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Alternative Media in Brisbane: 1965-1985

Stephen Stockwell

Brisbane under the Country/National Party governments from 1957 to 1989 is often portrayed as a cultural desert. While there were certainly many 'Queensland refugees' who went to the southern states and overseas to realize their creativity, this paper's review of alternative media in Brisbane between 1965 and 1985 substantiates previous claims that the political repression also encouraged others with radical views to stay to contribute to the extra-parliamentary opposition. The radical movement is revealed as adept at using the products of technological change (including new printing processes, FM radio and light-weight Super 8 and video camera equipment) to create new audiences interested not only in alternative politics but also contemporary creativity. In particular this paper argues that by countering Premier Bjelke-Petersen's skilful management of the mainstream media, alternative media workers were producing the basis of the thriving creative industry scene that exists in Brisbane today, as well as non-doctrinaire ideas that may have a wider application.

Bjelke-Petersen's Brisbane and the Willis Thesis

In his novel *Johnno*, David Malouf captures the spirit of Brisbane after the Second World War: 'Our big country town that is still mostly weather-board and one-storey, so little a city... so sleepy, so slatternly so sprawlingly unlovely!' (Malouf 1975: 51) With little industrial development and mining profits going south or overseas, Brisbane did not have the economic base to sustain the large, lively and well-financed cultural scenes of Sydney and Melbourne. Critics and residents alike accepted Brisbane as provincial, stunted and without a creative spark.

But Brisbane was not a cultural desert, either before or during more than three decades of National Party hegemony. The preceding Labor Governments were not known for their cultural aspirations, yet creativity flourished from the foundation of the *Meanjin* magazine in 1940, through the radical bookshops and galleries and via the work of the Barjai and Miya artistic circles (Watson 2004a, 2004b). Under the then Country Party in the late '50s and early '60s, a number of artists produced perhaps their best work while living in and around Brisbane: painters Ian Fairweather and Jon Molvig, and poet Judith Wright, for example. Local theatre flourished (Healy 2004) and local rock and roll provided young people with a creative outlet much to the consternation of police, government and parents (Evans 2004a).

But by 1965 the emerging conflict between the conservative state government and a creatively inclined younger generation was clear. In what can now be seen as a prelude to the coming turmoil, two young mothers, Merle Thornton and Ro Bogner, chained themselves to a bar of the Regatta Hotel demanding that the state government repeal laws

that prevented them from being served with liquor in public bars. Merle Thornton's own account of this episode, 'Our Chains: Rear View Reflections', appears in this issue of *Queensland Review*. (See also Ferrier 2004.) This was a cultural as well as a political protest that went to the heart of the experience of Brisbane where petty rules limited possibilities and dictated the kinds of lives people lived.

Many have sought to make the argument that, under Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen (1968 to 1987), Queensland was different to the rest of Australia (e.g., Charlton 1983). It is hard to imagine Bjelke-Petersen becoming premier of any other Australian state but he was certainly in the tradition of Queensland's strong leaders that stretched from early commandant of Moreton Bay penal settlement, Captain Patrick Logan, through Labor premiers Forgan-Smith, Hanlon and Gair, to Bjelke-Petersen's own mentor and predecessor, Frank Nicklin (Wear 1993). Bjelke-Petersen was part of the Nicklin government that first sought to ban street marches in 1966. As premier in 1971, Bjelke-Petersen reacted to protests against the touring South African Springbok rugby team chosen on apartheid lines by implementing a state of emergency and using police to charge and beat protestors. In 1977 Bjelke-Petersen again sought to ban street marches, putting the police in conflict with those seeking to exercise their free speech rights (Brennan 1983). This second attack on street marches was intimately connected with the rise of police commissioner Terry Lewis who hid a web of corruption behind the premier's knee-jerk support for the politically compliant police force.

The police were also often at the forefront of Bjelke-Petersen's cultural policy as they arrested an actor for swearing on stage (Evans 2004b: 276), seized copies of Beardsley prints (Healy 2004: 205), and closed down music venues (Stafford 2004: 79-94). Those years certainly were a time of exodus from Brisbane for those of a creative bent who confronted the petty censorship and political repression that was the Premier's stock-in-trade as a 'hillbilly dictator' (Whitton 1989). Bjelke-Petersen's early media performances were abominable but under the tutelage of former ABC journalist, Allen Callaghan, his handling of the media became very sophisticated. While he still appeared tongue-tied, this marked him as closer to the average person and definitely not a smooth-talking professional politician. The press gallery was highly managed and while Bjelke-Petersen joked about 'feeding the chooks', journalists knew that positive coverage was rewarded with improved access, while negative coverage meant no access and even reduced state government advertising for the journalist's outlet. Bjelke-Petersen had the mainstream media under control and it was in the vacuum so produced that alternative media thrived.

Long-time media activist Liz Willis (2005: 17) pointed out Bjelke-Petersen's role in creating his opponents: '...his almost 20-year reign also produced a magnificent byproduct: a remarkable oppositional culture manifested in music, theatre and art; media, comedy and satire.' She argues that Bjelke-Petersen's 'corrupt, violent and unprincipled regime' politicised a generation of young Queenslanders who would otherwise have had little interest in politics. The urgency and intensity of Bjelke-Petersen's politics called forth an extra-parliamentary opposition with a clear common purpose. There was a sense of unity as people came together in 'unlikely alliances', driven to action by the

immediacy of concerns. Of course, particularly in the '60s, radical politics in Brisbane learnt from and connected to international radicalism inspired by the Vietnam War, the US civil rights movement and the economics of the baby boom generation, but the political and religious fundamentalism of the Bjelke-Petersen regime, the personal intrusiveness and harassment of his special branch police and the obviousness of Indigenous dispossession on the streets, all went to create a more broadly-based and more intensely radical, and indeed revolutionary, movement than elsewhere in Australia. That movement displayed a high degree of creativity and organisation in spreading their messages through the alternative media, utilising new print, radio and screen technologies to create new audiences.

Brisbane Alternative Media 1965-85

Year	Print	Radio	Screen etc	Events
1965	<i>Semper Floreat's</i> 34 th year			31 Mar: Regatta protest
1966			Dickson's film of Anti-National Service Rally (b&w, 3 min)	14 March: first street march arrests; 22 Oct: LBJ visit
1967	<i>Impact</i> (SDA)			20 Jan: Nguyen Cao Ky visit
1968	<i>Student Guerrilla</i> (SDA), <i>Brisbane Line</i> , Red & Black Bookshop		3 Mar: FOCO founded Nick Oughton films	BUM 8 Aug: Bjelke-Petersen becomes Premier
1969	<i>Student Guerrilla</i>			
1970	<i>July: Up the Right Channels</i>		Schonell Theatre opens	8 May, 18 Sept: Moratoriums
1971	<i>HARPO</i> tabloid		Brisbane Filmmakers Co-op begins	30 Jun: moratorium Springbok tour UQ strike
1972	<i>HARPO</i> tabloid			2 Dec: Whitlam elected
1973		UQ Union Media Committee		May: Aquarius Festival, Nimbin
1974			Popular Theatre Troupe begins	Bjelke-Petersen election landslide
1975	<i>Hecate</i>	8 Dec: 4ZZZ founded	Video Access Centre	11 Nov: fall of Whitlam govt.
1976		Radio Times Joint Efforts Cedar Bay	<i>Surrender In Paradise</i>	TEAS march baton, Lewis promoted
1977	<i>Social Alternative</i> May: <i>Cane Toad Times</i> 1 (to 1979)			Street marches banned
1978	<i>Time Off</i>			

1979		Punks v Task Force		Bellevue Hotel demolished
1980	Zines: <i>First Gear</i> , <i>X-press</i>		Brisbane Independent Filmmakers	
1981				
1982				
1983	Sep: <i>Cane Toad Times 2</i> (to 1990)	Boggo Road riots		National Party rules alone
1984				UQ awards honorary doctorate to Bjelke-Petersen
1985				SEQEB strike

Print

The University of Queensland Union's student newspaper, *Semper Floreat* (from the Latin, 'May it always flourish') was the crucible of alternative media in Brisbane. Founded in 1932, *Semper* grew from a fortnightly newsletter of only a few pages to become by the sixties a tabloid utilising colour. The editors were elected annually by the student body and the protection of the University allowed it to take an independent and alternative stance. Many of Australia's leading journalists and media figures cut their teeth at *Semper*. Regular attacks by conservative parliamentarians only drew more participation from students so it became a strong, regular channel for a broad range of voices that, on average, gave the paper a moderately radical stance. There were, of course, some excesses including sexism, sexual grossness and adolescent inanity that came in for much criticism from radicals, and often *Semper* was restrained by the caution of the student union, whose executive bore the financial responsibility for defamation. As opposition to the Vietnam War hardened and interaction with the police became more intense, the revolutionary nature of the situation became more obvious and there was a desire for a medium of communication that was not constrained by the need for balance or legal niceties.

In 1966, the Society for Democratic Action (SDA) was formed by a general group of students concerned by Vietnam and civil liberties who were joined by Catholic students radicalised by the second Vatican Council. The printing of pamphlets was an important form of communication. Initially the printing choices were the roneo machines available at the student union and in University departments (while sympathetic staff averted their gaze after hours) or the hot lead presses available at the Communist Party headquarters. The roneo system used typed paper stencils that quickly deteriorated. Pamphlets could be produced quickly but they were poor quality, without illustration and in miniscule numbers. Alternatively, the hot lead publications needed a long lead time and could be

subject to Communist Party censorship, which quickly came as galling as Bjelke-Petersen's (Knight 2004).

In 1967, the SDA agreed that it needed 'the best available small press technology to produce its publications' (Knight 2004: 12). An entrepreneurial member of the group, Mitch Thompson, put together the finances (perhaps by stock market speculation) to purchase a Multilith 1250 flat bed printer using aluminium plates that was located under a Thompson's house in Jephson Street, Toowong. The SDA began producing their own pamphlets and *Impact*, an irregular publication of four stapled A4 pages discussing a variety of 'worthwhile causes' (Beatson 2006). *Impact* included local material against the Vietnam War, racism, the ban on street marching, the university administration and all forms of totalitarianism as well as international material sourced from the US-based Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) (Ferrier and Mansell 2004: 270). Sometimes the revolutionary material from UPS sat awkwardly beside the local, liberal Christian material. The SDA press also produced *Viewpoint* for the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties, a comparatively more staid publication focused on legal issues around the *Traffic Act* and street marches. While many contributed ideas and writing, the printing was executed by Jim Beatson and Geoff Dalton-Morgan (Beatson 2006).

By 1968, encouraged by international events, the SDA was becoming more radical and focused a lot of its energy on the regular publication of the *Student Guerilla* which was distributed at the St Lucia campus. There were 22 issues that year and a further six in 1969. It contained a similar mix of topics to *Impact*, though the liberal Christian focus began to be replaced by more anarcho-socialist theory. It is interesting to note that the hard-line Marxism and consequent factionalism evident elsewhere in the late '60s student movement was more muted in Brisbane where the independent but still revolutionary thought of Brian Laver, Dan O'Neill and many others garnered support. The *Student Guerilla* was far from serious, and contained internationally sourced cartoons as well as locally produced comedy material. Typical of its provocations was a full page wanted poster for Jesus Christ in issue 10: 'Wanted for sedition, criminal anarchy, vagrancy and conspiring to overthrow the established government...' *Student Guerilla* also contained advertisements for FOCO, the SDA sponsored entertainment venue in Trades Hall on Sunday Nights. (Knight 2004, Beatson 2006)

Midway through 1968, in what can only be described as a hare-brained scheme, Dave Nadel was plucked from taxi-driving in Melbourne and employed to create a national weekly entitled *Brisbane Line*. It was to have a much broader readership than the *Student Guerilla*, appealing to not only students but also blue and white collar unionists across the country, distributed through university and union outlets for 10 cents a copy. (Knight 2004: 28-36) The scheme came out of the working relationship that developed between the SDA and the Communist Party's youth wing, the Young Socialists League. The combined enterprise went under the name of the Brisbane Underground Machine (BUM). The plan was to produce a larger format A3 publication consisting of 10 sheets. The Multilith press, relocated to BUM headquarters in a cellar in the old Brisbane Markets, was pushed to its limits as was Nadel's ingenuity in coming up with material for the paper (Beatson 2006). The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia occurred as the first

issue was due to come out and the ensuing crisis within the Communist Party dissipated support that was crucial. In the end there was never a dedicated writing staff, the editorial line was confused, distribution was never properly organized and only three issues were produced. SDA energies went back into producing the *Student Guerilla*.

By 1969 the Multilith press had returned to under the Jephson Street house, FOCO was forced out of Trades Hall and the SDA became far more radical and transformed into the Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance. Besides a further six editions of *Student Guerilla*, the press was busy producing up to four pamphlets a night for distribution at the university (Beatson 2006). There was a common commitment to 'the well-produced leaflet' that was an effective piece of communication with visual elements, easy to read text and simple, often humorous, messages (Stanwell 2006). The impact of these pamphlets can be seen in the numbers of students and staff who were convinced to join demonstrations against the *Traffic Act*, the Vietnam Moratoriums and the university strike during the Springbok tour. It was not uncommon for these events to be supported by 'half the campus population' (Ferrier and Mansell 2004: 270).

In the 1970s there were a number of print initiatives that built on and developed the *Student Guerilla* experience. Dan O'Neill (1970) co-ordinated a major project that involved students and staff across the university critiquing their own particular disciplines and the role of the university generally. This material was collated into a large format, soft bound book, *Up the Right Channels*, which provided much of the intellectual integrity that accompanied the university-wide strike prompted by Bjelke-Petersen's declaration of a state of emergency during the Springbok in 1971. Between 1970 and 1972 a group of students and entertainers including Bomber Perrier, Graham Cathcart and Stuart Matchett developed the Romp Street Theatre Troupe into an organisation called How About Resisting Powerful Organisations (HARPO) that ran mixed entertainment events (Nights Out) and a restaurant and wholefoods shop (Mr Natural's) on Schonell Drive near the university. (Stanwell 2006) To promote these enterprises and their general political position, they produced an irregular tabloid magazine, also called *HARPO*, which they sold at the University and around Brisbane, dressed in quirky superhero costumes. Individuals involved in the HARPO group played major roles in the Nimbin Aquarius Festival, the growth of community arts in Australia and the foundation of 4ZZZ. In the mid seventies two academic journals were established in Brisbane that deserve mention. In 1975, Carole Ferrier was instrumental in establishing the feminist journal, *Hecate* and in 1977 Ralph Summy played a leading role in the foundation of *Social Alternatives* ('History of *Hecate*', 1998; 'History of *Social Alternatives*', nd). Both publications were formal academic productions but also took radical perspectives that owed much to the Brisbane experience.

In 1977, Bjelke-Petersen renewed the ban on street marches and set off another round of civil disobedience and arrests. One of the by-products of these events was the establishment of *The Cane Toad Times* by John Jiggins, Matt Mawson and a group of writers and cartoonists keen to provide a cultural adjunct to the politics on the street. They organised an office at Planet Press in Fortitude Valley and produced a quarterfold magazine that became a tabloid by the fourth edition. The name was chosen because it

was 'emblematic of Queensland' The cane toad was a species introduced to North Queensland in 1935 to eradicate the cane beetle. It failed to have any impact on the beetle but escaped from the cane fields and was in plague proportions in Brisbane by the seventies. The name was humorous but also evoked a sense of repulsion: 'the feeling of fear and loathing that typified being twenty-something in the Deep North.' (Jiggins 2005: 3). While the core work of the *Toad* was a sustained satirical attack on Bjelke-Petersen and his police enforcers, it also celebrated seemingly mundane but often surprisingly exotic aspects of Queensland popular culture: giant roadside attractions, local speedway heroes, banana worship. The first version of *The Cane Toad Times* folded in 1979 as participants got day jobs or left the state.

Emerging from the *Semper* offices in 1978 was *Time Off*. Based loosely on London's *Time Out*, *Time Off* was a tabloid with listings of entertainment events, music, theatre, film and restaurant reviews and an editorial policy that derided the conservatism of the state government. Unlike *Time Out*, *Time Off* was free, depended entirely on advertising and was distributed in the establishments that advertised in it. It was the brainchild of Rob Cameron and he quickly commercialised it, established an office in Fortitude Valley and sold the enterprise. It continues publication today as the cornerstone of Brisbane's street press.

As personal computers began to spread in the early 1980s, desktop publishing was quickly appropriated by Brisbane's alternative communities. What we now call 'zines' – perfunctorily produced, glorified newsletters of appeal to relatively small audiences – started appearing free in record stores, alternative clothing shops and the ZZZ foyer. A couple of particular interest were *First Gear*, the magazine of the Purple Hearts scooter club which extolled the joys of the Mod sub-culture, and Ian Gray's *X-press*, which chronicled local independent bands with devotion.

In 1983 the second iteration of *The Cane Toad Times* began, at first laid out in *Semper* offices after hours by Matt Mawson, Anne Jones and Damien Ledwith. Its rebirth was prompted by the 1983 state election where Bjelke-Petersen's Nationals were successful in taking sufficient seats in South-East Queensland that with a couple of Liberal deserters they could form government in their own right (with 39% of the primary vote!). It was launched by a Labor member of parliament and strident critic of Bjelke-Petersen's corrupt regime, Kev Hooper, and the magazine's pursuit of government corruption and excess was eventually picked up by the mainstream press, and in turn led to the Fitzgerald Inquiry which recommended criminal charges against a string of Queensland police and government ministers, including Premier Bjelke-Petersen himself (Whyte 1989, Stocks 1998). The second coming of the *Toad* was avowedly eccentric, extending satire of the state government to a much broader world view: sex, religion, food and death. The adoption of desktop publishing allowed the *Toad* to produce a superior product, on their own premises (a rented hose in Woolloongabba, then a commercial space in the refurbished McWhirter's building in Fortitude Valley), and develop a national audience, particularly amongst the Queensland refugees in southern states. The second version of the magazine saw fifteen issues produced between 1983 and 1990. Many involved worked towards the election of the Goss Labor government in 1989

and after that their professional skills were in high demand. The magazine's work was done and it folded, but not before it became the platform for Toadshow theatrical events at La Boite, the Princess Theatre in Annerley and the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. The Toadshow multimedia production house continues operation today.

Radio

After the Springbok state of emergency and the subsequent university strike in 1971, there was a growing awareness among radicals that they were not getting their message through to a mass audience. The mainstream media were happy to parrot Bjelke-Petersen's line and the alternative print initiatives of the late sixties had never become sustainable but there was a clear strategic need, and audience, for an alternative voice. Jim Beatson, in particular, was disturbed that many of the newspapers, newsletters and pamphlets that he had laboured over as printer were never distributed properly and were still in the boots of comrades' cars months later (Knight 2001: 3-4, Beatson 2006).

During and after the university strike there was talk of establishing a pirate radio station and while at first Beatson thought it would be a complex project, his investigations revealed that 'a pirate radio station was a relatively easy thing to do. The only problem was that it was also easy to monitor illegal transmissions and then block them.' (Beatson quoted in Stafford 2004: 22). Once the Whitlam government was elected in December 1972, Beatson dedicated a large amount of energy to establishing a legal FM radio station. In 1973 he chaired the University of Queensland Union Media Committee, which lobbied the federal Labor government to grant test and provisional licences. By aiming for a licence on the otherwise vacant FM spectrum, Beatson was inserting the station into a technological gap and not only assuring quality reproduction but also avoiding a fight with Australia's powerful (at the time) AM radio industry. Knight (2001), Stafford (2004: 20-30) and ZZZ's own commemorative publications (Caroli 1985, Williams 2000) document the bureaucratic manoeuvres that led test broadcasts in early 1975 and permanent transmission at 10-watt strength from 8 December 1975 when announcer John Woods played the Who's 'Won't Get Fooled Again'.

ZZZ played a major role in building a sustainable alternative community in Brisbane and developing the city's cultural life and creative industries. The accommodation, travel and events notices read out on air brought people together. Unified by opposition to Bjelke-Petersen, there was little factionalism at the station or in the alternative community generally. There were differences of opinion between those who wanted more radical talk and those committed to audience-building through the music, between advocates of West Coast and Punk, and between feminists and heavy metal enthusiasts, but once matters were resolved at open station meetings, a lot of rancour disappeared and people got on with communication.

The station employed three journalists from the outset and in 1976 they were credited with breaking the Cedar Bay story when police burnt down an alternative community in far North Queensland, even though it was legally on a mining lease. The

story went national and the station was seen to come of age. ZZZ also followed the depredations of the police Task Force as it was used to harass youth, particularly at independent music venues, and other media relied on the station as a source during the 1983 Boggo Road prison riots.

The station had three main sources of income: funds from the University of Queensland Union for services to the student community, subscriptions and its own fund-raising efforts. Subscribers received discounts at record stores, restaurants and many other counter-cultural establishments as well as a regular magazine called *Radio Times*, produced in *Semper* offices. Subscriptions were heavily promoted in the annual, on-air Radiothon. It was the station's own external fund-raising that had most significant cultural impact through FOCO-inspired Joint Efforts and Market Days. These were mass events where the audience came together and saw what others in the alternative community had to offer in the way of music, entertainment and artefacts.

In particular, Brisbane's music scene benefited greatly from the on-air exposure, appearances at ZZZ events, and station promotion of alternative venues. Independent bands, venues and labels sprang up all over the city, dependent on making contact with their audience through ZZZ. Bands such as the The Saints and The Go-Betweens, recorded on local labels Fatal and Able respectively, were first played by ZZZ and went on to international careers (Stafford 2004: 43). Others bands played on the station, such as Razar and The Black Assassins, made a local career out of baiting the Queensland police with their loud, fast and non-boring songs and gigs (Smith 2004, 'Who is Brisbane's Ugliest Band?' nd). ZZZ provided the infrastructure that has been the dynamo for the Brisbane independent music scene for more than 30 years now and it is hard to imagine the success of bands like Powderfinger, Regurgitator and George without the preliminary work done by the station. Similarly Brisbane's theatres, galleries and community spaces have benefited greatly from their exposure on ZZZ.

Screen and Stage

While film and theatre are relatively more expensive projects than print and radio, alternative groups made good use of available spaces and technologies to get their message across in the period under discussion. Bruce Dickson (1966), a future editor of *Semper*, was shooting 16mm and Super 8 footage of demonstrations and cultural events in the sixties and early seventies, and screening rough-cut films for student audiences. In 1968, the SDA founded FOCO as a multi-media event in three rooms on the top floor of the Trades Hall on Sunday evenings. There was live rock music, light shows, poetry readings (by actor Jack Thompson among many others), folk music, theatre, public forums, underground newspapers on sale and screenings of classic, experimental and local work produced filmmakers such as Nick Oughton (Evans 2004b: 273-4). FOCO came under attack in both federal parliament and the labour movement and it was closed down in 1969 but it remained inspirational for HARPO's Nights Out, ZZZ's Joint Efforts and La Boite's Friday Night Revue, La Bamba.

In 1970 the University of Queensland Union built the Schonell Theatre on the St Lucia campus. The main stage of the theatre became a key venue for alternative music and theatre. The first show performed at the Schonell was Bryan Nason's interpretation of Euripides' *The Bacchoi* [sic: *The Bacchae*] which included in its cast Bille Brown and Geoffrey Rush. The Schonell was also the venue for the annual Architecture Review which was a funnel for much campus creativity and produced shows such as 'I Hear What You Say' (a favourite phrase of the then Vice Chancellor and future Governor-General, Zelman Cowen) and 'Learn to Love Your Sperm Test'. The Schonell complex also provided a smaller venue, the Cement Box, that allowed for even more theatrical experimentation. The Schonell also became Brisbane's main venue for experimental, foreign and art house cinema and many young, aspiring filmmakers benefited from the free cinematheque on Wednesday afternoons during the '70s. In 1971, the Brisbane Filmmakers Co-op was established by Peter Gray, who also organised the screening of a series of independent films.

The Whitlam years provided some seed money for various alternative enterprises in Brisbane. Many of the theatrical experiments of the late '60s and early '70s came together in 1974 with the foundation of the Popular Theatre Troupe, which received funding from various government sources to perform its own brand of social agitprop in a variety of venues around Brisbane and across Australia for ten years and provided the groundwork for later community arts programs such as Order by Numbers and Street Arts (Capelin 1995). In 1975, the Whitlam federal government provided the funding to buy a heritage building at 109 Edward Street that became a Community Arts Centre, with a Video Access Centre which provided community access to light-weight video equipment and production classes. This milieu produced work such a *The Battle for Bowen Hills* by Peter Gray about the Main Roads Department's unsuccessful attempt to evict long-term residents to build the northern freeway out of central Brisbane. The Centre provided a sense of confidence in the Brisbane filmmaking scene and 1976 saw the production of Queensland's first alternative feature film, *Surrender in Paradise*, directed by Peter Cox with stunning cinematography by Don McAlpine. As alternative arts funding dried up in the Fraser years, the Centre was incorporated into Brisbane Independent Filmmakers, which provided support in the early '80s for alternative productions in Super 8 and 16mm as well as video, and an independent cinematheque in the theatre at 109 Edward Street. From this loose network came many of the film teachers and practitioners who provided the basis of the current screen production scene in Queensland today.

Reverberations

The recent Museum of Brisbane 'Taking to the Streets' exhibition was a time of recollection and reflection for many involved, like myself, in radical politics in Brisbane between 1965 and 1985. On one hand it was an opportunity to frame our radical politics as a reasonable response to dead hand of Bjelke-Petersen and the National Party: we were just a bunch of righteous reformers with the courage of our convictions. This is a satisfying and safe make-over given the maturity of our years and the gravitas of the positions we now hold, from Premier on down.

But there was another side to our activities all that time ago: we were revolutionaries. Most of us did not really want to go to the barricades but we did want a revolutionary change to our cultural life so there were more creative possibilities available right here in Brisbane and other parts of Queensland. Now, when I see magazines like *Frankie* come out of suburban Burleigh Heads, or the band George making a break, or a former student get a gig on environmentally-aware, Brisbane-made TV show, *Totally Wild*, or my niece's internet radio fans, or the GOMA opening creating something like intellectual ferment, or a hundred other cultural moments in an average year, I can see the constellation of effects from those years of cultural revolution working their way into the present through our creative industries.

Back then we took chances, political and cultural, to raise life above the moribund which is where Bjelke-Petersen wanted it. We had to do things and we knew they were significant because they were the only things that were happening. Now cultural life is a given, provided by the state and commerce, in comfortable doses from our thriving creative industries. The revolution has been achieved. But I am still enough of a cultural revolutionary to ask: what about the next revolution?

What was missing from the 'Taking to the Streets' exhibition was an acknowledgement of the revolutionary aims of that era, because that would lead to the question, 'what about revolution now?' It strikes me that things have not got that much better since the '60s: we've got more stuff, people don't die of cancer so easily, there's a greater flow of information, the diet is more varied and you can get a good coffee on the street all over town, but we are again stuck in a foreign war with no way to win it, we constantly find new levels of intolerance and incivility with our fellow humans, torture is tolerated, the physical environment is much worse, we seem shut off from achieving a global response to global threats, and life could always be more interesting, more intense and better. The new technology and flood of information can alienate the soul if you don't keep it in perspective. Sometimes I laugh that for twenty years I was under Special Branch surveillance and now I just fill in the forms to provide self-surveillance. The minimal demand of anyone who might have once been a cultural revolutionary must be to 'live without dead time', as the Situationist graffiti advised in Paris 1968.

Brisbane is suitably placed to respond to such a revolutionary call. The whole conurbation from Byron to Noosa and in to the ranges is still heir to the non-doctrinaire milieu of the sixties. Queensland theory, if I may have the temerity to name it as such, welcomed approaches as diverse as the ideas inside the Red and Black bookshop, it rejected factionalism for the unity required by human needs in the face of state oppression like the police charge at the Tower Mill, it was influenced not only by Marxist and anarchist thought in equal parts but also by that Vatican II habit of asking big questions to find unexpected answers. If I can discern common threads from thinking then to thinking now, they would be: a practical libertarian socialism embedded in the everyday; an individualist, eccentric communitarianism tinged with sub-tropic languor and the black humour of those waiting for the cyclone to come; a directness inspired by the need to get things done quickly to get out of the heat of the day; and a willingness to

go big. And Queensland theory has always appreciated the importance of using opportunities provided by new technologies to create new audiences in ways that stay independent, just outside of patterns of state or corporate control. Queensland could be just the sort of milieu where big answers could emerge, where we can see the problems we face not as a mystifying complex but as a network of inter-related issues that need a revolutionary approach to see the simple answers we always knew were there. Above all, Queensland has a sense of possibility leavened by a scepticism that 'won't get fooled again.'

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