

Produced by
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(Tender Loving Care for Trans-Led / Trans-Loved **T.L.C** Cinema)

Good practice examples for tricky questions

These questions and answers were created alongside and refer to three T.L.C. podcasts, discussions around screenings of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, *Anything can Happen Here* and *Magic Mirror*, and an introductory discussion with programmer Jaye Hudson and Trans+ on Screen founder Alice Blanc.



CHAPTER



THE NATIONAL LOTTERY



How do we talk about the gender/s of people in the past, and in other countries and cultures?

Don't assume that people were cisgendered as a default.

In their very useful book *Before We Were Trans*, historian Kit Heyam suggests that it is best practice to

- learn and provide as much information as possible from the subjects themselves – sometimes this means providing context on how it was recorded and/or erased, including by hostile witnesses
- offer a contemporary, open and informed interpretation that does not assume cisness as standard.

There wasn't a word previously for erasing trans identities and their possibilities, so we've come up with incisibilise: feel free to use it!

This leaves room for complex conversations about gender and sexuality as having specific local and historical contours as well as shared experiences, producing nuanced discussions that open up to politics and aesthetics, and make space for audiences to be fully informed and aware.

1. In the introduction to *Magic Mirror*, curator Juliet Jacques notes that Claude Cahun wrote 'Neuter is the only gender that always suits me', and comments that she and filmmaker Sarah Pucill will use both she/her and they/them pronouns when discussing Cahun and partner artist Marcel Moore.
2. In her introduction to *Funeral Parade of Roses*, Lillian Crawford provides a content note about the language of the film and its subtitle translations, which dates from the late 1960s. She notes that the trans women in the film use the term 'gay boys', and she uses this alongside she/her pronouns in referring to Eddie/Peter. Crawford notes that the usage is both historically and linguistically specific, and presents it on its own terms, while contextualising it with other modes of expression in the film.



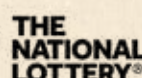
What *is* a “trans film” and who decides?

In Episode 1’s introductory conversation, Jaye Hudson makes the point that for her, as a curator, a trans film is in the eye of the trans viewer, in terms of relating to on-screen subjects, themes and aesthetics in older films that may not be explicitly trans-led. Alice Blanc adds a useful reminder that it’s not only trans on-screen subjects or lead creatives that can shape a film, but also below-the-line crew members such as sound editors who bring their sensibilities and input.

Both of these ideas open up different points of engagement for the audience, offering thoughtful ways into thinking about both filmmaking and spectatorship. Lillian’s discussion of *Funeral Parade of Roses* does exactly this: she sets out a case for reading the film as a trans film, using both evidence from within the film and her own response to it.

There’s a moment in Juliet’s and Sarah’s discussion where Sarah notes that, as the filmmaker, she is now reflecting on seeing trans elements of *Magic Mirror* on this viewing: this underlines that how films are perceived can change through the context in which they are viewed.

In their intros, Lillian and Juliet *open up a possibility* that enriches the audience’s experience of the films they are discussing, rather than insisting on a category. Offering nuanced perspectives informed by critical thinking and evidence from the filmmakers’ and their subjects’ lives gives an audience an enriched experience of any film – in these cases, by deciding not to incise screen representations, the introductions create a more expansive view of history and film that leads to interesting discussions and new ways of seeing.

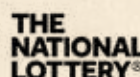


**I want to do some programming for LGBT+ History Month.
I can think of mainstream films that feature trans characters, but not
that many trans filmmakers...
What if I screen *Tootsie* or *Mrs Doubtfire*? They're trans films, right?**

As Jaye mentions in Episode 1, it's worth watching the Netflix documentary *Disclosure* directed by Sam Feder, which has great interviews with trans actors discussing the trans characters they've seen and played: it's a useful guide to some of the often-transphobic tropes that particularly occur when cis directors are directing cis actors. The 'trans punchline' is one of them, and *Tootsie* and *Mrs Doubtfire* both fall into that.

Thankfully, there are now trans writers, directors and performers creating films, and trans writers, critics and programmers writing about them and reassessing the films of the past in nuanced ways – for example, in Juliet Jacques' book *Trans*, she discusses the work of filmmakers such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder and how her perceptions of it changed.

Jaye's article '[The Transfeminine Archive](#)' on *Oestrogenation* is a great place to start looking and thinking. You could also check out the past programmes of festivals like Fringe! and SQIFF (Scottish Queer International Film Festival) in the UK for inspiration. For more critical resources and ideas on the breadth of trans cinema and media, and some lively and informative conversations on its parameters and definitions, check out the invaluable [Transgender Media Portal](#).



OK, what about *The Matrix*? Which leads me to another question: if I want to screen a film made by a filmmaker, or starring a performer, who has transitioned since making it – is that OK? What do I do?

Ivor MacAskill:

"We were definitely aware of the issues of having like, some video from the past, and then video of you now. And then even, yeah, I guess I can see like, oh, my chest is hairier now. And there's differences or, will you get to a point where actually you don't want that to be seen. And I think those are kind of the general things that people who transition are dealing with all the time anyway..."

Natalie Ferguson

"... I think that it's difficult because like you were saying, as trans people, there's always gonna be these things kind of following you around. And it's about, I guess, being able to look back at them and feel proud, feel proud of yourself in the past and feel proud of yourself currently, for being able to go on that journey."

Go for it! There's lots of great writing on *The Matrix* as a trans film or trans allegory, summarised by [Andrea Long Chu](#), and the director Lilly Wachowski has said [herself](#) that's the case. You might want to share some of the writing by trans critics on how they see the film. Both Chu's and Wachowski's pieces offer a reminder that, while there's a before and after transition, there isn't a 'before' and 'after' being trans, or being your gender, so *The Matrix* was always a trans film by a woman director – even if the credits don't reflect that.

While film credits can rarely be changed, you can use the performer or filmmaker's post-transition name, not their previously-credited name, in any written or verbal communications, like marketing copy and film introductions. You may want to provide a content note that the credits deadname (use the pre-transition name) the filmmaker or performer, as it can make trans viewers and our allies feel uncomfortable.

There's a great section of Milo's discussion that partially addresses the larger question by stressing that it is part of a larger question, as both Ivor MacAskill and Natalie Ferguson speak to what happens when people change and film stays fixed, even if it's documenting change.

As Milo titled the event: anything can happen here, and allowing for that fluidity and nuance is an important role for the chair. In episode 1, Jaye smartly suggests sharing panel questions beforehand so that panelists can prepare, suggest alternate wording or veto off-limits questions as needed.

It's also a case-by-case basis in terms of how on-screen performers feel about roles prior to their transition – with a mainstream performer like Elliott Page, it's generally quite easy to find an interview where he discusses his feelings about prior films (which may also differ from film to film), and how he'd like them to be screened. Some filmmakers may have withdrawn their pre-transition films: respect this, and respect their reasons for doing so.

How do I/we talk about transness during an event without tokenising people or asking them to explain themselves? How do I check someone's pronouns without it being weird?

It's always best to find a way to check pronouns *before* you're on-stage! Also worth checking whether people would like you to include them in your introduction, or they'd like to say them themselves, as people have different feelings about that.

It's also good practice to normalise sharing pronouns by sharing your own as well, if you're cis: you can do this when you do a panel intro, and also have them in your email signature and social media bios. That makes it feel more equal and conversational to check in. In episode 1, Jaye and Alice have some great suggestions about event and venue prep that can make everyone feel comfortable and included, such as adding a sign that creates a gender-inclusive toilet facility, even if it's only temporary for the event.

On-stage, it's a good idea not to ask intrusive questions at any time, and not to start with identity-based questions. In the discussion for 'Anything Could Happen Here', the curator and host Milo Clenshaw starts the conversation by establishing the speakers' experiences of making their films – not their trans identity.

Milo Clenshaw:

"Yeah, it really feels like both of the films were very responsive to kind of personal circumstances and personalities. And I guess, you know, they're both linked by transition and trans identity as a theme. Do you think you would say that they're trans films? Or do you have another idea about that?"

Several questions into the discussion, he asks a question about the films in relation to trans identity in a way that makes lots of room for all four of the filmmakers to self-define and explore their working practices, and contribute to an expansive discussion of storytelling that routes back into a consideration of DIY filmmaking and its relation to theatre. In subsequent questions, the filmmakers speak about transition videos and changing gender identities in relation to the fixedness/ephemerality of the storytelling forms.



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What if I get something wrong – if I use the wrong pronouns or name for a speaker, filmmaker or subject during an introduction, or in marketing copy?

We all make mistakes! The important thing is to apologise briefly and respectfully, and correct yourself or the copy as soon as possible. If someone offers you a correction, say 'thank you' because it might save you from another error or offending someone. It's also the case that people's names and pronouns do change, even between you booking in an event and it occurring: if someone lets you know they've made a change, make sure you change it wherever possible in digital copy, in any verbal introductions, and in your correspondence.

If you're a programmer or events manager, it's also worth taking the time to check out your venue or organisation's payment procedures for freelancers. Since COVID, electronic payment systems have become very strict about insisting that the name on payment details supplied on an invoice match the name on a bank account. This can be distressing for people in the process of transition, as banks demand legal notice of a change of name, which is costly and time-consuming to obtain. While you can't change the payment procedures, it can be really appreciated if you advise freelance speakers ahead of time that their banking name will be needed.

In episode 1, Alice and Jaye talk about preparation and accountability, such as having a safety plan in place in case of transphobic violence, and more broadly ensuring that, as Alice says, it's never a case of tokenising one trans person to carry an event or programme. Have trans staff members in-house, or trans programmers and other freelancers that you work with regularly, and include them in organisational discussion. Be trans-led!

Written by So Mayer

Part of the T.L.C. project – a new podcast series featuring T.L.C. – trans-led and trans-loved cinema, creating a space for trans curators, writers and thinkers; a space for the trans community and for cis allies to celebrate, learn and share. This is an Inclusive Cinema project by Film Hub Wales using National Lottery funding through the British Film Institute.

