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84 Ibid.
88 Humphrys, ‘GLAM, QUEER and QuACE’, 10.
90 Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer*, 3.
The Stop CHOGM booklet, produced by NUS, also highlighted connections with the past, and opportunities for the future. ‘Queers have always been part of anti-capitalist activism,’ the anonymous author writes, citing the large demonstrations in Paris in 1968, Stonewall, Mardi Gras and AIDS activism as examples of queers ‘recognis[ing] that their situation does not exist outside of an economic context’. The author then goes on to foreground queer participation in the ‘new anti-capitalist movements’, arguing that this participation ‘both challenges homophobia and questions the sexual repression that capitalism espouses’.

Stonewall and Mardi Gras are the most common reference points for this radical nostalgia, and with the formation of GLAM and its entry of a float in the official Mardi Gras parade in 2001, the radical activism of the queer anti-capitalist groups met the commemorative stage of Mardi Gras. The float, and the ongoing activities of GLAM, were explicitly described as existing in this tradition:

Mardi Gras began as a protest rally in 1978 to campaign for the rights of lesbians and gay men in Australia. It was inspired by the Stonewall Riots in 1969, when Lesbians and Gays confronted police violence by fighting back against police violence … [The float] used the opportunity to spread the word about the upcoming Global Strike Against Capitalism on May 1st, and also had the broader aim of critiquing the shallow commitment corporations have actually shown to the liberation of gay and lesbian people.

In Brisbane, in the convergence booklet for the aborted Stop CHOGM protests, the anonymous author traces a slightly varied, but equally long, history of queer involvement in anti-capitalist activism, from ‘the anti-Vietnam protests, the early Gay Liberation Movement and the HIV/AIDS crisis’ through to the Seattle protests. In this tradition, queer activists at CHOGM were planning to ‘not campaign on civil rights style demands for inclusion in society’s institutions but demand a society free of sexism, racism and homophobia and the economic system that inherently perpetuates oppression’.

The physical presence of these groups through the GLAM float in the major commemorative event of the Australian queer calendar, alongside the regular referencing of queer historical touchstones and other examples of large-scale radical activism (in which queer people were involved), served to place contemporary action in a perceived tradition of largely continuous anti-capitalist queer activism,

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91 After 9/11, the next major summit on the movement’s agenda was the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Brisbane on October 6. A large protest and blockade were planned, but the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, and subsequent military action, led to a postponement of CHOGM and the transformation of the protest into a peace march and rally.


93 Ibid.


96 Ibid.
and place queer sexuality at the centre of radical politics. This tradition was a key factor in the formulation of the political ideas and praxis of the groups.

**DESIGN AND SUBSTANCE: THE ACT-UP INFLUENCE**

In some cases, particularly that of QUEER, there was also a conscious and repeated use of visual cues and protest tactics of earlier queer activists to drive home new or updated political messages. QUEER’s prime activist influence was ACT-UP, a radical AIDS activist organisation that formed in New York in March 1987 before spawning ACT-UP collectives in many major centres around the world, including several in Australia.

ACT-UP, and its ‘unofficial propaganda ministry and guerrilla graphic designers’ Gran Fury, were responsible for a major shift in both the content and form of activist imagery. ACT-UP protest imagery featured historic iconography such as the pink triangle, updated with memorable slogans and vivid designs. The famous ACT-UP ‘Silence=Death’ image came to symbolise much of AIDS activism.

QUEER formed out of student and queer groups; several key members were art students and designers, many with knowledge of the iconic nature of ACT-UP imagery and propaganda. This connection to past imagery was reflected in the similar design principles employed by QUEER, which, like ACT-UP, used minimal text, block fonts and graphic icons for impact.

ACT-UP also used a range of political tactics subsequently taken up by QUEER. These included affinity groups, or:

small associations of people within activist movements whose mutual trust and shared interests allow them to function autonomously and secretly, arrive at quick decisions by consensus, protect one another at demonstrations, and participate as units in coordinated acts of civil disobedience.

This organising model was not new in left circles (with origins as far back as the Spanish Civil War), but was infused with a camp humour and savvy design aesthetic that reflected ACT-UP’s emergence from the New York gay and artistic

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98 Significant differences existed between the ACT-UP chapters formed in the US, which were responding to official lack of interest and neglect of the large and growing health crisis that was AIDS, and those formed in Australia, where early government acceptance of the scale of the problem led to world-leading community engagement practices. In Australia, ACT-UP was formed as an unofficial radical arm of the established AIDS organisations, essentially as a pressure tactic to force governments into further funding or action around HIV/AIDS. Graham Willett covers this point extensively in *Living Out Loud*, 184–92.
100 Homosexuals were forced to wear a pink triangle and targeted by the Nazi regime in Germany in a similar way to Jews and other minority groups.
101 Crimp and Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics*.
communities most heavily impacted by the AIDS crisis. Melbourne’s S11 protests also called for affinity group-style organisation by explicitly referencing these other left traditions, but QUEER’s affinity group model was arguably more closely tied to ACT-UP’s than other left models, as their subsequent reproductions of many other ACT-UP modes of operation indicate. QUEER continued to organise by way of affinity groups in large anti-capitalist protest actions.

ACT-UP’s political actions were a mix of large and organised protest rallies and interventions into established activities (such as Gay Pride Day). ACT-UP also revived the earlier Gay Liberation term ‘zaps’ for ‘small protests organized on the spur of the moment to respond to an emergency situation or tip-off’. Similarly, after S11, QUEER continued to be involved in a range of direct actions. These included organising a speakout on HIV/AIDS exploitation on World AIDS Day (1 December) in 2000 and developing actions around sex worker harassment in St Kilda in conjunction with sex worker organisations. QUEER also participated in broader anti-capitalist actions, such as the M1 demonstrations at the Melbourne Stock Exchange on 1 May 2001, and gay community events such as the annual Pride March. QUEER also employed ‘zap’ strategies and gave a knowing wink to its ACT-UP and Gay Liberation forebears, saying in one protest flyer adorned with a Tinkerbell motif, ‘I’m Tinkerbell, the revolutionary fairy. I use my magic wand to ZAP the rich and powerful & their uniformed henchmen … ’. QUEER targeted conservative Catholic Archbishop George Pell for his public anti-homosexual statements in a 2001 Easter Sunday protest, staging a mock suicide ‘die-in’ and chanting ‘George Pell—Go to Hell!’ to highlight the church’s complicity in the high rates of queer youth suicide. Outside Easter Mass at St Patrick’s Roman Catholic Cathedral approximately 30 people lay ‘dead’ on the ground and placed nooses over the fence of the cathedral.

This action directly referenced a similar action, held by ACT-UP New York, at its own St Patrick’s on 10 December 1989, when more than 4500 people disrupted church services, staged a die-in and picketed outside. ACT-UP also personally targeted New York’s Cardinal O’Connor, with the two major themes of the protest being ‘Stop the Church’ and ‘Stop this Man’. Media coverage of the two events was also strikingly similar, despite the difference in scale, with mainstream media

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105 Crimp and Rolston, AIDS Demo Graphics, 22.
106 M1 was the first major manifestation of the anti-globalisation movement in Australia post-S11. With actions in each major city centred on the Stock Exchange, affinity groups were encouraged to focus on a particular corporate target.
108 QUEER pamphlet, October 3 rally (2001), private archive.
109 ACT-UP developed the die-in as an effective way of making a visual impact—multiple bodies ‘dead’ on the ground—and resisting move-on directions of the police. Limp bodies on the ground were significantly more difficult to move than standing or sitting activists.
111 Crimp and Rolston, AIDS Demo Graphics, 136.
highlighting the ‘sacriligious “homosexual activists” desecrating the host’\textsuperscript{112} in New York and acting ‘beyond rational public behaviour’\textsuperscript{113} in Melbourne.

ACT-UP and QUEER both strongly resisted corporate exploitation of the virus. ACT-UP’s 1989 targeting of Burroughs Wellcome, the owner of then experimental AIDS treatment drug AZT, featured the slogan, ‘AIDS. It’s Big Business! (But Who’s Making a Killing?)’\textsuperscript{114} and highlighted the large profits being generated by Wellcome. QUEER also targeted drug company profiteering from AIDS, with its 2001 M1 protest targets including GlaxoSmithKline, a major pharmaceutical company chosen because it was ‘overcharging for life-saving drugs whilst declaring a $26.3 billion dollar profit’.\textsuperscript{115}

QUEER’s most explicit reproduction of the past came on the twentieth anniversary of the discovery of AIDS. Ten years earlier, the Melbourne branch of ACT-UP had held a controversial action, declaring an AIDS D Day, on 6 June 1991. ACT-UP members targeted an iconic Melbourne attraction, a large floral clock opposite the National Gallery of Victoria, uprooting the flowers and replacing them with white crosses. D Day was the culmination of a campaign targeting Federal Health Minister Brian Howe, demanding:

\begin{itemize}
  \item DRUGS needed urgently by people with HIV/AIDS; of 50 available overseas 3 are in use in Australia
  \item DEATHS caused by lack of HIV/AIDS treatments which have been tested and approved overseas
  \item DELAYS in HIV/AIDS drug approvals in Australia caused by bureaucratic obstruction
  \item DEADLINE June 6 1991 for Mr Howe to respond to Act Up’s demands for improved drug access\textsuperscript{116}
\end{itemize}

Ten years later, QUEER recreated this action, with the same fonts and designs on flyers, demanding that:

\begin{itemize}
  \item DRUG companies’ prices of HIV/AIDS treatments are freely accessible to all, and companies remove all patents from treatment drugs to allow generic production
  \item DEBTS exacerbated by the structural adjustment programs imposed on developing countries by the IMF be abolished to promote regeneration of public health systems.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 138.
\textsuperscript{114} Crimp and Rolston, \textit{AIDS Demo Graphics}, 116.
\textsuperscript{115} Wilkinson, ‘An Update on QUEER’, 46.
\textsuperscript{116} Willett, \textit{Living Out Loud}, 191.
PENDLETON

- DEPENDENCY on charity of people living with HIV/AIDS be reduced through Federal Government providing increased welfare benefits.
- DEATHS, caused by the lack of free and universally available materials including safe sex and injecting equipment and preventative educational resources, end now.\textsuperscript{117}

As stunts, both were effective, garnering much mainstream attention and prompting large-scale debate, but the two floral clock actions differed in almost all other ways. Where the first D Day was the culmination of a carefully planned build-up, and existed as part of a key national campaign decided on by AIDS activists,\textsuperscript{118} QUEER’s was planned and executed largely outside the context of a national campaign, or a significant relevant movement. The first D Day had a core desired (and expected) reformist outcome—faster approval of treatment; QUEER’s were more ambitious, yet less specific, calling for broad anti-capitalist goals and revolutionary change.

That ACT-UP was a key influence in the development of QUEER’s public identity demonstrates again the ways in which the queer anti-capitalist groups consciously referenced, replicated, reinterpreted and radicalised the past in the development of their radical and revolutionary queer politics.

**The Past into the Future**

Nostalgia for the past has traditionally been seen as negative by left theorists and activists. Despite this, regular referencing and replicating of the past became a central element in the politically radical subset of the left that was the queer anti-capitalist groups. Far from the negative and conservative characterisations of nostalgia, their ‘radical nostalgia’ served to position the groups in an established community tradition, and outlined a forward-looking politics of radical social change.

By placing their actions and politics in a community history that included iconic incidents such as Stonewall and the original Mardi Gras, the groups were able to argue for the centrality of anti-capitalist politics to those communities, and critique commemorative processes that downplay the radical in favour of the commercial. By also seeing their practice as existing in continuity with radical queer participation in earlier movements, they were able to position queer sexuality as central to anti-capitalist politics and the broader anti-globalisation movement.

With the decline of the anti-globalisation movement after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, these groups also disappeared. However, as their radical nostalgia demonstrates, an anti-capitalist queer politics may just as easily resurface, referencing past political actions and

\textsuperscript{117} D Day flyer (Melbourne: QUEER, 6 June 2001), personal archive.

\textsuperscript{118} Willett, *Living out Loud*, 190.
again fusing the politics of sexuality and economics with the aim of developing a liberatory politics that argues once more for ‘a whole new pie’.\textsuperscript{119}

\textit{The University of Melbourne}

\textsuperscript{119} McKenzie, ‘S11 Queers Demand New World’, 3.