

**Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video, 1976-1986**

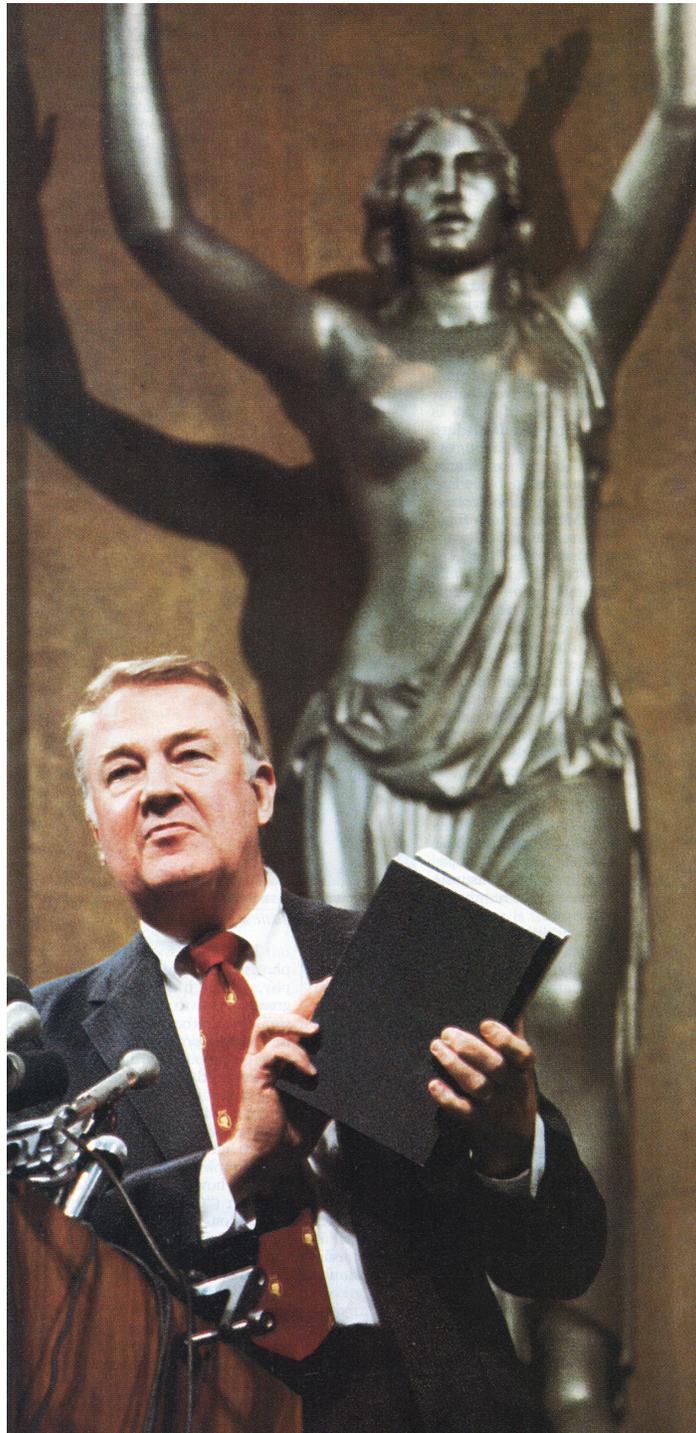
by

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**United States Attorney General Edwin Meese, III**

*(Time, 21 July 1986:13)*

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**For Beckett**

*Long May You Run*

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Bill Margold, David Jennings, Joel Jacobson, Larry Revene, James Bryant, Carter Stevens, Candida Royalle, Mark Johnson, and others all very graciously and patiently answered my questions about their involvement in the industry. Given the nature of my work, many of my questions involved an area of their lives that, unfortunately, many scholars over the years (not to mention the police, courts, and anti-pornography activists) have treated disrespectfully, so I am extremely grateful for their willingness to trust my motives. It is an unfortunate reality that many of the people who witnessed the transition of the adult film industry to videotape are advancing in age. In many cases, the key people in this history have already died. As with any era and topic, it is imperative that historians continue to gather oral histories and interviews from the participants while there is still time. I am grateful to and humbled by those who were willing to share their stories.

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## PREFACE

### The Challenges of Pornography Studies

[O]ne had best enter the study of pornography with an open and gentle heart or be swamped by one's own morality.<sup>1</sup>

Robert J. Stoller, 2003

Scholars interested in pornography often face an arduous, uphill battle unique to the topic. Many of the same cultural barriers preventing the public from openly acknowledging the place of sex in daily life (and particularly the place of sexually explicit media) have also historically prevented scholars from studying such material without risking serious personal and professional consequences. Robert Stoller, for example, noted in 1993 that he did not purchase adult videotapes, so critical to his research, for fear of losing tenure.<sup>2</sup> Even as the academy has gradually accepted pornography and pornography as legitimate topics of study, scholars still must often mobilize a variety of complicated justifications and defenses.

Describing the media uproar that occurred in the early 2000s when he taught a course entitled “Sexuality in the Media” at Arizona State University, Peter Lehman illuminates the complications around this topic:

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Stoller and I.S. Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) 5.

<sup>2</sup> Stoller and Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* 42.

I was on the phone and in meetings every day with provosts and deans and media people. I was being warned to be ready for the possibility of the press descending upon my home. I wasn't answering my phone for months. Fox News called me so often. We couldn't answer the phone in our house for three months. We had to let everything ring and listen to messages. We didn't want to be put in the position of being put on the air or having to say, "No comment." It had an incredible impact on my life.<sup>3</sup>

An alumni group made Lehman and his course the centerpiece of an effort to stop donations, and legislators introduced a bill in Arizona that would penalize the university for the funds that had supported the course. Ultimately, that bill failed and the university unhesitatingly supported Lehman. The struggle faced by Lehman (just one example among many similar instances in the last few decades) illustrates the challenge of this topic—one that I passionately believe needs to be given the same breadth, depth, and clarity as any other in film history, a project continually complicated by those that seek to silence, control, or eradicate it. This dissertation could not exist without the work of Stoller, Lehman, Joseph Slade, Linda Williams, Chuck Kleinhans, Constance Penley, Laura Kipnis, Jane Juffer, Jon Lewis, Eric Schaefer and the many, many others who paved the way. I am deeply indebted to them, and hope only to carry on the work they have started.

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin John Bozelka, "Interview with Peter Lehman and Linda Williams," *Velvet Light Trap* 59 (Spring 2007): 62.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Adult Video, Respectability, and the “Mystery of Difference”

When the full history of porn is finally committed to paper, video will be seen as a truly major event.<sup>1</sup>

Laurence O’Toole, 1998

The question is not whether pornography, but the quality of the pornography.<sup>2</sup>

Paul Goodman, 1961

Deep in an essay from November 1971, pornography scholar Joseph Slade buried a curious and perplexing detail that, with the benefit of hindsight, explodes off the page for adult video historians. Relating his experiences in the porn theaters off Times Square in New York, Slade describes the screening of poor quality “homemade videotapes.”<sup>3</sup> Coming almost four years before videotape technology was widely available to the average consumer in the form of Sony’s Betamax (and six years before JVC’s VHS system), his brief mention of the technology raises immense and tantalizing questions. What was the content? Who were the performers? Who paid for the production? Were these tapes available for sale to a variety of theaters, or made for single locations? Most curiously, what format were these tapes, and what machine played them? In short: *what was Slade watching?* This appearance of video, however small, stands as both anomaly

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence O’Toole, *Pornocopia* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1998) 103.

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis original. Paul Goodman, “Pornography, Art & Censorship,” *Commentary* 31.3 (March 1961): 209.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph W. Slade, “Pornographic Theaters Off Times Square,” *Transaction* (November/December 1971): 123.

and portent. Video technologies such as the one witnessed by Slade in Times Square would, in the fifteen following years, transform the adult film industry, shifting it away from the public theatrical space toward the privacy of the home.<sup>4</sup>

The ways in which people have historically consumed pornography have depended primarily upon the technological capacity to deliver it to them, be it the halftone reproductions of photographs in magazines, the emulsion on the celluloid of film, the mechanical equipment comprising various VCR and DVD systems, or the complex hardware and software required for access to the Internet.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, this same technological journey has been one of increased privacy, as consumers have been

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<sup>4</sup> As Eric Schaefer has shown, however, home viewing of adult films preceded video by decades, in the form of a thriving 8mm market. See: Eric Schaefer. "Plain Brown Wrapper: Adult Films for the Home Market." *Looking Past the Screen*. Eds. Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. 201-226. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding terminology: after much deliberation on the subject, I do not avoid the word "pornography" in my own description of the types of sexually explicit materials I examine in this dissertation. This is not an insignificant decision, and one that I have wavered on throughout my research. As I analyze throughout, the historical struggles (and subsequent consequences) over the definition and meaning of "pornography" has resulted in the formation of a contentious terrain. The word itself now represents something highly loaded and presumably suspect, existing outside the boundaries of the "normal." There is also the matter of etymology. The word, as Walter Kendrick identifies, comes from the Greek *pornographos*, which translates as "writing about prostitutes." Anti-pornography feminists have long used this as an argument for its invalidity. I attempt here, as a historian, to trace an industry built, in fact, on paying people for sex, which makes the word far less contentious and simply appropriate for what, in the end, is fairly obvious.

It is important to note here the difference between "obscenity," which is a legal term describing something not covered by First Amendment protection, and "pornography," which simply refers to material designed to elicit a sexual response. The two, unfortunately (and often deliberately and, as I will show, strategically) have become conflated. What the word often becomes is an unnecessary distraction. Ultimately, my decision to use the word is a deliberate response to arguments made by those such as Nadine Strossen, who notes that "the word 'pornography' has assumed such negative connotations that it tends to be used as an epithet to describe—and condemn—whatever sexually oriented expression the person using it dislikes." This is not a trivial distinction: for example, as I describe in the final chapter, federal prosecutors in the mid-1980s deliberately conflated the terms (and misinterpreted existing court decisions) to define pornography as any hard-core depiction of sexuality and that such material was, by nature, obscenity, thus allowing widespread legal cases against mail order distributors as part of an effort to put them out of business. Ultimately, however, I choose to use the word as a means of deflating the negative connotations and predetermined oppositions, and (hopefully) assisting in breaking what have become automatic assumptions that pornography is the same thing as obscenity. See: Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights* (New York: Scribner, 1995) 18; Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1987) 1-2.

increasingly able to locate, purchase, and consume such materials in the home—a chain that has not always been possible. This dissertation examines, from a group of distinct and overlapping vantage points, a critical historical moment in that chain, as pornography moved from the public space of the adult movie theater of the 1970s and 1980s to the private space of the home through the technological capabilities of home video. It was a time of intense cultural, technological, and industrial change.

In the mid-1970s, the number of theaters in the United States committed exclusively to playing hard-core films peaked at nearly 800.<sup>6</sup> By 1983, having weathered widespread obscenity prosecutions, changes in the law both nationally and locally, oppressive zoning strategies across the country, and organized protests by anti-pornography feminist and community groups, the adult film industry still took in more than \$100 million in ticket sales at what remained of these public exhibition spaces.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the massive industrial and technological transformation was already well underway that would permanently alter not only the adult film industry, but also the very notion of modern entertainment. RCA, under president David Sarnoff's urging, developed a videotape playback prototype as early as 1951, and the Ampex Corporation demonstrated a similar machine in April 1956 at the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters.<sup>8</sup> The Sony U-Matic, perhaps the true precursor to more familiar home video players, entered the market in 1971. By 1974, having gone through various

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<sup>6</sup> Chuck Kleinhans. "The Change from Film to Video Pornography: Implications for Analysis." *Pornography: Film and Culture*. Ed. Peter Lehman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 154-167. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Kleinhans 157.

<sup>8</sup> James Lardner, *Fast Forward: Hollywood, the Japanese, and the Onslaught of the VCR* (New York: Norton, 1987) 57-60.

redesigns, the machine began replacing film divisions in the television news industry.<sup>9</sup> Finally, with the introductions of the Betamax in May 1975 and rival VHS systems (a JVC product, though it would be licensed to a large variety of manufacturers) shortly after, true home video was finally possible—if inordinately expensive.<sup>10</sup> With the introduction of these systems, the adult film industry began the wholesale transfer of its inventory to magnetic tape before gradually moving toward video-based production, a process that would take more than a decade to complete. By 1986, there were more than 100 million adult video rentals per year in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

The years I have chosen for this project, 1976 to 1986, represent a period bracketed by the widespread transfer of adult film *to* video and the production of material primarily *for* and *on* video—but they also offer a compelling view of the accompanying changes within and around the industry.<sup>12</sup> I trace the myriad regulatory efforts across the United States to limit, contain, or eradicate sexually explicit materials, all culminating in the attempt by the Meese Commission in 1986 to dictate and institute a national discourse on the subject. The timing of this commission, coming just as home video was exploding into mass popularity was not coincidental, much as technology and mass availability frequently recur around similar regulatory efforts of earlier eras.

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<sup>9</sup> Lardner, *Fast Forward* 73.

<sup>10</sup> Lardner, *Fast Forward* 148-149.

<sup>11</sup> Kleinhans 157.

<sup>12</sup> David Hebditch and Nick Anning, *Porn Gold: Inside the Pornography Business* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 227.

VCA Pictures and Caballero (the two largest production houses at the time) began shooting primarily on videotape rather than celluloid in 1986. A major task of this dissertation will be to determine the context of that shift as well as seeking counter narratives that may complicate it. See: Lawrence Cohn, “Pornmakers Surface in the Mainstream,” *Variety* 9 March 1988: 3, 26.

In the chapters that follow I examine when, how, and why the industry changed its production, distribution, and exhibition practices by adopting a new technology in order to move from public to private spaces. Alongside is a tracing of the regulatory pressures circulating around that transition. Ultimately, I argue that those pressures were rooted in twin, related efforts: first to contain and limit the industry's efforts to gain respectability; and second, to contain and limit the culturally transgressive gender behaviors embedded within adult video. The many opponents of adult film, I argue, worked diligently (and, indeed, continue to work) to prevent the industry from gaining respectability, credibility, and normalization because to allow that to happen would tacitly acknowledge that the gender and sexual performances in adult film were also respectable, credible, and normal. My emphasis on these areas represents a deliberate move away from a focus on sexuality, which typically occupies most scholarship. Furthermore, I argue that the tensions and anxieties circulating around "appropriate" gendered behavior are nowhere more visible than in the various contexts *surrounding* the issue, rather than *within* the materials themselves, representing another deliberate move away from the standard approach on the subject.

### *The "Mystery of Difference"*

I begin, however, not with the industrial examination that takes up the bulk of this dissertation, but with an analysis and exploration of the ideological underpinnings of the obsession with "appropriate" gendered behaviors both inside and outside the industry. I do so not in order to perpetuate the cycle of value judgments that force scholars to be "for" or "against" pornography (a frequent, and rather unique, side effect of writing on

the topic), but in an effort to ground what follows in a discussion of power. Considerable analytical space has been devoted to the narrative “meanings” of adult films, a contentious and complicated topic given the presentation of explicit sexual behaviors. By the early 1970s, the so-called “Golden Age,” feature-length adult films were playing in theaters across the United States, offering audiences the opportunity to see in public what had long been relegated either to the peep show or the underground market—and what was unspooling had a particular set of recurring discourses.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a brief examination of three of the most important Golden Age films reveals these recurrences:

- *Deep Throat* (1972, dir. Gerard Damiano), offers a plotline in which a sexually naïve and frustrated woman (Linda Lovelace, playing “herself”) is told by a male doctor (Harry Reems) that her clitoris is located in her throat, and that to achieve orgasm she must perform oral sex on men. After doing so, she discovers sexual freedom and happiness.<sup>14</sup>
- *Behind the Green Door* (1972, dir. Jim Mitchell and Artie Mitchell) presents another sexually naïve woman, Gloria (Marilyn Chambers), who is kidnapped by two men and raped by multiple partners, male and female,

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<sup>13</sup> Briefly, the “Golden Age” of adult films (a term employed throughout this dissertation) refers to the period beginning in the early 1970s when adult films, however briefly, enjoyed a moment of increased public acceptance, visibility, and popularity. This was spurred primarily by the success of *Deep Throat* (1972, dir. Gerard Damiano), which crossed over from being simply another “dirty movie” and into public discourse. Further acceptance came when *The Devil in Miss Jones* (dir. Gerard Damiano), which ranked seventh in total box office gross for 1973, received glowing praise from a variety of mainstream critics, and was even hailed by *Variety* as “approaching an art form.” The growing popularity and public presence of adult films inspired Ralph Blumenthal’s 1973 *New York Times* piece, in which he coined the term “porno chic,” where he called *Deep Throat* “a premier topic of cocktail-party and dinner-table conversation in Manhattan drawing rooms, Long Island beach cottages, and ski country A-frames.” This high point, however, would not last, as a variety of cultural pressures and legal pressures pushed adult films back down again away from such high visibility and acceptance. I use the term throughout this dissertation less as a marker of value or nostalgia, and more as a temporal reference. See: Ralph Blumenthal, “Porno Chic: ‘Hard-Core’ Grows Fashionable—and Very Profitable,” *New York Times Magazine* 21 January 1973: 272.

<sup>14</sup> *Deep Throat*. Dir. Gerard Damiano. Arrow, 1972. DVD.

in front of a live audience. By the end of the film, she has discovered sexual freedom and happiness.<sup>15</sup>

- *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973, dir. Gerard Damiano) follows a lonely, depressed older woman, Justine (Georgina Spelvin), who commits suicide. Placed in a metaphysical limbo because of the “purity” of her life, Justine begs the Angel in charge (John Clemens) to be allowed temporarily to return to Earth to find lust in order to leave limbo and go to Hell, with Heaven not being option due to her suicide. Released back to Earth, Justine finally discovers sexual freedom and happiness through the help of “The Teacher” (Reems again) and goes at last to Hell—where she is forced to reside for eternity in a small room with a sexually disinterested man.<sup>16</sup>

These three films, among the most successful, high-profile offerings of the “Golden Age” of adult cinema as well as hallmarks of virtually any “best adult films of all time” list, peel back the layers of female sexuality to present it as a mysterious, larger-than-life, and often unknowable quantity needing male insight, guidance, and control in order to be understood and subsequently managed. The pleasures depicted in these films stem from observing the journey *toward* pleasure, rather than the unabashed celebration *of* pleasure, an important distinction that defines much of adult film history. While all three narratives present female characters on journeys of sexual discovery, all three also find themselves fairly obsessed with female sexuality as a “problem” that must be overcome as part of the

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<sup>15</sup> *Behind the Green Door*. Dir. The Mitchell Bros. Mitchell Bros. Film Group, 1972. DVD.

<sup>16</sup> *The Devil in Miss Jones*. Dir. Gerard Damiano. Arrow, 1973. DVD.

process of what I will call the “mystery of difference.” Increasingly concerned with narrative and aesthetic advancements away from the relatively simple stag films and loops of the past, Golden Age films also overwhelmingly presented female sexuality on just such journeys of “discovery” rather than celebration.

Thus, the narrative “meanings” of sex in adult films frequently center on this female journey toward sexual discovery and in unpacking the “mystery of difference” at its foundation. Linda Williams, in her groundbreaking book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (1989) argues for the fundamentality of the phenomenon to adult films, suggesting that the overwhelming generic desire to locate the “proof” of pleasure summarizes these questions. Men’s pleasure, so easily visualized in the expression of a visible orgasm, the ubiquitous “money shot” of adult film, cannot be so readily captured with women, leading to the obsession with narrative and visual “knowledge.” Women’s difference, then, becomes the fulcrum on which pornographic narratives often rest, and the desire for understanding that difference underlies the tension at the heart of much of adult cinema. “The animating male fantasy of hard-core cinema,” Williams writes, “might therefore be described as the (impossible) attempt to capture visually [the] frenzy of the visible in a female body whose orgasmic excitement can never be objectively measured.”<sup>17</sup> The “mystery” of female sexuality, in other words, manifests narratively in an attempt to “solve” and understand difference—and nearly always with the power and control to do so located in male characters, even when, as is typically the case in adult film, women are the protagonists and central narrative figures. This is precisely why pornography is nearly universally referred to as “for” and “about” men’s

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<sup>17</sup> Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 50.

pleasures, even as the mysteries of *female* pleasures drive the genre. In the 1970s, men's pleasures—both on screen in the narratives and off screen in the mostly male audiences sitting in the theaters and peep shows—most definitely drove the adult film industry.

In 1977, Steven Ziplow, who had served as production manager and assistant director on Golden Age adult films such as Roberta Findlay's *Fringe Benefits* (1973) and *Slip-Up* (1974), published what might be unique in the industry's history: a detailed, book-length primer on the craft of making adult films. The result, *The Film Maker's Guide to Pornography*, tackles the nuts-and-bolts of adult filmmaking in great detail, and offers unique insight into the creation of the "mystery of difference."<sup>18</sup> Covering everything from what to get the cast and crew for lunch (in order to be as efficient as possible, a theme throughout) to supplying a sample release form, Ziplow's book reads as a condensed film school for the inexperienced. It was also about how to write, produce, direct, and distribute hardcore sex on celluloid. Emphasizing what Ziplow called the "three day wonder," the book describes how to make a complete adult film, from start to finish, for under \$20,000. Capitalizing on the public interest in the Golden Age of film (though it was on the wane by 1977), the book pragmatically outlines the mundane details of filmmaking, while simultaneously exploding the mythology that producing sex films was nonstop bacchanalia for all involved.

Alongside all the dry production-speak and legalese, however, resides a second set of pragmatic discourses illuminating the importance of the "mystery of difference" to the industry. Ziplow does not necessarily offer an ideological treatise defending the often

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<sup>18</sup> New York's Drake, the company responsible for the dozens of lower-tier adult magazines of the era, published the book. See: Steven Ziplow, *The Film Maker's Guide to Pornography* (New York: Drake Publishers Inc., 1977).

regressive, misogynistic narratives structuring women as bearers of a sexual difference under constant scrutiny and curiosity by men's patriarchal control; rather, he matter-of-factly explains why those narrative and aesthetic decisions ensure return on investment. "Always try to include at least one lesbian scene in your picture," he writes. "Lesbianism is always a good turn-on for a major portion of your audience. Keep in mind you're not including lesbianism for the enjoyment of the women in your audience. Women do not make up enough of a percentage to cater to. Make the women's gay scenes pleasing to a man's eye."<sup>19</sup> Driving ticket sales guides the book's narrative, not what will create positive change or a new atmosphere around adult film friendlier to female audiences. Ziplow is utterly disinterested in anything but creating profits, which he connects to particular audience demands and requirements. The stakes for such endeavors, of course, were high. As Robert Stoller points out, "If pornographers understand their audience... they are financially successful. If wrong, they are out of business."<sup>20</sup> Adhering to his "formula," Ziplow argues throughout, ensures financial success, at least on the modest scale afforded the "three day wonder" and its resulting distribution.

Yet, this formula, despite Ziplow's indifference to explaining (or defending) its ideological ramifications, remains deeply invested in maintaining the "mystery of difference" based around highly gendered behaviors and specific pleasures targeting a pre-determined audience. Chief among these is the "proof" of the visible ejaculation, highlighted throughout the book less as a marker of narrative importance and instead

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<sup>19</sup> Ziplow 18.

<sup>20</sup> Robert J. Stoller and I.S. Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) 5.

intended to satiate the apparently non-negotiable requirements of spectators. In a passage called out by Williams in her critique of the trope, Ziplow outlines its significance:

As the writer, you will want to include a number of come shots in your script. There are those who believe that the come shot, or, as some refer to it, “the money shot,” is the most important element in the movie and that everything else (if necessary) should be sacrificed at its expence [sic]. Of course, this depends on the outlook of the producer, but one thing is sure: if you don’t have come shots, you don’t have a porno picture. Plan on at least ten come shots. Odds are that some of them will be eliminated during the course of the shoot, but ten is enough to allow for some freedom of choice.<sup>21</sup>

As Williams notes, the “money shot” as an essential element of adult filmmaking did not arise until the 1970s; “Previously, hard-core sequences tended to be organized as discontinuous, relatively nonlinear moments of genital meat shots offering visual evidence of penetration.”<sup>22</sup> By 1977, however, the “meat shot,” or extreme genital close-up, had been replaced by the “money shot” as the primary organizational tool. The requirement (as Ziplow so strenuously states) was undeniable, and by the time home video became the dominant mode of production, it was all but taken for granted.

The “mystery of difference,” then, rested mightily upon male pleasure (“proven” in the visible ejaculation) being the narrative conclusion of any successful sex scene, thus standing in for *both* sexes. While not explicitly stated by Ziplow, women’s roles in adult film typically hinge on being facilitators of that pleasure. The formula, for whatever else

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<sup>21</sup> Ziplow 34; Williams, *Hard Core* 93-94.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Hard Core* 93.

its elements, requirements, and strategies, hinges upon Ziplow's decree: "If you don't have come shots, you don't have a porno picture." The "mystery of difference" driving adult film narratives positions women on journeys toward pleasure—but the specifics of those pleasures and by what means they occurred remained almost entirely driven by, focused on, and devoted to men. Given this, it is hardly surprising that Ziplow would suggest, "A liberated woman who is subject to various situations and experiences is probably the best format available for a three-day wonder."<sup>23</sup> The necessity of the "mystery of difference" practically requires a "liberated" woman at its narrative core; after all, how else would a female character be able to go on the journey of (male) pleasure? In what becomes a perplexing contradiction recurring frequently in the containment of female sexuality, I would argue that "liberating" female characters in adult film narratives simultaneously allows for their containment; after all, the access given these women, so ostensibly couched in the pursuit of pleasure, ultimately most often becomes literalized in the providence of *men's* pleasures. The "money shot," then, dramatically visualizes this contradiction and the underlying "mystery of difference," giving ultimate and final narrative control to men.

This mystery, driving narratives such as the three I have highlighted from the Golden Age, brings with it deeply gendered and problematic underpinnings revealing a hesitancy and reluctance to move beyond male-centric perspectives. Williams notes: "The confession of pleasure is organized according to male norms that fail to recognize—or perhaps to imagine—difference."<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, the (failed) understanding of difference

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<sup>23</sup> Ziplow 18.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Hard Core* 53.

is the inevitable and even desired narrative outcome. The doctor in *Deep Throat*, the kidnappers in *Behind the Green Door*, and the Teacher in *The Devil in Miss Jones* all fit this description, in which male control of female pleasure not only dictates the narrative outcome but also effectively rigs the results. Williams argues that this is precisely the point: “proving” female pleasure works most effectively when “the woman’s body is solicited, questioned, and probed for secrets that are best revealed when she herself is not in control.”<sup>25</sup> Given the male-dominated space of the production and exhibition spheres during the Golden Age, this narrative structure (and industrial paradigm) governed adult film discourses.

Williams goes to great length to examine this narrative obsession from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including psychoanalytic and Marxist, linking the desire for understanding difference to larger contexts and possibilities.<sup>26</sup> Throughout this dissertation I take a different approach, focusing on industrial practices and histories rather than narrative “meaning,” which frequently dominates the discussion at the expense of other equally important topics. Nevertheless, those discussions remain important to the field for understanding possible roots, both psychological and cultural, for the deeply patriarchal and often misogynistic narrative recurrences throughout the history of adult film texts. Not mentioned in Ziplow’s book, however, was home video. No other single element in the history of adult entertainment would affect the long-standing “mystery of difference” at the core of the industry more than the move of adult film from public to private, from the theater to the home, and from celluloid to magnetic

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<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Hard Core* 51.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Hard Core* 93-119.

tape. Yet that mystery would remain intact, albeit in different forms and with different tensions, as the industry made its migration.

### *Quality and Respectability*

Issues of “quality” and “respectability” guide the focus of this dissertation, the former of which was a strategy within the industry to garner the latter, ostensibly in an effort to improve bottom-line financial success.<sup>27</sup> Troubling gendered ramifications also accompanied the strategies, however. Important not just for social acceptability, these concerns have deep implications in terms of regulatory efforts, legal concerns, and economic profitability—and, ultimately, effectively illustrate the boundaries within culture where transgression occurs. As such, an analysis of quality and respectability in relation to the adult film industry forms the basis of this dissertation and recurs frequently in its pages. Historically malleable, definitions of these terms have changed and adapted over time, but have always been linked first and foremost with notions of “appropriate” gender behavior. The fears over what will happen if the dismantling of those boundaries occurs manifest themselves in a variety of regulatory ways, but the process I am most interested in here is the formation of a discourse linking respectability to cultural beliefs regarding femininity and female audiences. It is necessary here to examine the historical roots of the changes in the conceptions of the human body, gender roles, and cultural beliefs in order to understand the ramifications for the adult film industry.

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<sup>27</sup> Despite the contentious and debatable contexts surrounding the terms “quality” and “respectability,” I choose not to keep them in quotes in the majority of the rest of this dissertation, except where completely necessary. It can be assumed, however, that their meanings remain highly contested and not at all a given.

The concerns surrounding quality, respectability, and pornography stretch back well beyond cinema. Walter Kendrick traces the history of pornography to the nineteenth century, where (upper class, white, male) anthropologists unearthed sexually explicit imagery at the ruins of Pompeii and created “secret museums” to keep them away from those less “capable” of understanding them, which is to say the lower class and, especially, women. Ultimately, Kendrick argues that pornography is best defined as a “not a thing but a concept, a thought structure,” and that it “names an imaginary scenario of danger and rescue, a perennial little melodrama in which, though new players have replaced old, the parts remain much as they were first written.”<sup>28</sup> This melodrama, he argues, is rooted in the fear that divisional boundaries will be broken, and that the result will be open access to anything, for anyone. As Williams describes, Kendrick’s summation is that “pornography is simply whatever representations a particular dominant class or group does not want in the hands of another, less dominant class or group. Those in power construct the definition of pornography through their power to censor it.”<sup>29</sup> Pornography, in other words, only became a visible and definitional category after the rise of the industrial, “modern” age, when those in power became concerned that anyone could access sexually explicit materials and thus cordoned them off into something “unacceptable” and only available to those (upper class, white, men) with the intellectual acumen to handle the responsibility.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kendrick xiii.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, *Hard Core* 12.

<sup>30</sup> “Pornography” appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* beginning in 1857, further illustrating the tensions and anxieties around sexual representations in that period. The Collection de l’Enfer of the Bibliotheque Nationale in France (which housed “obscene” writings and made them available only to men) was installed in 1836, and it was around this time that Italian museums began sectioning off and limiting access to the explicit artwork found in the excavations of Pompeii. See: Kendrick 1-32.

Once these divisions were in place, pornography began to take on new forms and meanings, often political in nature. Lynn Hunt, among others, traces the connection between sexualized representations and political commentary. Often taking the form of satire, pornography frequently targeted government, the law, and organized religion.<sup>31</sup> Once this happened, a cultural sea change occurred in which transgression became the objective rather than the side effect. Kendrick is worth quoting at length on this point:

Only in the nineteenth century itself do we begin to find frequent instances of artists deliberately affronting their audiences, treading upon ground they knew to be forbidden. The establishment of a restricted area is itself the boldest invitation to trespass; before the nineteenth century, when no barriers were yet completely manned, there was no strident temptation to leap over them. So long as grossness had a home and stayed there—primarily in satire and comedy—it could be freely displayed to a select audience without inspiring much outrage. But when this sense of propriety was lost, when it began to seem possible that anything at all might be shown to anybody, new barriers had to be erected against a threat that was probably already invincible.<sup>32</sup>

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Steven Marcus makes similar observations, arguing that “pornography” as a definitional category arose as a problem explicitly linked to the rise of modernity and mass culture, basing his study in the Victorian-era England. See: Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (New York: New American Library, 1974).

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Hunt. “The Curtain Rises.” *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*. Ed. Michelle Perrot. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990. 7-97. Print.

<sup>32</sup> Kendrick 57.

Therein lies the fear: when anybody could see anything some sort of threat to the stability and “natural” order of culture was imminent. Pornography, then, does not simply exist; objects *become* pornography, and thus dangerous, through availability and dissemination to the “wrong” people.

If the definition of pornography hinges on the “wrong” people seeing it, the concept of the respectable emerges more clearly. Respectability, in this formulation, arises from the process of ensuring the containment of the threatening. These concepts have deep roots in the body itself, and particularly the split between the mind and the body—an “upper” and “lower” division that has significant impact on pornography and the adult film industry’s quest for respectability through the demonstration of quality. The properties of the lower body, disassociated from the intellectual pursuits of the upper, come to be associated with the disgusting, gross, and monstrous—and, given the location of the sexual organs, sex itself. Deeply invested in illustrating the political potential of the lower body, sixteenth-century French satirist François Rabelais used it as the primary instrument for painting a world of carnival grotesquerie, in which the celebration of the body becomes a celebration of humanity and a pointed critique of those in power.<sup>33</sup>

Much like the process by which pornography only came into being through a process of transgression, the concept of disgust, linked to the lower body, was also a historical and malleable concept. Not surprisingly, Rabelais’s ability to celebrate the grotesque was only possible because it had become disgusting. Norbert Elias’s work in this regard reveals that the creation of manners, politeness, privacy, and disgust—what

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<sup>33</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1984).

might better be termed the “civilizing” process—only emerged in the sixteenth century, precisely when Rabelais was critiquing similar elements to make political statements and cultural observations.<sup>34</sup> Similarly to pornography emerging as a threat when modernity made it more available, the rise of individualism centuries earlier made the human body more visible, leading to conceptions of “civilized” behavior disassociated from the lower body and rooted in the mind. Given the long history of disgust associated with the body, it makes sense that pornography, as a genre, would become what Laura Kipnis describes as an “oppositional political form.”<sup>35</sup>

One more historical change had to occur, however, before the links could all be forged between quality, respectability, and femininity. During this same period, beginning in the late eighteenth-century, as the concepts of privacy, individualism, and mass culture developed, along with the various industrial capabilities permitting those identities to publically flourish, an accompanying discourse relating “home” to “privacy” began to grow. Women, for a wide variety of reasons, began to be associated with the domestic, private space of the home, as the inverse of the men who roamed freely in and commanded public spaces. These links were associated with both the lower *and* the upper parts of the body:

Women were identified with their sexuality, their bodies; men were identified with their minds, their energy. The uterus defined the woman and determined the consequences for her emotional and moral being. The female reproductive system was thought to be especially sensitive, a

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<sup>34</sup> Norbert Elias, *History of Manners* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) 123.

sensitivity enhanced by the weaker cerebral matter of women. Women were weaker muscularly and sedentary by inclination. The combination of mental and muscular weakness with emotional sensitivity made women functionally well-suited for child-rearing. Thus, the uterus defined the place of women in society as mother.<sup>36</sup>

Culture linked men and women to their respective public and private spheres, and tasked them with different capabilities, responsibilities, and purposes, both in their bodies and in minds. Women's "sensitivity," precluding them from exposure to those things that might threaten the natural order, became their primary definitional marker. "Women," Lynn Hunt writes of this period, "became the figure of fragility who had to be protected from the outside world (the public); she was the representation of the private."<sup>37</sup> Of course, it is important to note here the importance of class to this history: the women in question were of a particular upper and middle class, of which the "fragility" in question was an important part.

In an effort to defend women from those things that might threaten the social order, women were associated with "higher" and more protected, quality pursuits, while their bodies were contained. Respectability became anything related to protecting, defending, and shoring up the classed social order. This is precisely why, as Richard Butsch puts it, "respectability was at its core a gendered concept."<sup>38</sup> Sexuality carries with it the transgressive potential for disruption of all these concepts—most visibly,

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<sup>36</sup> Hunt, "The Curtain Rises," 43-44.

<sup>37</sup> Hunt, "The Curtain Rises," 45.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century America," *American Quarterly* 46.3 (September 1994): 375.

perhaps, in the form of the prostitute, who violates them all practically at once. The proper “role” for women (safely inside the home, detached from her own body, limited to higher pursuits, and carefully ensconced in a familial structure as wife and mother) would be *anything* but out in public, commodifying her body sexually with strangers or for any reason other than procreation. Kendrick’s maxim—that pornography names a thought structure, not a thing—comes into ever clearer focus when placed against this historical backdrop: pornography catalogues and articulates all that which violates quality and respectability in its deliberate and unrepentant overturning of the “normal” social order. Even the word “pornography” comes from the Greek *pornographos*, for “writing about prostitutes.” As the essentialized view of women grew into “common sense,” it took that notion of the “normal” and expanded it into beliefs that some women were not only best protected *from* bodily pleasures, they were not even *interested* in them. William Acton, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, infamously captured the sentiment, arguing, “The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, women were simultaneously contained from both exterior *and* interior sexuality, domesticated, and contained, representatives of the “normal” social order.

As this structure developed, women took on the form of gatekeepers, literalizing the boundaries of the social order with their very bodies. These boundaries served as class divisions, the next critical step in the formation of quality. As Lee Grieveson writes, “[T]he development of a middle-class consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century was predicated on notions of domesticity and gentility that were closely aligned with idealized

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<sup>39</sup> William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life: Considered in Their Physiological, Social, and Psychological Relations* (London: Churchill, 1858) 101.

conceptions of femininity as moral guardianship that in turn effectively positioned the middle-class woman as the moral boundary between classes.”<sup>40</sup> Once these class divisions were in place, and women firmly positioned as the guardians of the boundaries, it was a logical step to associate quality with essentialized notions of “femininity.” In order for a cultural product to be respectable, then, it could not carry a threat to the social order. It is relatively easy to understand how pornography quickly solidified into a “low-class” position in these circumstances.

These associations became part of a capitalist process by which quality goods and services became tailored to particular, feminine, audiences. Deviations quickly resulted in a lack of respectability and, thus, profit potential. To bring the discussion back to cinema, Grieveson notes the crucial significance of gender structures in the history of film exhibition, regulation, and censorship. He argues that “a confluence of regulatory and commercial imperatives led the film industry to seek to appeal to middle-class audiences by telling moral stories and by imitating norms of respectable forms of middle-class culture.”<sup>41</sup> This manifested not only in the content produced by the industry, but in the marketing and exhibition of films as well—right down to the literal theaters themselves, which carefully crafted themselves as “safe” spaces embodying the type of quality that would appeal to respectable (i.e. feminized) audiences.

This was not a new strategy. As Butsch traces, a similar project had been undertaken in the traditional theater decades before. “Both literally and symbolically,” he writes, “theater owners and managers, beginning in the 1840s, cleansed their theaters of

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<sup>40</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 27.

<sup>41</sup> Grieveson 27.

their disreputable aspects and marketed theaters to women as mothers and moral guardians within the family.”<sup>42</sup> The pattern would repeat itself again, when the adult film industry labored mightily in the 1970s to create quality exhibition spaces that might appeal to a middle-class audience. In fact, one of the first attempts at an adult film exhibition space, the Sutter Cinema in San Francisco, was marketed to customers as “legitimate” not only due to the quality of the films playing there, but in the decoration and aesthetics of the space itself.<sup>43</sup> This approach reached its height most notably with Vince Miranda’s Pussycat Theater chain, which deliberately cleaned up its auditoriums and lobbies, played “classier” films, and attempted to draw in more “respectable” crowds. Miranda, who worked with the Boy Scouts and underprivileged children, also remodeled a legitimate theater in San Diego into a thriving performance space, even though it came at a substantial economic loss. These quests for respect did little to protect Miranda: arrested more than fifty times on obscenity charges, the courts convicted him once, in 1977.<sup>44</sup> The attempts, though, were representative of the long-standing tradition of connecting quality to respectability.

When seen against this historical frame, the importance of boundaries, divisions, and binaries becomes increasingly clear. Art became an oppositional construction, divided by “upper” and “lower” strata that placed quality strictly into the realm of the intellectual, away from bodily pursuits and certainly away from any intention of arousal.

Andrew Ross connects these divisions with the mind/body split:

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<sup>42</sup> Butsch 378.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Turan, “Sex Films in San Francisco Reach Plateau of Legitimacy,” *Los Angeles Times* 30 October 1970: I20.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Knight, “Adult Film Group in Quest to Gain Respect,” *Los Angeles Times* 17 February 1974: 14,17; Nancy Skelton, “Pinnochio to Porn with Vince Miranda,” *Los Angeles Times* 15 April 1974: SD-A1.

Pornography, it could be argued, is the lowest of the low, because it aims below the belt, and most directly at the psycho-sexual substratum of subjective life, for which it provides an actualizing, arousing body of inventive impressions. That all of pornography's conventions of spectacle and narrative are mobilized toward this greater actualization of bodily impulses runs directly counter to the premises of higher cultural forms, committed to a progressive *sublimation* of these same impulses, whether in the provocative routines of erotica, in the exploratory, transgressive world of avant-garde permissions, in the bourgeois drama of passion and responsibility, or in the aesthete's realm of refined sensibility.<sup>45</sup>

Pornography is thus, by nature, *not* respectable, which is why it carries such capability for illuminating the social order it labors to transgress. Laura Kipnis expertly describes this process by exploring its contours in *Hustler* magazine, which she identifies as a space in which pornography identifies the hypocrisies of these respectability systems.<sup>46</sup> Pornography's inherent transgressive status is also precisely why those seeking to find respectability first attempt to distance themselves from the term itself.

It is not by accident that Ross mentions "erotica," for it is there that the final piece of this puzzle emerges, linking quality to narrative in ways that reify old and deeply entrenched and essentialized gender conceptions. The term emerged in 1853, only a few years after "pornography," and then gained popularity in the 1950s and 60s to indicate a

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<sup>45</sup> Emphasis original. Andrew Ross. "The Popularity of Pornography." *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

<sup>46</sup> Laura Kipnis. "(Male) Desire, (Female) Disgust: Reading Hustler." *Cultural Studies*. Eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treicher. New York: Routledge, 1992. 373-392. Print.

particular level of respectability not granted to pornography, meaning materials that dealt with sex but from a perspective of quality.<sup>47</sup> Itself a type of boundary guardian, erotica creates a solution for both the public and the industry in that it allows pleasure to slip safely over the mind/body split, from the “lower,” disreputable body and into the “higher” pleasures of the mind.<sup>48</sup> In effect, it makes pleasure “safe.” As Ross describes, erotica typically deals in “representational codes of romantic love, with an emphasis on traditionally ‘feminine’ qualities like tenderness, softness, wholeness, sentiment, sensuality, and passion.”<sup>49</sup> This is in contrast to pornography’s “lower” concerns of bodily pleasure, detachment from romance or traditional relationships, and commitment. To summarize the contrast: “art,” in order to be art, cannot simply arouse. It must do more.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kendrick 244.

<sup>48</sup> Ross elaborates on this formulation, drawing from Roland Barthes: “[T]he limited and mundane libidinal economy of *plaisir* is contrasted with the higher, transgressive experience of *jouissance*... itself based on the Freudian distinction between the ‘economic’ pleasure principle and the destructively ‘spendthrift’ death drive.” Erotica, in other words, appeals to the mind, while pornography can only appeal to the body. Ross 184.

Thomas Waugh, in his groundbreaking study of gay male eroticism in photography and film, notes the cultural tendency to disavow even the “erotic” in efforts to legitimize pornography as “high art.” Calling this a process of “underevaluation of the erotic,” he aims in his work to “show how desire is at the center of the production, circulation, and reception of the images, and flesh out the eroticism of the actual pictures themselves—in other words, to put the erotic back in the homoerotic.” My aim in this dissertation is similar, if located in the discursive culture, industrial, and legal efforts to control the “erotic” aspects of adult film during its transition from film to video, and to illustrate the gendered tensions around the term “erotic” (and many of its synonyms). See: Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 60.

<sup>49</sup> Ross 185.

<sup>50</sup> This critical distinction forms the basis for virtually the entire history of obscenity law. The difference between simple arousal and something “more” can also be taken to imply the concept of “value.” *Miller v. California* (1973), the landmark Supreme Court decision that still operates as the legal guideline for obscenity in the United States, uses this concept as its core principle. In order for something to be considered legally obscene, according to *Miller*, it must fit three criteria: A) whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; B) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct

These tendencies to connect “higher” pursuits to essentialized views of femininity carry powerful ramifications that work against social-constructionist view of gender, which claim “masculinity” and “femininity” are constructed culturally, rather than being inherent to men and women.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, they create rigorous boundaries around sexuality that inevitably lead to binaries of “normal” and “abnormal” sexual behavior. Erotica, which labors to distance itself from pornography through abstract links to “intellectual” pursuits, represents one such site of containment. Anti-pornography feminists, seizing on the distinction, made (and make) efforts to support erotica while dismissing pornography, typically using the “high/low” distinction as the primary marker of acceptability. For example, in an early effort, ostensibly to defend pornography, Susan Sontag ultimately concludes that sexual representations offer a political opportunity to expand one’s mind and push conventional limits.<sup>52</sup> A worthy and necessary claim, to be sure, but nonetheless one that, as Ross puts it, remains “far removed from the semen-stained squalor of the peep show, the strip joint, the video arcade, and other sites of

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specifically defined by the applicable state law; and, C) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious, literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. It is this last criterion that explicitly argues that “art” cannot simply arouse, for simple arousal would lack the “value” elevating it beyond “prurient interest.” Pleasures of the body for their own sake, in other words, do not equal the pleasures of the mind—where “value” apparently resides. See: Thomas C. Mackey, *Pornography on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws, and Documents* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2002) 211-217; *Miller v. California*. 413 U.S. 15. Supreme Court of the United States. 21 June 1973. *Lexis Nexis*. Web.

<sup>51</sup> The full parameters of the discussion of social-constructionist views of gender are outside the bounds of this project; nevertheless, that view is one that defines much of the contemporary landscape on gender and sexual theories, as well as my own research. In short, the approach holds that gender and sex are socially constructed, performative acts created through discursive formations and strategies. The resulting binaries limit, contain, and mandate particular behaviors and ideologies, leading to the cultural formation of highly normative and rigid gender and sex categories. See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination,” *Partisan Review* 34 (Spring 1967): 184.

popular pornotopian fantasy.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, erotica stays somewhat removed from the body itself and planted back safely in the “upper” reaches of the mind.

Similarly, in another early example, Gloria Steinem claims that erotica presents a “sensuality and touch and warmth, an acceptance of bodies and nerve endings,” and defines it as “a mutually pleasurable, sexual expression between people who have enough power to be there by positive choice.” She goes on to add, “It is truly sensuous, and may give us a contagion of pleasure.”<sup>54</sup> The explicit references to “sensuality” and “warmth,” while not necessarily negative characteristics, call back directly to the long-standing, essentialized stereotype that women’s sexuality should be carefully contained, lest it venture out aggressively into territory where it might have more than a “contagion” of pleasure, detached from the mind and located more firmly in the body. Annette Kuhn makes the link back to narrative even more explicit: “[I]n pornographic stories, literary as well as visual, characters are never very strongly developed as psychologically rounded human beings. They perform functions, they take on roles already fixed within the commonplace fantasies that porn constructs.”<sup>55</sup> The need for “psychologically rounded” human beings, for narrative motivation, is always present in erotica, for the dismissal of “psychology” would entail acknowledging the legitimacy of bodily pleasure.

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<sup>53</sup> Ross 185.

<sup>54</sup> Gloria Steinem, “Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference,” *Ms.* November 1978: 53.

Pro-sex feminists would later criticize Steinem’s utopian view. Ellen Willis, for example, decried it as a “goody-goody concept” associated with femininity, not feminism. Ellen Willis. “Feminism, Morality, and Pornography.” *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson. New York: Monthly Review, 1983. 460-467. Print.

<sup>55</sup> Annette Kuhn. “Lawless Seeing.” *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. Print.

Acknowledging such legitimacy might also threaten the social order of “taste” as well, and begin to mix the “lower” pleasures with the lower classes as well, a divide most fully theorized by Pierre Bourdieu. Recognizing that “moral excellence” is upheld, in part, by the sublimation of bodily pleasures, Bourdieu points out that such divides work to classify those performing the classifying just as much as the objects under scrutiny—an observation particularly important for chapter five, which details the relentless demonizing of pornography by those who claimed “moral” authority over “decency.” Bourdieu writes:

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences.<sup>56</sup>

This “social difference,” however, does not reside simply in class formations, but also with gender. The move of adult video into the mainstream, particularly in the 1980s as mainstream rental stores offered it across the United States, represents a period in which Bourdieu’s formulation was fervently engaged.

Ultimately, the connection between narrative, quality, and essentialized conceptions of femininity rests on a foundation of rigidly heteronormative, highly classed views of the social order. To detach sex from patriarchal views of the home, privacy, and

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<sup>56</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) 7.

marriage is to suggest that pleasure can exist for its own sake. An emphasis on narrative reinforces that view by adding layers of justification to sex: pleasure, in a narrative context, comes with a *reason*. Tenderness, sensuality, relationships, warmth, sensitivity, love—all these code words, the hallmarks of erotica, imply knowledge and familiarity, something beyond just the sex act itself, something that can more easily be understood as “narrative.” The result is a highly proscriptive view of sex that creates boundaries between “normal” and “abnormal.” This reinforces the anti-pornography feminist view that, as the title of a well-known documentary put it, pornography is “not a love story,” suggesting with extreme prejudice that sex can only exist “properly” within a particular, very rigid set of boundaries predicated on relationships and intimacy.<sup>57</sup>

Pornography, with its frequent flagrant and unabashed dismissal of “before” and “after” the sex act, relishes all kinds of transgressive sexual behavior: stranger sex, group sex, lack of context, lack of familiarity of all kinds, often the utter disregard for “tenderness” either before or after the physical act itself, often very little interest in

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<sup>57</sup> That film, *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (dir. Bonnie Sherr Klein, 1982), was used by Women Against Pornography (WAP) during informational anti-pornography meetings and provoked intense debate among feminists. See: Lisa DiCaprio, “*Not a Love Story: The Film and the Debate*,” *Jump Cut* 30 (March 1985): 39-42.

None if this is to suggest that loving, intimate, monogamous relationships are dangerous or ideologically questionable. My aim here is merely to illustrate the long-standing cultural formation of “quality” being tied to similarly long standing cultural formations of femininity, and how the two have become intertwined and embodied by narrative as a marker of respectability. Nor is my intention to dismiss the interests anyone (female or male) has in particular types of pornography, be they narrative or non-narrative based. Nor, finally, is my intention to ignore the practical, lived realities of women in a culture that, as this history has shown, has labored mightily to contain their desires, behaviors, and beliefs. Women are always, already caught up in the cultural formations seeking to contain their pleasures, and any struggle against that containment is immediately marked as transgressive and suspect. Pornography, an epicenter of these struggles and debates, has long been a partner to many of these containment strategies, as I show in this research. As Linda Williams argues, “[P]ornography [has] long been a myth of sexual pleasure told from the point of view of men with the power to exploit and objectify the sexuality of women.” As such, pornography has frequently participated in, rather than liberated, the construction of binaries and boundaries around gender and sexual behavior—one of the guiding assertions of this dissertation. See: Williams, *Hard Core* 22.

traditional relationships and, almost never, procreation. To connect narrative to quality is to make the link between the “upper” region of the mind and the pursuit of something *more* than simple bodily pleasure—which, as the myriad tensions and anxieties throughout history have shown, is most dangerous when pursued by women.<sup>58</sup> The social order depends on this formulation of “respectability,” in which people (but especially women, the moral guardians of human behavior) strive for *something* beyond the “lower” territories of bodily pleasure.<sup>59</sup> Most often embodied by the somewhat abstract concept of narrative, that *something* is a key element that I analyze throughout this dissertation as a marker of the strategy employed by the adult film industry in its quest for greater public acceptability and profits. I also look at the ways in which pornography’s opponents used similar strategies to contort and reconfigure the meanings behind the term, further complicating its usage. Both the industry and its opponents, by mobilizing quality, carried on the long tradition of linking “appropriate” female behavior to discourses of sexuality and cultural stability.

### *Methods, Sources, and “Trace Historiography”*

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<sup>58</sup> Jane Juffer expertly identifies how much of the process as I have described it has often been sidestepped by women who find sexual pleasure in myriad forms removed from “traditional” pornography such as adult video. Much as women have been relentlessly subjected to discourses of domestication, Juffer points out that various types of resistance can also be found within those discourses that also provide pleasure. From that perspective, women frequently avoid many of the regulatory mechanisms I outline in this dissertation in the pursuit of pleasure, successfully negotiating and resisting the very types of domestication seeking to limit their access to and pleasure from pornography. See: Jane Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Very little has changed in this formulation, which requires pornography to have narrative to attain “quality” status. For example, adult film producer Erika Lust, in her recent book otherwise loaded with defenses of pornography for women, replete with dismissals of “erotica” and the tired mythology that women are not “visually oriented,” still insists on arguing that adult films for women are all about “intimacy and relationships.” Those codes, heavily weighted with connotations of narrative, “quality,” and “respectability,” persist in defining “women’s porn.” See: Erika Lust, *Good Porn: A Woman’s Guide* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2010) 16.

The story of the adult film industry's transition from celluloid to home video has many corridors, twisting and turning in a maze of discourses, often arising in unexpected places and leading to unanticipated conclusions. It is, of course, about sex and its representations, and how those representations changed along with the technology; the literal mediation of sexual behaviors, however, will be the least important and least discussed element in what follows. Concerns surrounding the sexual acts in adult film, be they in the form of feminist polemic, textual analysis, or recuperative politics, have become omnipresent in most discussions within pornography studies as a discipline, severely limiting the field and blocking off other very necessary and useful research avenues.<sup>60</sup> Kendrick argues, "When pornography is at issue... facts [make] little difference," a statement too often true: facts make little difference because little effort is spent on gathering, analyzing, and complicating them in favor of more textual analyses and ideological readings of the "meaning" of sex in adult films.<sup>61</sup> What is needed now, in other words, is more of the *rest* of the story of adult film history rather than simply continued investigation into the content of the films the industry produces; after all, that content, for the most part, has not changed very dramatically since the first stag films of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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<sup>60</sup> The omnipresence of textual analysis as a method in pornography studies often has wide-ranging and unexpected consequences. When I tell other scholars or my students my area of research, I am often met with responses that (falsely) assume I spend the majority of my time watching hardcore films—an assumption that carries a seed of perversion, as if I have somehow "tricked" the system into supporting my own taboo habits, or that my work is somehow illegitimate because it involves something "dirty" that people should (only) do in private. Adult film historians face an uphill battle in this regard, which is precisely why I strenuously argue as often as possible that pornography be included in mainstream industry studies and histories rather than cordoned off into its own, segregated space, where such assumptions and mythologies will only continue to flower.

<sup>61</sup> Kendrick 256.

Thus, first and foremost, this project will help begin to fill in the gaps of an academically neglected historical period in terms of a specific film industry. Pornography studies, home video scholarship, and general film histories have all overlooked the transition of adult film from celluloid to video. This dissertation examines the period of 1976 to 1986 in much the same manner as traditional film historiographies, drawing on a variety of materials, discourses, and evidence to reconstruct the elements of modification, tension, success, and failure to craft a portrait of the changes and various pressures facing a media industry as it underwent a technological and cultural transition. In doing so, my hope is that it fits into a general trajectory of *film* history rather than *pornography* history. Constance Penley, writing on how her courses in pornography studies aim to situate the material in broader contexts, pointedly asks: “What happens when a class of student researchers asks the same kinds of questions about porn that they have already addressed in their other classes on film and media history and theory?”<sup>62</sup> Like Penley, I believe this is to be an important goal, and have constructed my work in such a way that it poses such questions.

As such, this dissertation utilizes an interdisciplinary approach rather than being limited to one set of methods or practices. Part of this is an insistence on deliberately seeking out discontinuity in the mess and clutter of the past, rather than locating (or creating) clearly demarcated historical paths to predetermined outcomes. Michel Foucault describes the way in which historians have embraced rather than rejected discontinuity,

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<sup>62</sup> Constance Penley. "A Feminist Teaching Pornography? That's Like Scopes Teaching Evolution!" *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*. Eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas Shimizu, Constance Penley and Mireille Miller-Young. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013. 179-199. Print.

an approach that offers salience for this project.<sup>63</sup> My purpose is not to relate a teleological narrative or to impose order on the chaos, but instead to highlight complexities and complications from a group of related and overlapping vantage points, an approach that has not yet been utilized by scholars in terms of this industry in this period.

What follows will thus be less about “rearranging” and more about uncovering and following the trajectories of chaos, disorder, and compromise embedded in the regulations of various kinds that had such an impact on the adult film industry as it moved to magnetic tape. Regulation is as much a part of this history as any other element—and it is particularly salient in terms of the story of adult video, which arrived and thrived during a period of intense cultural conflict over what constituted “appropriate” gendered behavior. This dissertation does not (and cannot) tell the entire story of the period under investigation; that undertaking is beyond the scope of a single historian or even possible. Nor does it cover every avenue, regardless of the obvious importance to the discussion, such as the story of pornography on cable and satellite television, industries that grew during the same period as home video. My focus resides squarely in a history of the industry producing heterosexual adult films in the United States, despite the immense importance of queer material in the history of pornography, a decision based in an effort to limit the scope and scale of the research to a particular industrial history that has not yet received much scholarly interest. To include queer pornographies, particularly in the period under investigation, would necessitate doubling the body of research, expanding the cultural lens, and complicating the regulatory

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<sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010) 8.

strategies in myriad ways. Thus, my decision to focus on heterosexual content is not an effort to further solidify the cultural binaries surrounding sexuality, but instead to illustrate the ways in which the industry marketed to specific audiences in specific ways.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, I do not intend my narrative and analysis to be complete. Rather, I wish to contribute to what I hope will become a growing area of interest, a body of historical research that endeavors to uncover and present the history of the adult film industry in more detail than merely its controversial products, the ideological debates surrounding their cultural legitimacy, or the “meaning” of the mediated sex acts themselves.

My research choices and arguments, as part of this effort to help construct and contribute to a new research field, will therefore consciously and deliberately challenge what falls under the rubric of “Cinema History.” Adult film, rarely taught to undergraduates (or graduate students) as part of film history curricula, is almost never included in textbooks.<sup>65</sup> At best, academia tends to cordon it off and treat it as a toxic

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<sup>64</sup> For more on the history of queer adult video, see: Jeffrey Escoffier, *Bigger Than Life: The History of Gay Porn Cinema from Beefcake to Hardcore* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> The prominent introductory film history textbooks yield dismal results in terms of including pornography as a part of cinema’s past, present, and future. Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, sadly, include nothing on the subject beyond suggesting there was a “boom in pornography fostered by the availability of home video in the 1980s.” Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009) 442.

Pam Cook offers nothing on the subject. Pam Cook, ed., *The Cinema Book*, 3rd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 2007).

David Cook follows an academic trend (discussed at length elsewhere in this dissertation) in acknowledging the massive effect of home video on entertainment, but somehow neglects to note the importance of pornography in that same history. In fact, he makes no mention of it at all. David Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).

Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell, so committed elsewhere in their work to ensuring rigorous, careful research and details, mention only that Russ Meyer “blazed the trail for ‘mainstream’ 1970s pornography,” but neglect entirely to follow up with that history, or, in fact, to mention it again at all. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, eds., *Film History: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010) 491.

element best carefully contained and kept from too much exposure, lest it seemingly taint “official” film histories. Penley describes this as “putting porn in a quarantine zone to protect... sensibilities from any porno contagion.”<sup>66</sup> At worst, scholarship ignores it completely, denying it any place in film history. Indeed, the primary and most important works on film exhibition history (of which this dissertation is designed to be a part) ignore adult film, acting it as if it simply did not exist.<sup>67</sup> All of these absences are particularly striking given the proliferation and financial success of adult material across film history.

Industry Studies, too, ignores adult material, creating an odd situation in which the thousands of people employed in Chatsworth and other areas of West Los Angeles by hundreds of companies to produce moving images do not count. The major research in

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Gerald Mast and Bruce Kawin might do even more of a disservice than merely absenting the topic: offering a single sentence about the growth in popularity of adult film during the early 1970s, they go so far as to suggest that readers look at Linda Lovelace’s autobiography *Ordeal* for “a horrifying account of the making of *Deep Throat*.” Given that Lovelace’s book has been widely dismissed as anti-pornography propaganda (so much so that it was unofficially adopted by the feminist anti-pornography movement as “truth”), it is disturbing and sad that this would make up the extent of Kawin’s efforts (as Mast died in the 1990s) to “include” pornography as a legitimate part of film history. Gerald Mast and Bruce Kawin, eds., *A Short History of the Movies*, 8th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2003) 447.

John Hill and Pamela Church, refreshingly, offer a section on pornography, written by Lara Kipnis. While the bulk of the material, unfortunately, is given over to defending pornography from anti-pornography feminists, it nevertheless represents a step forward in that it offers a literature review and raises theoretical questions. John Hill and Pamela Church, eds., *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 153-157.

<sup>66</sup> Penley 186-187.

<sup>67</sup> If scholars were to take the following list of otherwise excellent and comprehensive works to be a solid and dependable history of film exhibition in the United States, they would be forced to conclude that pornography did not exist. See: Gregory A. Waller, ed., *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen, eds., *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Cinema* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007); Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Ina Rae Hark, ed., *Exhibition: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Industry Studies treats pornography as if it literally does not exist.<sup>68</sup> In his groundbreaking and provocative introduction to the book *Global Hollywood*, for example, Toby Miller persuasively calls for an overhaul of screen studies, arguing that “we should acknowledge the policy, distributional, promotional and exhibitionary protocols of the screen at each site as much as their textual ones.”<sup>69</sup> He adds: “Enough valorization of close reading and armchair accounts of human interiority without ethical and political regard for the conditions of global labor and the significance of work, texts, and, and subjectivities within social movements and demographic cohorts.”<sup>70</sup> Yet, despite this necessary call for change, Miller and his co-authors avoid discussing pornography anywhere in what follows. Ultimately, then, calls such as this one for extending and redefining what “screen” studies mean, in terms of industry, neglect to consider expanding the field of study to include adult films. While I acknowledge that not every research undertaking needs to (or should) examine pornography, the lack of attention to it in otherwise comprehensive analyses of the institutions and structures that create moving images remains troubling.

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<sup>68</sup> A short list of the many examples of industry studies texts that do not include adult film: Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks and John Thornton Caldwell, eds., *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009); John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflections and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren, *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, eds., *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Philip Napoli, *Audience Economics: Media Institutions and the Audience Marketplace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Philip Napoli, *Audience Evolution: New Technologies & the Transformation of Media Audiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007); David R. Croteau and William D. Hoynes, *Media/Society: Industries, Images and Audiences*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2002); Janet Wasko, *How Hollywood Works* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2003); Tim Havens and Amanda Lotz, *Understanding Media Industries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2001) 14.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, Govil, McMurria and Maxwell 14.

The trends in home video scholarship follow a similar pattern. What some have called the rise of “New Video Studies,” a recent surge beginning in the mid-2000s in interest in home video history, has simultaneously been an avoidance of looking at the importance of pornography to that history.<sup>71</sup> This trend is nothing new, unfortunately, and stems back to even the earliest efforts to explore the history and theory of home video. Manuel Alvarado’s *Video World-Wide* (1998), for example, gives only the slightest attention to adult film.<sup>72</sup> This is particularly disappointing since it is otherwise comprehensive in collecting an impressive amount of data about the production, distribution, and reception of home video. Roy Armes, in his early theorization of home video, avoids the topic entirely.<sup>73</sup> James Lardner’s crucial early history offers one paragraph.<sup>74</sup> Megumi Komiya and Barry Litman also present one paragraph, with the standard narrative of initial popularity followed by decreased interest as access opened to more mainstream titles.<sup>75</sup> Frederick Wasser’s seminal analysis of the rise of the VCR and Hollywood’s subsequent response also follows the pattern. “Pornography was historically important to the emergence of home video,” he argues, yet offers only a few pages to

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<sup>71</sup> I first encountered the term “New Video Studies” at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in March 2013 in Chicago, where I participated in a panel on the topic organized by Dan Herbert which included Charles Acland, Lucas Hilderbrand, Chuck Tryon, and Hannah Spaulding. Given my arguments in this dissertation about pornography being excluded from precisely this sort of conversation, I was immensely glad to be included—and hopeful that future discussions, in both print and at conferences, will similarly include the topic of pornography. See: Dan Herbert, Peter Alilunas, Charles Acland, Chuck Tryon, Lucas Hilderbrand and Hannah Spaulding. “Workshop: Video Studies: Rewinding a Past and Demanding a Future.” Society for Cinema & Media Studies. [Conference]. Chicago, Illinois. 7 March 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Manuel Alvarado, *Video World-Wide* (Paris: Unesco, 1988).

<sup>73</sup> Roy Armes, *On Video* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>74</sup> Lardner, *Fast Forward*, 178-179.

<sup>75</sup> Megumi Komiya and Barry Litman. "The Economics of the Pre-recorded Videocassette Industry." *Social & Cultural Aspects of VCR Use*. Ed. Julia R. Dobrow. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990. 36. Print.

support the claim.<sup>76</sup> While Wasser acknowledges, for example, that “X-rated material... created the infrastructure for video distribution,” he makes only cursory effort to go into detail or map the history of such a powerful statement.<sup>77</sup> Nearly all work on the subject, in fact, ignores pornography, thus recreating the “back room” of the video store within the work on home video.<sup>78</sup> Recent calls for more research on home video history often completely avoid adult films, thus reproducing the position that the topic does not need to be included.<sup>79</sup> Some recent work, such as Joshua Greenberg’s *From Betamax to Blockbuster* (2008), integrates adult video more seamlessly into the narrative, demonstrating a hopeful model for future research.<sup>80</sup>

While I do not believe that these omissions represent a deliberately moralistic stance, and often seem to be oversights, issues of distaste do seem to play a role.

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<sup>76</sup> Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001) 147.

<sup>77</sup> Wasser 95.

<sup>78</sup> Regardless of method or approach (be it industry studies, theoretical analyses, sociological perspectives, or traditional histories), the body of work on home video has almost universally ignored pornography and the pornography industry, or has relegated it to passing mentions before moving back as quickly as possible to more “legitimate” forms of content. See: Sean Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Julia Dobrow, ed., *Social and Cultural Aspects of VCR Use* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990); Gladys Ganley and Oswald Ganley, *Global Political Fallout: The First Decade of the VCR 1976-1985* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Mark Levy, ed., *The VCR Age: Home Video and Mass Communication* (London: Sage, 1989); Paul McDonald, *Video and DVD Industries* (London: BFI, 2007); Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994); Ann Gray, *Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology* (London: Routledge, 1992); Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> For example, Charles Acland persuasively calls for more research on home video yet does not refer to adult film. In fact, he makes special mention of early video enthusiasts purchasing children’s tapes and workout videos but, inexplicably, does not mention adult titles alongside them despite their historical importance alongside those genres. See: Charles R. Acland. “The Last Days of Videotape.” *flowtv.org*. Flow. 12 November 2009. Web. 12 November 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Joshua M. Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster: Video Stores and the Invention of Movies on Video* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

Frequently, too, it seems that pornography is not included because scholars believe it is best handled elsewhere. Typically, the mediation of sexuality, when it is included in academic discourse, is generally taken up under a feminist heading and debated on political or ideological terrain mostly centered on content, a long-standing trend emanating from the anti-pornography feminist movement of the 1970s and 80s. The legacy of that movement, outlined in chapter five, haunts both academia and public opinion in ways that have been radically destructive in terms of basic historical knowledge, particularly since such paradigms have been mostly dismissed within academia or treated as a minor piece of a larger, more nuanced story. Nevertheless, they have left a lasting impact in terms of positioning the various “meanings” of the content as the primary, and often only, element worthy of any discussion or as part of the apparently necessary rebuttal and/or justification process familiar to anyone who teaches the subject.

The legacy of such over-emphasis can be seen in the three primary pornography studies anthologies, which are filled predominantly with textual analyses and ideological interventions, as are the “special issues” of journals devoted to adult film (which rarely include the topic in other issues).<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, with some notable exceptions, academic explorations of adult film have avoided historical approaches and the type of research and analysis common to nearly every other segment of media and film studies. Often it seems that the “toxic” aspects of pornography have taken such a hold that it has become nearly

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<sup>81</sup> James Elias, ed., *Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography, and the First Amendment* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999); Linda Williams, ed., *Porn Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).; Peter Lehman, ed., *Pornography: Film and Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

For special journal issues, see: *The Velvet Light Trap* 59 (Spring 2007); *Wide Angle* 19.3 (July 1997); *Journal of Film and Video* 45.2/3 (Summer-Fall 1993).

*Porn Studies*, the first peer-reviewed, international journal devoted to the topic, is set to begin publication by Routledge in spring 2014, representing a groundbreaking moment for the field.

impossible to perform anything *but* ideological interventions and content analyses, be they pro or con. Indeed, even within historical interventions on the topic, the ideological ramifications must also, apparently, be included, a “requirement” not typically associated with other genres and industries.<sup>82</sup> My own stance on the apparent “requirement” might best be described by Eric Schaefer, who argues that “it is the task of scholars and archivists working together to emphasize that one does not have to approve of, be an apologist for, or a champion of adult movies to recognize that they are a part of our culture and that they represent a legitimate area of scholarly interest.”<sup>83</sup> The continued segregation of pornography from other forms of scholarship has resulted in the replication of cultural regulations that mark the form as “dirty” or “distasteful,” best cordoned off, as in the video store, into a “back room” of academia. One of my primary goals as an adult video historian is to break that model, and reinsert the topic into the mainstream of film history, Industry Studies, and Home Video research. There is simply no reason it cannot be included other than the predilections of scholars, which often seem based on nothing more than precedent or oversight.

Given my interest in rethinking the history of the adult film industry as just one component in a larger history of film, it follows that this project has much in common with historiographic works *outside* of pornography studies. Specifically, I have drawn from research efforts dealing with cultural and technological change in media, not only in method but also in cultural patterns of behavior. I have looked in particular to the work

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<sup>82</sup> I recognize the inescapable irony that my argument against including such justifications becomes, itself, just such a justification, a construct that I believe is unique to pornography scholars in the field of media studies.

<sup>83</sup> Eric Schaefer, “Dirty Little Secrets: Scholars, Archivists, and Dirty Movies,” *The Moving Image* 5.2 (Fall 2005): 94.

initiated by the “historical turn” in film studies dealing with the histories of early and silent cinema and its technologies, signaled, in part, by Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery’s *Film History: Theory and Practice* (1985). That work turned a historiographic lens not only on early film history, but also on Film Studies as a discipline and its move toward high theory as a primary method at the expense of historical investigation. Their approach holds particular salience for this project: “Rather than analyze one film or reflect on the nature and potential of all films, the film historian attempts to explain the changes that have occurred to the cinema since its origins, as well as account for aspects of the cinema that have resisted change.”<sup>84</sup> This change/resistance construction neatly fits this project as it examines the multiple tensions circulating culturally, industrially, and legally around the adult film industry in the period in question, and particularly addresses the monumental technological changes undertaken in the move from celluloid to magnetic tape. Such a construction also calls for a rethinking of historiographic methods.

In his book *Silent Film Sound* (2004), Rick Altman demonstrates a research paradigm that has inspired my rethinking of the methods used to interrogate adult film history. He implements what he calls a method of “crisis historiography” to write a history of an emerging technology, placing particular emphasis on ruptures, disjuncture, conflict, and failure, rather than seamless teleology. He writes:

Concerted attention to the concerns of distinct user groups constitutes a hallmark of crisis historiography. Traditional technological history employs what might be called a ‘single-ledger’ approach to specific events: each event (invention, patent, law, experiment, commercialization,

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985) 5.

contract, etc.) is measured from a single standpoint: its contribution to the eventual development of the technology under study. Crisis historiography utilizes instead a ‘multiple-ledger’ approach. Individual developments are evaluated according to the contribution they make to *each* user’s ledger, with the attendant possibility—indeed, probability—that a gain for one user group will represent a loss for another.<sup>85</sup>

This “multiple-ledger” strategy, along with my similar interest in discontinuity, aids in avoiding a temptation to fit a complex and complicated history into a pre-determined outcome of advancement and success. Crisis historiography functions as a means of locating the failures, short-term victories, and forgotten moments of the technological transformation of an industry, while analyzing multiple “ledgers” permits examination of the many efforts to halt or eradicate the dissemination of pornography on the new format.

Like Altman, Donald Crafton makes cinema sound his object of study in *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (1994). He focuses on the gaps and failures in a technological transformation. “[T]he boundaries dividing Hollywood ‘before’ and ‘after’ sound,” he writes, “were not so clear-cut. In fact, there is no unanticipated landmark event or watershed film that separates the golden age of silent from the modern age of the talkies. The transition was years in the making and in the finishing.”<sup>86</sup> Identical logic can be applied to the adult film industry; indeed, in many ways, my project mirrors Crafton’s in approach, particularly in my intention to emphasize that the move to home video was anything but immediate and seamless. Crafton stresses

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<sup>85</sup> Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 22.

<sup>86</sup> Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 4.

repeatedly that the popular perception of a smooth transition in Hollywood to sound has resulted in an incomplete and incorrect historical understanding. “Competing readings have been sheared off. Making sound violently revolutionary displaces the hidden violence of the historical method that produced the illusion of a clean break with the past.”<sup>87</sup> In an effort to untangle and explore the “hidden violence” various regulatory pressures had on the decade-long technological transformation of an industry, as well as the many “competing readings” that have been forgotten or dismissed, this dissertation follows Crafton’s example.

Yet, while I am inspired by these historians and their approaches, the particular complications of studying adult film history require a reexamination of traditional methods. What I wish to argue is that the cultural efforts to regulate and contain pornography result in a complicated situation for historians, in which the typical problems associated with historical research become amplified in particular and unique ways. Even in its contemporaneous moments, the adult film industry existed on the fringes of culture, often deliberately hiding in the shadows in order to avoid prosecution and other regulatory pressures. The lack of established research on the subject means contemporary historians often cannot draw on existing work; given the size and scope of the adult film industry, this means any project becomes daunting. The adult film industry did not interact with various cultural structures and bodies in the same ways as its mainstream counterparts. Thus, the historical footprints for pornography, when they appear at all, often do not resemble “traditional” projects that with established research protocols, methods, and sources.

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<sup>87</sup> Crafton 4.

Furthermore, while all manner of voices (newspapers, magazines, trade journals, etc.) have long covered mainstream film industries, the adult film industry rarely received such coverage, often appearing only in the context of prosecution or panic. It is difficult to locate basic industrial histories of the adult film industry in traditional places. Very few archives (with some notable exceptions) collect adult material, and university libraries generally do not subscribe to or hold collections of adult publications—particularly those that dealt in hardcore imagery. Aside from *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and, occasionally, *Hustler*, microfilm copies of adult publications do not exist, and the many books on the industry published by popular presses have been lost to history or are expensive to acquire. Adult film historians must often construct a personal archive, gathered on the (expensive) collector’s market. Even this process, however, can be complicated, as often the items saved by collectors do not match those that might benefit historians, and those that do offer complex and detailed histories are often the most expensive. Thankfully, given the rise of online marketplaces, contemporary historians have a serious advantage over those from previous eras who might never have been able to locate and acquire the vast body of work necessary for this type of undertaking.

Scholars interested in adult film history must often turn to work outside academia to piece together the history, or pull from a variety of cross-referenced discourses to interrogate the past. As Schaefer identifies, “insider” accounts, anecdotal approaches, loose ethnographies, oral histories, and superficial overviews tend to comprise much of the work on adult film history.<sup>88</sup> Details often lack citation or supporting evidence, and

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<sup>88</sup> Schaefer, “Dirty Little Secrets: Scholars, Archivists, and Dirty Movies,” 86.

This collection of literature is too large to list here, but there are a few noteworthy examples: William Rostler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema* (New York: Penthouse/Ballantine, 1973); Kenneth Turan and

can lead down twisting paths of factual confirmation, or, worse, transmit inaccurate information. Often scholars must rely upon the industry itself for historical research, a situation that can present more verification problems and sometimes a lack of access. Despite this, pockets of evidence do exist, and gathering them is a necessity if adequate excavations of such histories are to occur. For example, adult film director and historian Jim Holliday's essay on the history of the industry has been included in a pornography studies anthology.<sup>89</sup> Early viewers' guides to adult video provide similar examples, and contain invaluable production data and historical snapshots of the industry.<sup>90</sup> Ultimately, for scholars to write this history, the notion of the archive itself will have to expand, and conventional archives will have to consider why they have not gathered evidence— industrial, cultural, and otherwise—that could assist in that project.

These many challenges do not mean that uncovering and analyzing the history of adult film is impossible. These difficulties may require an adept, creative approach shifting focus away from traditional methods and sources, but not in the core practice of historiography itself. In this dissertation, I implement a method that I call “trace historiography,” which seeks to locate historical evidence where it seemingly no longer exists. By searching for traces, often peripheral and, on first examination, unrelated, the

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Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema* (New York: Praeger, 1974); Luke Ford, *A History of X: 100 Years of Sex in Film* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999); Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne and Peter Pavia, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: Regan Books, 2005); David Jennings, *Skinflicks: The Inside Story of the X-Rated Video Industry* (Bloomington, IN: 1st Books, 2000); Carolyn See, *Blue Money: Pornography and the Pornographers* (New York: David McKay Company, 1974).

<sup>89</sup> Jim Holliday. "A History of Modern Pornographic Film and Video." *Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography, and the First Amendment*. Eds. James Elias, Veronica Diehl Elias, Vern L. Bullough, Gwen Brewer, Jeffrey J. Douglas and Will Jarvis. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999. 341-351. Print.

<sup>90</sup> Two important early examples: Robert H. Rimmer, *The X-Rated Videotape Guide* (New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1984); Keith L. Justice, *Adult Video Index '84* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1984).

echoes and footprints of the past can reveal what might have once there but has been lost. To put it another way, the trace historiographer must often examine the smoke rather than the fire in order to determine how it started, what was burning, and why. Over the course of this research it has become clear to me that much of the evidence appears to form a narrative only when assembled together from disparate and fragmented sources, a puzzle of sorts that does not appear to offer answers when seen as individual pieces. While this method is not unique to pornography history, the complex challenges of identifying evidence for an industry often forced into (or deliberately residing in) the shadows makes it particularly useful.

In constructing this trace historiography method, I look to similar strategies used by Lynn Spigel in her work on postwar suburban life.<sup>91</sup> Drawing on Carlo Ginzberg's "conjectural model," which argues that the process of historiography is akin to hunters or detectives searching for clues in order to reconstruct past events through conjecture and symptomatic analysis, Spigel outlines a process ideally suited for the pursuit of adult film history. She describes Ginzberg's method: "Historians look for traces of the past; they search for 'clues' to a reality that remains opaque and ultimately unknowable in any absolute way."<sup>92</sup> Her rich description of her own methods is worth quoting at length, given its close relationship to my own approach:

Many of the questions I pose are about elusive and ephemeral realities, about unrecorded histories (or histories of women, children, and people of

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<sup>91</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>92</sup> Spigel 12-13; Carlo Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," *History Workshop Journal* 9.1 (1980): 5-36.

color whose acts and beliefs don't typically wind up in the archival record). In addition, many of these essays are based on sources that exist in incomplete or partial form. [...] I do my research in flea markets, thrift stores, collector's homes, and by watching television, as much as I use libraries, museums, and archives. From this point of view, it isn't only some pre-ordained method and theory but also the kinds of objects we study and places we actually practice our research that govern the ways we interpret the past.<sup>93</sup>

Such an approach encapsulates what I wish to do with trace historiography as a method, to seek out the "elusive and ephemeral realities," often drawn from unique and unconventional spaces, in order to craft a portrait from the past that not only no longer exists, but barely ever existed at all. The smoke, in many ways, may have been all there ever was.

This method also draws heavily on Schaefer's notion of "critical-mess historiography," which is remarkably similar to what I have in mind. Describing the challenges of researching and writing the history of sexploitation movies, Schaefer notes that, given the myriad difficulties of finding evidence (many of which I have similarly described), he has ultimately engaged in "critical mess collecting" as a method of research. He describes this as "involving the casting of the widest net possible, amassing material, and then looking for patterns in order to draw conclusions."<sup>94</sup> Extending this

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<sup>93</sup> Spiegel 13.

<sup>94</sup> Eric Schaefer, "The Problem with Sexploitation Movies," *Illuminace.3* (2012): 151.

Schaefer was inspired by the idea of "critical-mess collecting" after reading a portrait of obsessive bibliophile Michael Zinman. See: Mark Singer, "The Book Eater," *The New Yorker* 5 February 2001: 62-71.

into a historiographic methodology, Schaefer writes: “Critical-mess historiography is slow and it is messy; it relies on chance connections and fortuitous convergences. But ultimately it represents the most thorough and conclusive method of studying fringe phenomena like sexploitation films when compared to faster, more cursory efforts at writing history, especially those that start with a predetermined thesis.”<sup>95</sup> My own work relies heavily upon the notion of a “critical mess,” and my sprawling personal archive of materials (catalogs, magazines, brochures, ad slicks, telephone books, autobiographies, blog posts, gossip columns, advertisements, etc.) that I use to write this history does precisely what Schaefer describes in terms of identifying patterns amidst the chaos to reach conclusions. A great of deal of my research, in the end, is about digging through the “mess” assembled from the past: finding a reference in one place, searching for its elusive origin, then tracing it out through myriad other, related sites, all in order to find connections, which is what I mean, ultimately, by “trace historiography.”

This dissertation also closely follows in methodology the histories written by Schaefer and Jon Lewis, who have both conducted extensive research in the area of adult film. Both also work in the wake of the “historical turn” that places emphasis on locating and analyzing industrial changes, discursive trends and markers, and cultural reactions to film genres and production strategies, rather than theoretical explorations of film content or efforts to “understand” the medium as a whole. Schaefer, in *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Film, 1919-1959* (1999), outlines the history of exploitation cinemas, presenting a compelling case for the importance of that genre even

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<sup>95</sup> Schaefer, “The Problem with Sexploitation Movies,” 151.

as it has been either forgotten, overlooked, or ignored in conventional film histories.<sup>96</sup> Schaefer's work undertakes a contextualization of exploitation film within cultural, industrial, and legal spheres, and as such offers a model for my own similar approach. Intertwining textual analyses, production histories, cultural reactions, and a vast body of primary research, Schaefer ultimately presents a sophisticated history that ends before the rise of hard-core adult film in the late 1960s. That period of acceptance is the starting point for my own research, linking my work to Schaefer's in a critical fashion. His research offers not only a model, but also a necessary background for understanding where and why I initiate my own research paths and arguments.

Jon Lewis's work on the tensions between the Hollywood studios and the adult film industry in *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle Over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (2000) offers another critical framework and more necessary background to my research.<sup>97</sup> Arguing that the financial success resulting from the widespread public appeal of adult film in the 1970s led to increased pressure on the Hollywood studios to attract dwindling audiences, Lewis sifts through various historical discourses to craft a portrait of industrial change during a specific period. Ultimately, he suggests that a combination of regulation (particularly through the formation of the MPAA), an increase of adult content in mainstream film, and the suppression of the adult film industry helped "save" Hollywood by creating censorship mechanisms that successfully partitioned both content and audiences into safely regulated zones. Lewis's

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<sup>96</sup> Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> Jon Lewis, *Hollywood V. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

discussion of the consequences of Hollywood's reaction, much like Schaefer's work, leads directly into my own argument. Once again, it is not only Lewis's methods that offer a framework for my approach (particularly his skillful deployment and analysis of primary evidence from a wide array of trade journals), it is also his underlying theorization of *how* regulation worked to benefit particular industries while limiting others that is highly appropriate to my argument.

Additionally, I draw on work examining the regulatory changes during transition periods of the film industry, and specifically the ways in which the intersection of respectability, quality, and gender played a significant role in the cultural tensions often most visible in and around movies. In particular, Lee Grieveson's analysis of the contentious period following the widespread proliferation of nickelodeons across the United States in 1906 in *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (2004) offers much to my analysis of the similar widespread proliferation of adult video following the introduction of the Sony Betamax in 1976. As Grieveson identifies, the connections between class, gender, censorship, and the social uses of cinema find their roots in a much larger discussion of the political ramifications of entertainment and the containment methods employed throughout culture to restrict and control particular audiences and industries. Similar discourses, tensions, and methods operated in the 1970s and 1980s in the contexts of adult film, drawing a useful parallel between the two periods and industries. Likewise, Shelley Stamp draws a wide-reaching portrait of female movie audiences between 1908 and 1915 in *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (2000).<sup>98</sup> Examining the ways

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<sup>98</sup> Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

in which the film industry marketed to women, Stamp illustrates how female audiences resided in a complicated, often contradictory zone: used by the industry as a marker of quality in order to attain respectability, women were nevertheless simultaneously a source of tension and cultural anxiety, needing to be contained even as they were encouraged to participate. In both cases, the portrait of an industry in transition, and the resulting regulatory efforts (particularly surrounding gender), offer much to the analysis of adult film during its own period of significant transition.

Ultimately, my trace historiography methods and selection of sources in the chapters that follow cast a wide net, but they do so from a firmly grounded perspective described by David Bordwell as “middle-level research.” Avoiding a hermeneutical approach that examines individual films for “proof” of larger cultural fantasies, beliefs, or trends, this approach allows for empirical analysis and abductive reasoning, rather than pre-formed conclusions designed to fit particular theoretical paradigms offering little to a more complete picture of adult film history. Bordwell writes:

Middle-level research programs have shown that an argument can be at once conceptually powerful and based in evidence without appeal to theoretical bricolage or association of ideas. Moreover, these programs have demonstrated that you can do a lot with films besides interpreting them. In particular, we do not need to understand a film by projecting onto it the semantic fields ‘privileged’ by this or that theory.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> David Bordwell. "Contemporary Film Theory and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory." *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. 3-36. Print.

Indeed, I follow Bordwell's call for "building theories not of subjectivity, ideology, or culture in general but rather of particular phenomena."<sup>100</sup> To continue in the trend of squeezing the *content* of adult film into examinations of subjectivity, power relations, pleasure, and regulation is to neglect those same elements in the greater contexts *surrounding* adult film. In other words, I argue that the struggle for respectability by the industry, and the ensuing efforts at regulation are the most important elements in this history. Crucially, this regulation often came from various and unexpected places (both internal and external) only tangentially related to the materials themselves. Thus, my methods and sources conform to a goal of locating, as Bordwell describes it, "particular phenomena," rather than merely more theoretical interventions into content.

These phenomena exist across broad terrain, from the pages of *Variety* and other mainstream discourses, to home video trade magazines, and on into popular press magazines and newspapers. They also circulate within the publications of anti-pornography feminist groups and grassroots conservative organizations aiming to contain, limit, or eradicate adult video. Adult film trade publications such as *Adult Video News* offer a great deal to the project, as do hard-core video magazines such as *X-Video*, *Adam Film World*, *Cinema-X*, *Adult Cinema Review*, and others. I also trace this story in zoning laws, Supreme Court obscenity rulings, local ordinances, and in the testimony and findings of the Meese Commission. In short, the discursive pathways to locate the adult film industry's quest for respectability as it moved to magnetic tape, as well as the accompanying regulatory efforts, are diverse and scattered, and often found in unusual or unexpected places. While I look at a variety of films, both before and during the

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<sup>100</sup> Bordwell 29.

transition, they are not privileged; instead, they represent merely an additional piece of a larger historical puzzle that, in a peculiar fashion, can often quickly become irrelevant. After all, opponents have often historically refused even to view adult films at all, or to view them in small pieces out of context in order to make unrelated, ideologically motivated and pre-determined arguments. To put it another way, I wish to follow Richard Maltby, who argues, “to write a history of texts and call it a history of Hollywood involves omitting the social processes and cultural functions of cinema, and denies the contextual significance of the material conditions under which movies were produced and consumed.”<sup>101</sup> At the same time, I also wish to follow Tom Gunning’s somewhat opposing approach: “Analysis of the individual film provides a sort of laboratory for testing the relation between history and theory. It is at the level of the specific film that theory and history converge, setting up the terms of analysis.”<sup>102</sup> This type of balanced research is especially necessary in the case of adult film history.

### *Chapter Organization*

The following chapters adhere to a chronological, but not teleological, trajectory. The story of the industry’s quest for respectability and the ensuing regulation emerges from areas that offer unique perspectives on the topic, each contributing to the larger historical narrative while also offering case studies, evidence, and examples. Ultimately, a portrait of regulation emerges that is not limited to any one area, but rather illustrates

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<sup>101</sup> Richard Maltby. “How Can Cinema History Matter More?” *Screening the Past*. 15 December 2007. Web. 1 January 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Tom Gunning, “Film History and Film Analysis: The Individual Film in the Course of Time,” *Wide Angle* 12.3 (July 1990): 6.

the interconnections and overlaps between them. Following Kendrick, my goal throughout this dissertation is to seek out desire—but rather than the *sexual* desires commonly associated with adult films, it is to trace the “urge[s] to regulate the *behavior* of those who seem to threaten the social order.”<sup>103</sup> The threatening behaviors I focus on here are those that disrupt gender normativities, and my targets will be those outside *and* inside the industry who stood to lose from the breaches of the barricades. As such, I have chosen four vantage points from which to observe and locate the traces of technological change, regulatory and containment strategies, and obsessions with “appropriately” gendered behaviors—all of which overlap and interact, to various degrees, on the terrain of quality and respectability. In the end, I am less interested in telling a conventional story of the adult film industry’s transition from celluloid to home video, and more concerned with how and why that process developed in the manner that it did, and why it took these particular contours rather than others.

Chapter two examines the early history of adult video from a variety of technological, cultural, and industrial perspectives. Beginning well before the development of the Sony Betamax, I look at previous technologies and spaces in order to trace the tensions of public versus private interactions with pornography. I begin with the Panoram, a device invented in the 1940s and completely unintended for pornography—but, ultimately, perhaps the most important technology in the pre-history of adult video. I also examine the adult motel industry of Southern California, as well as the role of public domain films, piracy, and pioneers such as George Atkinson who linked them all together. Much as Crafton points to the fallacy of the “dividing line” with early film technologies, adult video did not have a clear “before and after” moment. Instead, the

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<sup>103</sup> Emphasis mine. Kendrick 235.

process was one of slow change, treated suspiciously by many in the industry, and not immediately taken up as a production option. Finally, I examine how, from the very beginning, the industry itself engaged in regulatory efforts to emphasize gender-normative beliefs and cultural fantasies as part of an overall strategy to build audiences and profits through the attainment of respectability, a legacy that established a framework going forward.

Chapter three examines the creation in 1983 and subsequent publication of *Adult Video News (AVN)*, a newsletter initially aimed at the public but gradually transformed into a communications tool for the industry along the lines of *Variety* or *Hollywood Reporter*. Attempting to provide a more sophisticated, nuanced, and professional set of discourses for adult video, *AVN* represents a major turning point in this history, as it began to sell the sex in adult film without the sex, which is to say it focused its efforts on the industry *as* an industry, rather than merely as its content. Additionally, it repeatedly emphasized and encouraged the creation of quality material as a strategy to gain respectability, a stance it also replicated within its pages. Significant gendered ramifications accompanied this this spotlight on quality, which I examine in a larger historical scope, linking the marketing and news coverage of the industry to the industry's practices. Ultimately, *AVN* crafted something new: a space in which to promote, sell, and celebrate adult video—but it also reified and recreated many of the troubling and controlling frameworks that externally regulated the industry.

Chapter four traces the history and importance of Candida Royalle to the adult video industry, both in her literal participation as a performer and producer, as well as the discourses crafted by her on the larger topics of quality and respectability. Royalle, a

performer in the Golden Age, founded Femme Productions in 1984 with the goal of creating adult films for couples and, especially, women. While not the first company with that strategy, Femme nevertheless remains a groundbreaking company in adult film history for its overt politics, feminist strategies, and unique practices, marketing discourses, and narrative and visual content. Royale and Femme have since been the focus of much critical and academic attention, nearly all of it overwhelmingly positive. In this chapter, I step back and examine in detail Royale's early career as a performer, an analysis not previously undertaken by historians. I do so in order to connect her own past in the industry with the significant changes she would bring later with Femme, changes that would center on disrupting the "mystery of difference," eradicating Ziplow's formula, and reconfiguring women's pleasures away from the male occupation of the journeys of sexual discovery so central to adult film.

Complicating the seamless and unhesitatingly positive analyses of Femme common to the field of pornography studies, I instead argue for a different approach. Accounting for the ways in which Royale and Femme created, implemented, and stridently championed a set of gendered regulations, I propose that Femme was, ultimately, not so different from other adult film companies of the time—even if the regulations occurred in different directions and with different goals. Femme, in many ways, represents an ideal terminus for this research, as it was the first company to harness the new home video technology for radically divergent political uses while nevertheless operating within the standard capitalist framework. Royale, in other words, might have been interested in altering the cultural landscape, but she was also interested in doing so within highly familiar industrial structures and frameworks. The cultural and regulatory

responses to *Royalle* and *Femme* speak to the highly contested ways in which the industry as a whole mobilized notions of quality and respectability, as well as the ways in which those terms have highly malleable, gendered meanings. By moving away from the traditional “mystery of difference,” in other words, *Royalle* may have merely rewritten it from another, albeit feminist, direction.

The final chapter, which also serves as a conclusion, swings the emphasis away from the industry and into regulatory efforts, focusing on local protests, anti-pornography feminist movements, national efforts by conservative groups, and other attempts to contain the efforts by the adult video to change the cultural landscape by gaining respectability. I argue that a variation on the prototypical “moral panic” occurred during the mid-1980s traceable to the move of sexually explicit films from public to private spaces, and that this panic resulted in a major shift in the cultural understanding of gender and sexuality. This period of intense change, during which the adult film industry was simultaneously growing its video business as well as maintaining its public presence, can be seen as a critical one in film and technology history, as the private user was on the cusp of widespread access to and control over a large variety of sexually explicit material. The community regulatory efforts helped define the period (and define pornography going forward) in terms of guilt, shame, and fear, rather than liberatory potential or even simple pleasure. The “mystery of difference,” then, did not reside only *within* adult film; rather, it also resided in the many regulatory discourses *around* adult film as well.

I conclude by tracking legal efforts of many kinds to limit, contain, and control sexually explicit material in the early 1980s as adult video’s popularity began to soar.

Exploring the court cases, Supreme Court decisions, obscenity prosecutions, zoning laws, federal efforts, and the political discourses of the period, I end this narrative with a detailed examination of the Meese Commission's investigation in 1986—which, not coincidentally, aligns with the period in which the adult film industry completed the transition from celluloid to magnetic tape-based production and distribution. Claiming that the efforts by the Meese Commission serve as one of the most critical moments in the history of sexually explicit material, I show that these legal efforts were, in fact, more about the efforts to bolster a normative understanding of gender rather than merely sexuality.

Ultimately, I argue that this period of transition was about more than technological, industrial, or regulatory change—it was the about the intersections of these elements, made visible in the anxieties and tensions surrounding the pursuit of respectability in and around the adult film industry as it transitioned to home video. Robert Eberwein notes, following Foucault, that a “legitimizing system” often forms around the pleasures obtained from viewing sexually explicit media that links social, medical, technological, and institutional spheres in order to “defend” viewing practices. He writes: “This system forms an ideological framework in which—depending on the historical moment—sexual desire is acknowledged, condemned, controlled, monitored, surveyed, encouraged, stimulated, and enabled by film and video.”<sup>104</sup> From the following four vantage points, I seek to illustrate how the industrial transition from film to video was not only of the “historical moments” to which Eberwein refers (replete with all the accompanying enabling mechanisms), but was also one of deep contradictions and ironies

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Eberwein, *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999) 7.

in terms of sexuality, pleasure, and definitions of “appropriate” gender behavior. I will also examine and argue for the ways in which it was a migration built out of necessity. The story of that necessity begins in the next chapter, in which the struggles over the meanings of pleasure in public versus private spaces pointed the way toward home video as an answer for an industry long mired in regulatory struggles.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Panorams, Motels, and Porn: The Beginnings of Adult Video

The X-rated theater business is shrinking, shrinking, shrinking because most people in the X-rated business are going on the theory that the audience wants dirty, smutty, little movies.<sup>1</sup>

Chuck Vincent, 1983

The whole videocassette business was basically founded by pirates and pornographers.<sup>2</sup>

David F. Friedman, 1986

Historians tend to point to 7 December 1977 as one of the key moments in which the home video rental industry was born.<sup>3</sup> That day, in the *Los Angeles Times*, local entrepreneur George Atkinson placed an advertisement that would eventually shake the entertainment landscape, initiating massive and inalterable change. “VIDEO CASSETTE RENTALS,” the copy read, in all capital and bolded letters. “Betamax 1/2 or 3/4 formats. Full Length, Color-Sound Features. Low Rental Cost! Call or write for free catalog.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L.R. Goldstein, “Interview: Chuck Vincent,” *Adult Video News* October 1983: 1.

<sup>2</sup> David Chute, “Wages of Sin, II,” *Film Comment* 22.5 (September 1986): 60.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Eugene Marlow and Eugene Secunda, who write: “George Atkinson... is now generally regarded as the first retailer to promote the rental, rather than the sale, of prerecorded videocassettes.” Eugene Marlow and Eugene Secunda, *Shifting Time and Space: The Story of Videotape* (New York: Praeger, 1991) 130.

<sup>4</sup> Video Cassette Rentals. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 7 December 1977: E8. Print.

In his two seminal works on the history of home video, James Lardner claims Atkinson told him he ran an earlier, smaller advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* reading “Video For Rent,” as well as a coupon to mail in for more information, as part of an effort to gauge public interest. Lardner quotes Atkinson as saying: “In less than a week, I had a thousand coupons,” leading to the 7 December advertisement. This story has been repeated throughout subsequent home video histories. Lardner offers no date or additional explanation for this, and after a thorough search of the *Los Angeles Times*, I can find no evidence of this earlier advertisement—which is not to say I dispute these events, only that I cannot locate the evidence to support them. See: James Lardner, “How Hollywood Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the VCR: Home

Atkinson's action was groundbreaking in that he sensed a major business opportunity to rent rather than sell videotapes to the home market; before that moment, no one else had made the leap.<sup>5</sup> What Atkinson did was invent the home video rental store. In less than two years, Atkinson grew that simple idea into 42 affiliated locations, all with the straightforward and simple "Video Cassette Rentals" name on the door, following his original advertisement, and renting the handful of then-available tapes for an exorbitant \$10 per day (plus either a \$50 annual or \$100 lifetime membership).<sup>6</sup> In September 1979, he changed the name to Video Station and initiated a full-blown franchising strategy, eventually presiding over an empire of more than 600 affiliated stores.<sup>7</sup> By the time of his

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Video Has Diminished the Power of the Studios—but Not Their Profits," *Los Angeles Times* 19 April 1987: N13; James Lardner, *Fast Forward: Hollywood, the Japanese, and the Onslaught of the VCR* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Gomery makes a case for Erol Oranan of Washington D.C., founder of the Erol's video chain (later sold to Blockbuster), being among the first to seize the opportunity to rent, rather than sell, videotapes. See: Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) 281-282.

There was one other precedent for renting movies on videotape. Reporters Paul Jaulus and Stephen Traiman, in July 1974, in a story otherwise preoccupied with record labels promoting new releases by playing short video clips in three San Francisco shops, noted that Video Center was operating a "lending library." For a \$30 initial fee, plus \$10 for subsequent "loans," members (of which the store claimed roughly 100) could check out U-Matic, EIAJ cartridges, or open-reel videotapes along with Panasonic or JVC video players. The article notes that "entertainment releases of films and concerts, and... videotapes of local groups and some key rock acts" were available. This would make Video Center, perhaps, the first rental video store in the United States, predating Atkinson's efforts. See: Paul Jaulus and Stephen Traiman, "In-Store Videocassette Labels Tie in Promo," *Billboard* 6 July 1974: 1, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Bayot, "George Atkinson Dies at 69; Pioneer in Renting of Videos," *New York Times* 9 March 2005: A23.

<sup>7</sup> "Industry History." *entmerch.org*. Entertainment Merchant's Association. n.d. Web. 11 January 2013.

Video Station went public in 1982, but subsequently plunged into financial problems. In early 1983, the State of California opened an investigation on tax discrepancies with Video Station's accounting procedures, and Atkinson left the company in September 1983. In December 1984, Video Station filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, and began operating under court-approved reorganization in August 1985. In 1987, Atkinson, his brother Edward, and a former employee, Robert A. MacNeil Jr., were indicted by a federal grand jury for securities fraud and perjury related to the tax investigation from 1982. In mid-1988, Edward was convicted by a jury and was sentenced to five years in prison. George, who had earlier plead guilty before a trial to filing false financial statements, was sentenced to three months in a community treatment center, five years probation, and 2,000 hours of community service. See: Michael A. Hiltzik,

death on 3 March 2005, his lengthy obituary ran nationwide in newspapers, calling him a “pioneer in the movie video rental industry,” and crediting him with creating an industry that, by that point, reached well beyond his own affiliates, climbing past 24,000 total video stores, 2.6 billion movie rentals, and \$8 billion in annual revenue.<sup>8</sup>

The Atkinson mythology paints a tidy teleological portrait emphasizing particular paradigms: a small business owner with a creative, risky, and groundbreaking idea (renting rather than selling Hollywood films on tape) creates a new venture that explodes into popular and widespread success, eventually resulting in an entirely new, necessary, and useful industry that lives on far beyond the original idea. Atkinson’s story, now cemented in home video history and claiming him as the “father” of video rental, reveals something beyond the impulse, however, to implant capitalist mythologies into stories of new technologies; it also how reveals the cultural (and historiographic) desire to erase pornography from the origins of home video. Atkinson, as it turns out, was familiar with the *Los Angeles Times* advertising department before 7 December 1977—but what he was advertising before that date has been overlooked by historians. Atkinson, beginning in June 1975, rented pornography on cassettes to customers in Los Angeles, participating in an underground and questionably legal economy that laid the foundation for the transition of the adult film industry from celluloid to home video.

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“Video Station: State Tax Dispute Led to Discrepancy,” *Los Angeles Times* 15 April 1983: E2; Jube Shiver, “Video Rental Firm Files for Chapter 11 Protection,” *Los Angeles Times* 13 December 1984: J1; Al Delugach, “3 Ex-Officers of Video Chain Face Fraud Suit,” *Los Angeles Times* 25 September 1987: E3; Al Delugach, “2 Former Top Executives of Video Station Indicted,” *Los Angeles Times* 19 November 1987: E3; “Briefly,” *Los Angeles Times* 29 March 1988: F2; “Briefly,” *Los Angeles Times* 11 May 1988: E2.

<sup>8</sup> Bayot A23; Dennis McLellan, “George Atkinson; Pioneer in the Movie Video Industry,” *Los Angeles Times* 12 March 2005: B17.

In this chapter, I examine this economy as part of a larger goal of uncovering the early history of the adult film industry's transition from celluloid to home video. Whereas most home video histories tend to elide pornography from the discussion or grant it only the minimum attention (as outlined in chapter one), my focus here will be on the history and importance of the genre in the creation of home video as a widespread and enormously profitable industry. While it is historically accurate to say that adult video became available on home video in late 1977, and shot-on-video features were produced as early as 1979, such definitions are only appropriate within a capitalist paradigm in which an "official" and, indeed, legal marketplace determines the historical markers of a technology and accompanying economy. Here I shift that definition to confront a group of overlooked historical realities: pornography was available on a variety of cassette formats prior to 1977; adult films were a critical part of the formation of the home video rental industry; and, finally, many of the same people who have been credited with building the mainstream home video industry (such as Atkinson) were also veterans of the pornography trade. Ultimately, the history of adult video is the history of home video.

My focus in this chapter resides in the pre-and-early history of adult video, the spaces during which the majority of the industry was still producing material for and on celluloid. The public space of the adult movie theater still dominated the mid-1970s, and theater owners were still seeing healthy profits at the end of the decade. In 1978, the Adult Film Association of America reported that 780 theaters played adult films to 2.5 million weekly attendees, bringing in \$450 million in ticket sales.<sup>9</sup> The adult film business model in the 1970s mirrored that of mainstream Hollywood: production on

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<sup>9</sup> Lee Grant, "It's Strictly Business for Porn Makers," *Los Angeles Times* 20 February 1979: E1.

celluloid and exhibition in large rooms on large screens in front of audiences, admitted after paying a ticket charge. Video decimated and transformed that landscape. The adult industry, recognizing the cultural power of guilt and shame, harnessed the technological capability of home video to alter its production, distribution, and exhibition practices and strategies in order to circumvent various regulatory efforts; ironically, the ways in which it did so reinforced and reproduced many of those same efforts even as it claimed to be upending them. This chapter traces the early history of that change, the slow period in which only a handful of people were willing to gamble (often illegally or on the margins of legality) on the new medium, and the gradual industrial turn to recognizing its massive economic and cultural potential.

*Privacy in Public: The Roots of Adult Video*

On 21 February 1940, the Mills Novelty Company of Chicago, the nation's largest manufacturer of slot machines, signed a deal with the Globe Production Company to form Soundies Distribution Corporation, a new joint venture that had nothing to do with pornography.<sup>10</sup> Globe, founded in 1939 by James Roosevelt (eldest son of President Franklin Roosevelt), produced three-minute short musical films for a new machine manufactured by Mills called the "Panoram" that would be leased to bars, cafes, and drug stores.<sup>11</sup> A press release described the equipment: "The machine resembles a phonograph on a slot-machine principle, but it has in the front a screen on which the pictures will be

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<sup>10</sup> "Plan Film Slot Machines," *New York Times* 22 February 1940: 30.

<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt had previously worked for Samuel Goldwyn at MGM as an administrative assistant before striking out on his own and producing *Pot of Gold* (1941, dir. George Marshall) with Jimmy Stewart and Paulette Godard. He writes very briefly about this period, and about Soundies, in: James Roosevelt, *My Parents: A Differing View* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1976) 252-255.

projected.”<sup>12</sup> Eight or nine 16mm films, printed in reverse to be rear-projected on the screen, were fitted on a large reel to be played continuously. Viewers had no choice in their selection, either watching where the loop happened to be, or waiting until their selected number came back around. The films, called “Soundies,” were an overt attempt to supplant the highly profitable jukebox industry by upgrading the technology and including the movie image along with the music. On 20 October 1940, the machine was unveiled publicly in a gala three-day ceremony at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York, grandly publicizing Roosevelt’s presence and status as a Captain in the Marine Corps Reserve.<sup>13</sup> The Panoram was hardly the only machine on the market, but it was by far the most capitalized, publicized, and ready for mass production, and quickly went out across the country, filling up various locales with the short musical numbers by artists such as Spike Jones, Jimmy Dorsey, Louis Jordan, and Nat King Cole.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Plan Film Slot Machines,” 30.

<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt abruptly resigned as President of Soundies only a few days later. Expecting to be called to active duty by the Marine Corps (which he subsequently was), Roosevelt retained his unsalaried position as Vice President and member of the board of directors. Globe, which he still owned, continued to produce short films. See: “James Roosevelt Quits,” *New York Times* 31 October 1940: 10.

<sup>14</sup> Competition for the “visual jukebox” market in the early 1940s was strong. Other companies vying for the market included Metermovies, Inc., The Phonofilm Company, Phonovision Corporation of America, Tonovision Corporation of America, and Talkavision, Inc. None made it market. See: “Music Machines,” *Billboard* 18 January 1941: 80.

For more on Panoram history, see: Amy Herzog. “Illustrating Music: The Impossible Embodiments of the Jukebox Film.” *Medium Cool: Music Videos from Soundies to Cellphones*. Eds. Roger Beebe and Jason Middleton. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007: 30-58; Amy Herzog. “Fetish Machines: Peep Shows, Co-Optation, and Technological Adaptation.” *Adaptation Theories*. Ed. Jillian St. Jacques. Maastricht, Netherlands: Jan Van Eyck Academie Press, 2011: 47-89; Amy Herzog. “In the Flesh: Space and Embodiment in the Pornographic Peep Show Arcade,” *Velvet Light Trap*. 62 (Fall 2008): 29-43.

Also see: Gregory Lukow. “The Antecedents of Mtv: Soundies, Scopitones and Snaders, and the History of an Ahistorical Form.” *Art of Music Video: Ten Years After*. Ed. Long Beach Museum of Art. Long Beach, CA: Long Beach Museum of Art, 1991: 6-9; Gregory Lukow. “The Archaeology of Music Video: Soundies, Snader Telescriptions, and Scopitones.” *1986 National Video Festival Program*. Ed. National Video Festival. Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1986: 36-39.

Even before it was officially unveiled, a local operator used the Panoram to exhibit adult material, proving Joseph Slade's assertion that "whenever one person invents a technology, another person will invent a sexual use for it."<sup>15</sup> A reporter invited to a test run of the equipment in a Hollywood, California bar, in April 1940 described one film as a "strip tease number," and noted that it would be "unlikely that [it] would be given the Hays propriety seal."<sup>16</sup> Globe, the only producer of Soundies at the time, would not have made the film, so it is clear that the unnamed proprietor understood immediately that locally procured adult material had tremendous revenue potential. While such material was hardly sexually explicit, it nevertheless illustrates that the desire to see adult material was strong. The problem was privacy: the Panoram, essentially a large television, was available for anyone and everyone in the venue to see and enjoy rather than for the use of single customer.

That started to change by late 1943. George Ponser, a regional distributor of novelty machines and Soundies based in New Jersey, procured conversion units in November that turned the Panoram into the "Solo-Vue," allowing only the person

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Finally, there is the work of Maurice Terenzio, Scott MacGillivray, Ted Okuda, and Wally Hose, whose work cataloguing the Soundies films, performers, and some of the corporate history remains without peer as well as virtually exhaustive. Unfortunately, none of their works deal at all with pornography, a reminder of the many arguments I make throughout this dissertation about how adult film history has been systematically avoided, ignored, and erased. Nevertheless, these works are indispensable for tracing the mainstream, corporate, and sanctioned history of the Soundies and the Panoram equipment. See: Maurice Terenzio, Scott MacGillivray and Ted Okuda, *The Soundies Distributing Corporation of America: A History and Filmography of Their "Jukebox" Musical Films of the 1940s* (New York: McFarland & Company, 1991); Wally Hose, *Soundies* (St. Louis, MO: Wally's Multimedia, 2007); Scott MacGillivray and Ted Okuda, *The Soundies Book: A Revised and Expanded Guide* (New York: IUniverse, Inc., 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Joseph W. Slade, *Pornography in America: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2000) 9.

<sup>16</sup> D.W.C., "Return of the Peep Show," *New York Times* 21 April 1940: 122.

inserting the coin to see the film (but still letting everyone within range hear the music).<sup>17</sup> An advertisement by Ponser in *Billboard* graphically illustrates the capability of the Solo-Vue modification to bring a modicum of privacy to the otherwise public exhibition of the Panoram; additionally, it underlines the gendered politics of the machine and exhibition more generally. In a drawing accompanying the copy, one man looks into the peephole now covering the Panoram screen while two other men stand by the machine. One says, “Boy, that must really be something!” and the other laments, “Wish that guy would give me a chance.”<sup>18</sup> The tease in the ad of “something,” coupled with the presence of men only, strongly suggests that the material on the screen must be something sexually suggestive.<sup>19</sup> Privacy, in the context of the advertisement, meant privacy for men to pursue sexual fantasies in an otherwise public space.

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<sup>17</sup> “Ponser Purchases Conversion Units,” *Billboard* 27 November 1943: 117.

<sup>18</sup> George Ponser Company. Advertisement. *Billboard* 27 November 1943: 122.

<sup>19</sup> There is, of course, something undeniably homoerotic about this scene, just as there is to the peep show booth and pornography in general. While my research focuses on the industrial histories of the transition to adult video rather than specific spectatorial groups or viewing practices, and while I have avoided queer pornographies as matter of subject choice, I would be remiss if I did not mention this obvious reality. The men in this advertisement could be drawing pleasure from watching each other, and there is no way to know the fantasy playing out on the screen (or, more importantly, in their minds). While the early adult films playing on Panorams did not depict hard-core sexual practices, nor did they show male performers, the men in this advertisement (just like the men standing in front of actual Panorams) might have drawn a great deal of pleasure from watching other men experience pleasure.

This behavioral pattern emerges even more explicitly with the development of hard-core adult films, which, as Stephen Strager points out, ultimately involves men watching other men perform sexually. This means that they are watching the penis as the centerpiece of sexual action, which pointedly illustrates the fluidity of sexual desire and identification. Female spectators, too, can experience this sort of identification with female performers on screen—and the spectrum in between these two viewing positions is nearly limitless and highly malleable. Ultimately, pornography (perhaps more than any other genre) radically calls into attention the complicated ways in which identification works. While my project does not deal with these nuances or viewing practices (particularly since they remain the object of most study, while industrial histories have been neglected), they are nevertheless deeply important to pornography studies and a critical part of understanding the complexities of meaning. See: Stephen Strager, “What Men Watch When They Watch Pornography,” *Sexuality and Culture* 7.1 (Winter 2003): 50-61.

If Solo-Vue hinted at the sexual possibilities of the Panoram, the W.M. Nathanson company pushed the topic right out into the open. In January 1944, the company advertised its “Hollywood Peep Shows” conversion kit in *Billboard*, including a photograph of the finished product that left almost nothing to the imagination.<sup>20</sup> “For Art Students Only” reads the sign above the screen, now partially blocked on each side by photographs of women posing in lingerie, leaving a much smaller space through which to view the film. Even more importantly, Nathanson offered an “ample supply of snappy films” to go with the kit, direct from “one of the largest companies in Hollywood.”<sup>21</sup> What Ponser and Nathanson were actually selling, however, was neither groundbreaking nor new: the risqué “peep show” loop had been a staple of the penny arcade since the 1890s when enterprising parlor owners realized there was a great deal of money to be made in marketing sexually suggestive content on their Kinetoscopes and Mutoscopes, even when the actual content was little more than women removing a few of their clothes and no actual nudity, let alone sex.<sup>22</sup> Just like the arcades at the turn of the century, the converted Panorams offered films featuring women undressing and performing strip teases or burlesque routines, certainly with more suggestive movements and less clothing than their predecessors—but still no actual nudity.<sup>23</sup> It is also worth noting that the

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<sup>20</sup> W.M. Nathanson. Advertisement. *Billboard* 1 January 1944: 70.

<sup>21</sup> W.M. Nathanson. Advertisement 70.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Bianco, *Ghosts of 42nd Street: A History of America's Most Infamous Block* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2004) 161. Strip tease numbers were already playing in the late 1930s in peep show arcades, as evidenced by a 1938 review of content available on “automatic ‘peephole’ machines” on Chicago’s South State Street. See: “Strip Tease Films Showing in Chicago under City License,” *Motion Picture Herald* 24 September 1938: 56.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of strip tease and burlesque films from the 1940s, produced for the converted Panorams (and the home market), remain relatively easy to locate. A prototypical example of the genre might be *Red Hot Mama* (1940s, dir. Unknown), featuring Jenny Lee Hicks. The three-and-a-half-minute film, credited to “Vanity Productions,” features Hicks in a medium shot, performing her routine on the dance floor at The

evidence of Ponser and Nathanson marketing these modifications implies two otherwise silent conclusions: local Panoram operators had surely been modifying their own equipment prior to the introduction of mass-marketed conversions (thus creating the market), and there was ample adult material playing on the machines throughout the country to justify the need for the conversions in the first place.

The phenomenon of independently produced adult material on the Panoram had grown so large by April 1944 that the Soundies Corporation had to address it. General manager George Ulcigan, while outlining the company's postwar strategy, noted:

“Nothing will help the industry more than top pictures and, inversely, nothing can harm more than films that are bad technically or make use of off-color material.”<sup>24</sup> He also claimed that all independent producers would have to adhere to a contract in which they agreed to abide by the Hays Motion Picture Code as well as gain approval from local censorship boards—a hollow threat, given the clear production and distribution pattern already occurring. Soundies' anxiety and efforts to control the content proved meaningless. By 1946, the B&B Novelty Company was blatantly advertising “Burlesque”

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Sassy Lassy, the strip club she owned with husband Charlie Arroyo. The band is visible occasionally next to the dance floor, and she is accompanied by their upbeat tune. A narrator starts the film in voice-over: “Once again, it's the bazoom girl!” Ultimately, Hicks removes her clothing down to panties, heels, and pasties, and performs the tassle-twirling and acrobatic dancing for which she was most famous. Hicks seems exemplary of the era: a professional burlesque dancer, filmed onstage at a nightclub, performing her routine to music. See: Sonny Watson. “Jennie Lee' Hicks Burlesque Dancer in Red Hot Mama.” Online video clip. YouTube. 4 January 2013. Web. 24 January 2013.

Other dancers from the burlesque circuit that appeared in short films aimed at the converted Panorams included Amilia Aguilar, Kalantan (i.e. Mary Ellen Tillotson), Sandra Storm, Cherry Knight, Georgia Sothern, and Betty Howard. Schlock film director W. Merle Connell directed many of the entries from the era, distributing them under his “Quality Pictures” banner. The history of these performers and the short films they made is an area ripe for further scholarship. I am extremely grateful for the amateur scholarship of “Paghat the Ratgirl,” whose work identifying, cataloguing, and reviewing many of the extant burlesque and strip tease films for the Panarom is very nearly the only work on the subject I have been able to locate. See: Paghat the Ratgirl. “Weird Wild Realm.” *weirdwildrealm.com*. n.d. Web. 24 January 2013.

<sup>24</sup> “Vet's Plan, Better Pix, Service School and Revenue from Ads Spotlight Soundies Post-War Plans,” *Billboard* 15 April 1944: 64.

films for the Panoram in the pages of *Billboard*, another sign that the underground economy in such adult material was probably booming.<sup>25</sup> What was not booming, however, was the Soundies Corporation: beset from the beginning by financial difficulties, the production of Soundies ended in late 1946, and the company stopped servicing the Panoram machines in 1947. By the early 1950s, Panoram machines lived on almost solely as peep show machines for adult films.<sup>26</sup>

That conversion would not go unnoticed by law enforcement, and soon the Panoram was increasingly subject to scrutiny. In 1950, police raided an arcade on Market Street in San Francisco and arrested four people, charging them with “operating indecent peepshows.” The police report stated that the films played on Panorams (“a rebuilt type of the machine that Jimmy Roosevelt built”) labeled “for art students only” and “no minors allowed.” Reporters investigated and found 105 Panorams at five locations in San Francisco playing color films for 25 cents and black-and-white for a dime. The description of the films detailed women performing various activities: strip teases, poses, undressing, brushing their hair, and, most curiously, in some of the films, they “fish, practice archery, retire, get up, attend boarding school, roll dice, and take long walks.” And all, most importantly, in a “complete state of undress.”<sup>27</sup> The relatively tame, partially undressed routines of the past had finally given way to complete nudity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> B&B Novelty Company. Advertisement. *Billboard* 13 April 1946: 108.

<sup>26</sup> Herzog, “Fetish Machines” 62; Terenzio, MacGillivray and Okuda 10-16.

<sup>27</sup> Westbrook Pegler, “Frisco Peepshows,” *Chester Times* 16 October 1950: 6.

Such films recall Linda Williams’ arguments regarding Eadweard Muybridge’s early zoopraxiscope films of the human body, and particularly the ways in which nude female bodies were differentiated in those films by the addition of narrative justification. While the male bodies engage in physical activities such as throwing, running, jumping, kicking, boxing, and wrestling, the female bodies “picking up and putting down,” along with primary passive postures such as sitting, standing, and kneeling. Even those similar

The San Francisco raids were only the beginning. In 1952, Washington D.C. police busted fourteen arcades; one employee was eventually found guilty of possessing indecent films with the intent to exhibit them.<sup>29</sup> Two years later, in Seattle, police arrested an operator for exhibiting indecent films on fifteen Panorams in his arcade.<sup>30</sup> In an underground economy not anxious to publicize itself, these police actions serve the purpose of illuminating what was, by the 1950s, clearly a widespread and profitable industry. In the late 1950s, for example, Kirdy Stevens, who would later go on to direct the monumentally successful *Taboo* (1980), opened a Panoram arcade on Main Street in Los Angeles, and began showing his self-produced, color nudie films.<sup>31</sup> Other Southern California producers included William H. Door, Joe Bonica, Vanity Films, and Standard Pictures Corporation, all of whom distributed to both the arcade and home markets, and W. Merle Connell's Quality Studios even advertised films for the "peep or panorama," a

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movements, as Williams points out, in which women walk, run, and jump, Muybridge adds superfluous details such as a hand over a mouth. Props, too, convey this narrative justification, and frequently lend an air of eroticism to the women's bodies that is not similarly present with the men. Williams argues this leads to "the unmistakable structure of the fetish," in which women's bodies are simultaneously eroticized and disavowed, and that "by denying the women any existence apart from the marks of difference, Mybridge exerts a form of mastery over that difference." Similar structures are at play in the Panoram films from the late 1940s and early 1950s, and, indeed, throughout the history of adult film more generally. See: Linda Williams. "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 507-534.

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of burlesque history, see: Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> "Peep Show' Change Man Found Guilty in Film Case," *Washington Post* 4 October 1952: 15.

<sup>30</sup> Herzog, "In the Flesh" 29-43.

<sup>31</sup> Stevens and two partners built their own film-developing laboratory in 1957 to process their own adult films; before that point, most sexually explicit content was being imported from Europe. Stevens, along with his wife Helene Terrie, who wrote nearly all of his scripts, went on to a very long and distinguished career in the adult film industry before his death on 20 October 2012. See: Mark Kernes. "Legendary Director Kirdy Stevens, of 'Taboo' Fame, Passes at 92." *avn.com*. Adult Video News. 3 November 2012. Web. 6 November 2012.

clear reference to the Panoram market.<sup>32</sup> With hardcore sex still relegated strictly to underground stag films, the public exhibition of adult material was, by the late 1950s, still very much about the display of female nudity rather than any type of sexual behavior, which was off-limits in the public space.<sup>33</sup>

Change was happening quickly, however, and most visibly in the theater rather than the arcade. In the mainstream of public exhibition, the influx of nudist films such as *Garden of Eden* (1954, dir. Max Nosseck) had led to a great deal of public anxiety and tension surrounding the mediation of the female body. By 1957, the Court of Appeals of New York ruled in *Excelsior Pictures Corp. v. Regents of the University of the State of New York* that nudity in and of itself (as shown in *Garden of Eden*) was not obscenity.<sup>34</sup> Capitalizing on the ruling, Russ Meyer released *The Immoral Mr. Teas* in 1959, a

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<sup>32</sup> Schaefer traces the theatrical exhibition of burlesque films during this era, noting that between 1949 and 1959 at least fifty feature-length burlesque features were produced, along with dozens of short films—many of which were cut and repurposed for peep shows and arcades, as well as the home market. However, as he notes, “The incessant cutting and recutting resulted in multiple permutations... so we will probably never know exactly how many actual features and shorts were produced during this period.” Eric Schaefer, “The Obscene Seen: Spectacle and Transgression in Postwar Burlesque Films,” *Cinema Journal* 36.2 (Winter 1997): 44-50.

<sup>33</sup> Archivist Dwight Sanson offers an excellent case study of a typical collection of home material from the 1950s, donated to the Northeast Historic Film archive in Buckport, Maine. He notes the mix of material ranging from very softcore offerings with hardly any nudity (dated from the 1930s) to hardcore stag films, including arguably the most widely seen entry in film history, *Smart Aleck*, made in 1951 and starring Texas stripper Candy Barr, who was 15 years old and forced to perform on camera. See: Dwight Sanson, “Home Viewing: Pornography and Amateur Film Collections, a Case Study,” *The Moving Image* 5.2 (Fall 2005): 136-140. For more on Candy Barr (born Juanita Dale Slusher), see: Skip Hollandsworth. “Candy Barr.” *texasmonthly.com*. Texas Monthly. September 2001. Web. 25 February 2013. For more on the general history of stag films, a history outside the bounds of this dissertation but vital to the overall narrative of adult film history, see: Al Di Lauro and Gerald Rabkin, *Dirty Movies: An Illustrated History of the Stag Film, 1915-1970* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988); Dave Thompson, *Black and White and Blue: Adult Cinema from the Victorian Age to the VCR* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007); Arthur Knight and Hollis Alpert, “The History of Sex in Cinema: Part Seventeen: The Stag Film,” *Playboy* November 1967: 154-158; Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 309-322.

<sup>34</sup> *Excelsior Pictures Corp. v. Regents of the University of the State of New York*. 3 N.Y.2d 237. Court of Appeals of New York. 3 July 1957. *LexisNexis*. Web. 14 February 2013; Slade, *Pornography in America: A Reference Handbook* 150.

groundbreaking exploitation film that, as Eric Schaefer points out, did not justify the presentation of nudity through narrative, thus ending the classic era of exploitation films.<sup>35</sup> More importantly, Meyer shifted the presentation of adult material from the space of the arcade to the space of the theater, which would eventually lead to the Golden Age just over a decade later.<sup>36</sup> But, I would argue, those particular changes in the proliferation, availability, tension, and legal action surrounding the presentation of female nudity on screens must be regarded differently than the anxieties surrounding the Panoram machines of the 1940s and the rise of strip tease, burlesque, and posing films across the bars, clubs, and pool halls of the United States. Those tensions, centering on the paradox of obtaining a measure of privacy within a public space, follow a different track than the model that would push for exhibition of pornography in a traditional theater setting, despite the overlap in production and distribution of content.

The real turning point that connects the Panoram to the onset of adult video occurred in 1966, when New York jukebox distributor Martin Hodas, on his way to visit his uncle in Tom's River, New Jersey, stopped at a roadside gaming arcade.<sup>37</sup> It was there, somewhere along the Garden State Parkway south of Staten Island, that Hodas

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<sup>35</sup> Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 8.

<sup>36</sup> This very brief trajectory hardly does justice to the very long and complex pre-history of the Golden Age of adult film, which stretches through a large body of films and pioneers. The best and most complete analysis remains the work of Eric Schaefer, the foremost authority on exploitation cinema within academy. Meyer's immense contribution to film history (not just adult film history) has scarcely been examined or given adequate attention or credit, and is outside the scope of this dissertation aside from his extremely valuable, if peripheral, contribution to adult video history described later in this chapter. A handful of books on Meyer (including his own multi-volume autobiography) prove useful for scholars seeking further information: David K. Frasier, *Russ Meyer: The Life and Films* (New York: McFarland & Company, Inc. , 1997); Adolph A. Schwartz and Russ Meyer, *A Clean Breast: The Life and Loves of Russ Meyer*, 3 vols. (Los Angeles: Hauck Publishing Company, 2000); Jimmy McDonough, *Big Bosoms and Square Jaws: The Biography of Russ Meyer, King of the Sex Film* (New York: Random House, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Bianco 157-180.

watched a woman strip down to her underwear on a Panoram, triggering his idea that such machines (and content) would thrive in the adult bookstores on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan. Hodas was already familiar with similar equipment, owning a few small machines that played cartoons or old Western movie clips, but Hodas envisioned the combination of the Panoram and adult material on a grand scale throughout New York City. Hodas's idea was not unique; by the mid-1960s, machines playing similar content were already in operation in a group of arcades in Times Square as a minor novelty for tourists; the real challenge was to overcome the city's legal thickets originally imposed in the 1950s that prevented such machines and content from playing in the adult bookstores that populated 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.<sup>38</sup>

The Robert F. Wagner, Jr. mayoral administration in New York City had tolerated a limited number of the machines in Times Square, but stridently kept them out of adult bookstores by threatening the few attempts with legal notices claiming a city license was required to exhibit films.<sup>39</sup> After John Lindsay's 1965 election, the trend continued—and adult bookstore owners, wary of the costs and long odds, did not take the city to court after the constant rejection of their license applications. Hodas, well aware of these difficulties, instructed his attorney Charles Carreras to find a way through the legal morass and either obtain licenses or find loopholes. In mid-1967, Carreras broke through the bureaucratic wall and got Hodas a letter from the chief of the Department of Licenses stating that no city license was required to “install in the New York City area a coin-

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<sup>38</sup> Hodas offers a slightly different account of how he got the idea to make the peep show a widespread New York City phenomenon in interviews with William Sherman, telling him that it was a vending machine repairman on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street who suggested that old nickelodeon-type machines could be repurposed to show adult films on a wide scale. See: William Sherman, *Times Square* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980) 22.

<sup>39</sup> Bianco 162.

operated machine that shows movies.”<sup>40</sup> Hodas wasted no time, immediately buying the entire inventory of loop films and twelve Panorams from the roadside arcade in New Jersey; afterward, most of the bookstore owners initially rejected Hodas’s offer of a 50-50 split on all incoming revenues with no lease payments, security deposit, or maintenance fees. Hyman Cohen, of Carpel Books at 254 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, was the only one who agreed to take four of the machines and try the films.<sup>41</sup>

By late 1967, Hodas had placed his remaining machines at two more bookstores, ordered thirty similar models from a manufacturer in Kentucky, opened an office on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, and was depositing \$15,000 per day in quarters at the Chemical Bank branch nearby.<sup>42</sup> The landscape was permanently changed: pornographic peep shows would soon be much more common in New York. Hodas eventually bought leases and opened his own bookstores, and went into production on hard-core film loops such as *Flesh Party* and *Elevator Orgy*. This was purely a matter of competition: by the late 1960s, there were approximately ten producer/distributors mostly based in California distributing hardcore sex loops across the country, such as Kiss, Pretty Girl, Color Climax, Stars of Sex, Collection, Playmate, Kama Sutra, Limited Edition, and Diamond Collection, along with Lasse Braun from Europe.<sup>43</sup> Many of these companies would later be early entrants into adult video, transferring these peepshow loops to videotape. Hodas reigned over the exhibition end of the growing industry, controlling nearly all of the New York City’s peepshow machines.

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<sup>40</sup> Bianco 162.

<sup>41</sup> Bianco 162.

<sup>42</sup> Bianco 162.

<sup>43</sup> Josh Alan Friedman, *Tales of Times Square* (New York: Delacourte Press, 1986) 77.

By summer 1969, there were more than 400 total machines in roughly 50 locations in the city, and by the next year, there were more than 1,000 machines—with Hodas in control of 350 of them, making him the single largest owner.<sup>44</sup> By that point, he was no longer hiding his business interests. While most adult industry members had unlisted phone numbers, innocuous corporate names, and private, hidden offices, Hodas listed his phone number, put his own name and primary corporate name (East Coast Cinematics) on the directory in the lobby of his office building, and even posted his other thirteen corporate business names on his door.<sup>45</sup> He was even confident enough to give a free-ranging interview to the *New York Times*, describing his entire operation, including the “photo studio” at his office where customers could take photographs of models, a brazen front for prostitution, and confidently saying, “Luck is careful planning, taking advantage of opportunity.”<sup>46</sup> His photograph even accompanied the story. Hodas had

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<sup>44</sup> Bianco 188.

<sup>45</sup> Sherman 21.

<sup>46</sup> Richard W. Shepard, “Peep Shows Have New Nude Look,” *New York Times* 9 June 1969: 58.

The *New York Times* article, and Hodas’s accompanying confidence, certainly put him squarely in the crosshairs of police and prosecutors looking to stem the rising tide of pornography. The city tried repeatedly (and unsuccessfully) to institute licensing requirements, and held frequent organized crime inquiries and hearings trying to link Hodas to the Mafia, as well as frequently investigating him for obscenity. In 1972, Hodas and two associates were indicted for firebombing two massage parlors; the two acquaintances were convicted but Hodas was acquitted. In 1975, Hodas was convicted of tax evasion and sentence to a year in prison, after an investigation by the city that had begun almost as soon as he had entered the business. As part of that trial Hodas admitted he withheld money from the government to pay “protection” money to the Mafia in the late 1960s. Chemical Bank, in 1981, severed its ties with Hodas, claiming “disapproval” of his business interests, a decision upheld by a federal judge. He plead guilty to two counts of violating U.S. Interstate Commerce laws for transporting 1,200 hardcore videotapes from New York to Buffalo in July 1983 that were intended for shipment into Canada, for which he served another year in prison. As late as 1985, Hodas would still control more than 90% of the peep shows in New York City, and in the mid-1990s, he acquired additional theaters and bookstores, continuing his career as a major player in New York’s pornography industry. For the most detailed account of Hodas’s early interactions and struggles with New York’s law enforcement and regulatory communities, see: Sherman, *Times Square*. For more, see: “Peep-Show Producer Is Called Evader of Federal Income Tax,” *New York Times* 22 October 1970: 69; Eleanor Blau, “Investigation Chief Proposes Licensing of ‘Peep Show’ Outlets,” *New York Times* 27 October 1970: 51; Paul L. Montgomery, “Dirty-Book Store Run by Police Gains Indictment of 18 Here on Pornography,” *New York Times* 21 April 1972: 20; “Peep-Show Merchant

permanently altered the landscape, placing pornography into the public sphere on a scale never before witnessed, and in the process illuminating a set of tensions surrounding private and public sexuality that would come roaring to the surface over the next two decades.<sup>47</sup>

These tensions surrounded the peep show machines in the late 1960s just as pornography was about to make a major leap from its position on the relative margins into the very public sphere of the movie theater. The difference between the peep show machine and the theater, however, was significant. While the theater was out in the open, in a large public space and shared by patrons, the peep show was a small, private area enclosed within a larger public one. This liminal space gained even more privacy with the rise of the peep show “booth,” an enclosed room large enough for one person (or two in a tight fit) to have a small amount of privacy to view the film, first equipped with an 8-or-Super 8mm projector (playing films, like the Panoram, on continuous loops), and later

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Denies Crime Role,” *New York Times* 27 July 1977: 13; Martha M. Hamilton and John Kennedy, “Judge Says Bank Can End Its Service to Porno Seller,” *Washington Post* 21 February 1981: D8; Zuhair Kashmeri, “Mountie Helps Jail New York City ‘Porn King,’” *Globe and Mail* 12 February 1985: M3; “Indict Martin Hodas,” *Variety* 18 July 1973: 20; Bruce Lambert, “Back in Business: Once (and Future?) King of Times Sq. Porn,” *New York Times* 25 September 1994: CY6; Dave Saltonstall. “Peep Show King Eyes New Times.” *New York Daily News*. 12 November 1995. Web. 25 January 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Other peep show kingpins around the United States eventually joined Hodas. Michael Thevis in Atlanta, Reuben Sturman in Ohio, Milton Luros and Robert DiBernardo in New York, and Harry Mohny in Michigan all held vast pornographic empires based in similar operations with similar equipment, held similar ties to organized crime, and faced similar prosecutions and convictions. See: Herzog, “In the Flesh: Space and Embodiment in the Pornographic Peep Show Arcade,” 32; Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne and Peter Pavia, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 104-110; Eric Schlosser, *Reefer Madness and Other Tales from the American Underground* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 109-210; U.S. Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, *Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986) pt. 4, chap. 4, sec. 5; Jay Allen Sandford. “Battle of the Peeps: An Insider History of San Diego Porn Shops.” *sandiegoreader.com*. San Diego Reader. 23 October 2008. Web. 23 January 2013; Michael Satchell, “The Big Business of Selling Smut,” *Parade* 19 August 1979: 4-5.

with videocassette technologies.<sup>48</sup> Reuben Sturman created the modern peep show booth in the late 1960s as part of his Automated Vending pornography empire, sensing correctly that customers wanted more privacy (primarily in order to masturbate) than the Panoram-style machine offered.<sup>49</sup> As Eric Schlosser notes, the machines “turned what had been a communal experience into something quite different—a stag film for an audience of one. And before long they were filled with middle-class American men

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<sup>48</sup> Reporter David Gelman claimed in a 1971 article that, by 1969, “there were 1,000 cassette operated peep shows in New York, and a \$5 million industry where two years earlier there had been nothing.” It is unclear what Gelman meant by “cassette operated,” since all research points to the peep booths in New York operating with standard projection equipment at that time. It is possible that these were the Technicolor Instant Movie Projector, described later in this chapter. See: David Gelman, “Pornography in New York,” *Washington Post* 7 June 1971: B10.

In December 1969, Stephen Max Allen opened the Cinema 2000 on Yonge Street in Toronto, billing it as North America’s first commercial videotape cinema, projecting videotape over television screens in three small auditoriums. In February, Allen and manager Retha Dewey were arrested by Toronto police for showing Russ Meyer’s *Vixen* (1968). This early example illustrates the need for further research on the use of videotape in adult theaters. See: “‘Vixen’ Videotapes Are Seized by Toronto Police,” *Boxoffice* 2 March 1970: K1.

The major move of peep shows from projectors to video cassette players took place in January 1981, when Richard Basciano, owner of the infamous Show World adult entertainment complex in New York, took the advice of technician Roger Kirschner and installed a bank of 42 VCRs to run video feeds into the array of peep show booths throughout the building. The system offered the choice of ten videos, controlled by a numbered keypad in each booth. Concerned the new technology would be confusing to customers, Basciano filmed an “instruction video” to run in the booths featuring well-known performers Desiree Cousteau and Lisa DeLeeuw. From that point on, video technologies took over the peep show industry. See: Friedman 68-74.

<sup>49</sup> Schlosser 129. By 1973, Sturman had fifteen employees working full-time on constructing the cheap booths, shipped pre-fabricated all over North America. See: McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 106.

Sturman, who FBI agent Bill Kelly once called “by far the most important pornographer in the history of the world,” started out distributing mainstream magazines and comic books in the 1950s, growing the business into a large and profitable wholesale operation with outlets in major Midwestern cities. Realizing there was a vast and untapped market for adult magazines, he added those to his inventory, and by the late 1960s was the largest distributor of adult material in the United States. He was also linked to organized crime throughout his career. Using dozens of different aliases, hundreds of shell companies, and elaborate accounting strategies, Sturman managed to successfully avoid obscenity and other prosecutions throughout his career. In 1989, Sturman was convicted of tax evasion, forced to pay \$2.5 million in fines, and sentenced to 10 years in jail. A charge on interstate transportation of obscene material, resulted in a plea bargain for Sturman, but he was caught trying to bribe a juror and sentenced to 19 additional years for extortion. Captured in Anaheim, California after briefly escaping prison in Boron, California, Sturman died in a federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky on October 27, 1997.

See: McNeil, Osborne and Pavia; Schlosser 109-210.

privately seeking a few moments of pleasure.”<sup>50</sup> The privacy of those few moments, however, was (and continues to be) the source of much cultural and legal consternation seeking to discourage pleasure.

The primary anxiety surrounding the peep show booth hinged on a somewhat paradoxical desire to discourage private pleasure by eliminating the booth’s capability for unregulated activities—the very reason for its creation. In other words, even though pleasure was considered a private act, its presence within an isolated space in a larger public area meant those pleasures were still, technically, occurring in public. The intense regulatory and policing efforts of the 1960s and 1970s regarding peep shows around the United States focused primarily on the supervision of behavior. Lighting, occupancy, aisle width, and doors were all policed in order to monitor (and restrict) behavior, and they all point to an effort to discourage pleasure on the part of spectators even as such pleasures played out on the screens inside the booths.<sup>51</sup> As Amy Herzog notes, “pornography’s greatest threat to the social order... rests not in its representations, but in its public presence.”<sup>52</sup> Further solidifying this paradigm, the home increasingly gained protected status as a site of private pleasure. In *Stanley v. Georgia* in 1969, by a rare unanimous decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the mere possession of obscenity was

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<sup>50</sup> Schlosser 129.

<sup>51</sup> Of particularly intense interest in the peep show booths for law enforcement were the “glory holes” cut into the walls, facilitating sexual pleasure between adjoining occupants. It is outside the scope of this dissertation to discuss the enormous importance of queer sexual behavior in male-dominated spaces designed to deliver heterosexual mediated content. Such behavior was and is commonplace at peep show arcades, adult movie theaters, and other spaces designed with entirely different sexual practices in mind. For a useful examination of these apparent contradictions and their importance in adult film history, see: Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Herzog, “In the Flesh” 37.

not a crime—effectively confirming a broad right to privacy for adults in their homes.<sup>53</sup> Four years later, in *U.S. v. 12 200-foot Reels of Super-8 Film*, the Court ruled that the right to possess pornography in the home did not subsequently provide the right to import or transport it outside of the home.<sup>54</sup> Given these rulings and the regulatory tensions surrounding the peep show booths and their public presence, and the core need for the industry to provide opportunities for pleasure to consumers, the long-term solution was to find a way out of public spaces entirely.

The problem preventing the complete move of pornography out of public spaces was partly one of technology. Even though many of the same films available in the adult bookstore peep show machines were also available for home use for those who owned their own projectors, for sale in the same stores and also through mail order, the average person who wanted an occasional private encounter with pornography did not necessarily want to purchase the (often complicated) equipment—let alone the films. That would require going into the open, into the bookstores to purchase the films or the magazines in which advertisements for mail order adult films appeared. It is not surprising that, over the years, pornography producers would desperately seek advertising and marketing outlets in more “respectable” venues that would provide security and privacy for their customers, a topic examined more thoroughly in chapter three. In order to make the peep show booth less vulnerable to legal scrutiny, it had to be moved away from the adult bookstore with all its accompanying baggage. It needed to become more like the home.

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<sup>53</sup> *Stanley v. Georgia*. 394 U.S. 557. Supreme Court of the United States. 7 April 1969. *LexisNexis*. Web. 29 January 2013.

<sup>54</sup> *United States v. 12 200-Ft. Reels of Super 8mm. Film et al.* 413 U.S. 123. Supreme Court of the United States. 21 June 1973. *LexisNexis*. Web. 29 January 2013.

### *A New Form of Exhibition: Hotel Video*

The exhibition of cinema in hotels and motels represents a crucial missing link in home video history. Much like the Atkinson mythology, existing work marginalizes or erases pornography from the “official” narratives.<sup>55</sup> Yet, pornography lurked in the corners and in the early years of the phenomenon, always threatening to encroach on the more “respectable” content. When it did, those involved reinforced rather than resisted the heavily gendered paradigms I outline in chapter one. Pleasure, and particularly female pleasure, represented a threat even within the industrial paradigm that grew to serve it. The “adult motels,” which serve as the critical link between the peep show booth and home video, ultimately participated in a matrix of regulatory strategies aiming to contain women’s pleasures, even as they offered up new exploratory spaces.

The history of exhibition in hotels stretches back to 1955, and initially did not involve cinema.<sup>56</sup> The University of Notre Dame, forbidden (like all universities) by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to broadcast its football games on television, made a deal for as many as four games to be piped in to 19 Sheraton Hotel ballrooms on closed-circuit television, a loophole allowed under NCAA rules.<sup>57</sup> Two

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<sup>55</sup> For a prominent example that ignores pornography see: Kerry Segrave, *Movies at Home: How Hollywood Came to Television* (New York: McFarland, 2009) 116-117.

<sup>56</sup> As Douglas Gomery has shown, Hollywood studios had shown an interest in television as early as 1938, and had made attempts to exhibit television in theaters in the late 1940s. Utilizing hotels as exhibition spaces (particularly their ballrooms), as I identify, came later. See: Douglas Gomery, “Theatre Television: The ‘Missing Link’ of Technical Change in the US Motion Picture Industry,” *The Velvet Light Trap*.21 (Summer 1985): 54-61.

<sup>57</sup> At that point, Notre Dame had already been broadcasting its games to select theaters for two years, through its partnership with Box Office Television. “Hotel-Theatre Network Set on Notre Dame Grid,” *Variety* 20 July 1955: 27. Sporting events pioneered closed-circuit broadcasting. On February 23, 1939, three London theaters showed the Arthur Danaher/Eric Boone prizefight, and on September 23, 1955, 133 theaters in the United States offered the Rocky Marciano/Archie Moore fight from Yankee Stadium. See:

firms dominated the closed-circuit market in the mid-1950s: Theatre Network Television, headed by Nate Halpern, and Sheraton Closed-Circuit Television, Inc., a subsidiary of the hotel chain headed by William Rosensohn and Robert Rosenerans, who initiated the Notre Dame deal.<sup>58</sup> Early efforts drew on the theatrical model by using a large screen in a hotel ballroom rather than offering content in individual rooms, and used the technology primarily for corporate use.<sup>59</sup>

In mid-1956, the Hotel TV Broadcasting Corporation announced plans to offer closed-circuit service to two New York hotels that would feature in-room programs for tourists including movie trailers, sports news, dining suggestions, and other entertainment options.<sup>60</sup> Tension between the closed-circuit and television and film industries prevented much of a move of Hollywood content to hotels over the next decade, limiting the technology to industrial use.<sup>61</sup> By June 1971, however, that was all about to change. Computer Cinema, founded by Paul Von Schreiber and Paul Klein (former head of audience research at NBC), quietly began testing a pay-per-view closed-circuit system at the Gateway Downtowner Motor Inn in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>62</sup> Trying out the Ampex

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Hy Hollinger, "Closed-Circuit TV Started in London; after 16 Years, Future Still a Guess," *Variety* 4 January 1956: 42.

<sup>58</sup> Hollinger, "Closed-Circuit TV Started in London" 42. TelePrompter bought Sheraton Closed-Circuit Television, Inc. in late 1956, which noted that TelePrompter offered "the impetus of professional know-how in production and promotion which a hotel company cannot always guarantee." See: "Teleprompter Buys out Sheraton Closed-TV in Major Expansion," *Variety* 5 December 1956: 33.

<sup>59</sup> Hy Hollinger, "Closed-Circuit TV's Potential Brightens: Eye Tint Horizons," *Variety* 12 December 1956: 26; Hy Hollinger, "Closed-TV: A New Industry," *Variety* 29 February 1956: 29.

<sup>60</sup> "Now You Can Stay in Your Hotel All Day and Gander What's Going on in N.Y.," *Variety* 11 July 1956: 2.

<sup>61</sup> Nathan L. Halpern, "Closed-Circuit TV Invited \$30,000,000 in Billings," *Variety* 7 January 1959: 95.

<sup>62</sup> There was an even earlier effort overseas at in-room closed-circuit film exhibition. Vidicord of Great Britain tested its black-and-white cassette system at a hotel in Majorca, Spain, in January 1969, and expanded into ten additional Spanish hotels in the summer of that year, partnered with the Skytours travel

7500 one-inch system, the Sony U-Matic, a Panasonic half-inch player, and the CBS/EVR, the operation employed “video tape players... at a central point feeding motion pictures to each room through the hotel’s master antenna hookup on a mid-band channel (between 6 and 7) through a converter on top of the individual TV sets.”<sup>63</sup> The initial films were *Villa Rides* (1968), *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972), *Patton* (1970), *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *Barbarella* (1968), and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), at \$2.50 per viewing. Other chains, including Holiday Inn, Howard Johnson’s, and Hilton expressed interest, and Computer Cinema escalated the project from a test into a pilot operation.<sup>64</sup>

While such activities might have alarmed Hollywood in the past, the results of these tests unveiled something of great importance that the studios were not expecting: “A majority of the Computer Cinema viewers had not been to the movies (in a theater) the previous three months, and some reported that they hadn’t gone a film house in as long as five years.”<sup>65</sup> It was immediately obvious that pay-per-view movies in hotels

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agency. They also had the system in several London hotels, including the Hilton, and were supplied with vintage films by British Lion. See: Jack Pitman, “Britain’s Vidicord Poised for First Public Test of Home TV Via Cassette; Hot Movies in Living Room Next?,” *Variety* 12 November 1969: 2, 86; “Britain’s Vidicord Sheds Cassettes’ Umbilical Cord with Pix-on-Video,” *Variety* 16 December 1970: 1, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Les Brown, “Computer Cinema: How Feevee Fared in Newark Hotel Against Free-TV,” *Variety* 29 September 1971: 30.

<sup>64</sup> Brown 30; “Hotel Shows Films on TVs,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 October 1971: G12. For detailed technical information on the operation of closed-circuit hotel systems of the era, see: Morton Dubin, “A Study on the Business of in-Room Movies at Hotel/Motel Rooms,” *Backstage* 7 April 1972: 34, 38; Morton Dubin, “Further Discussion Relating to the Systems That Bring Movies to Hotel Rooms,” *Backstage* 21 July 1972: 5, 12, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Brown 30; John J. O’Connor, “To the Critics: How Would You Improve Things?,” *New York Times* 10 October 1971: D17. Hollywood’s reluctance to embrace new technologies, stemming from a fear of potential threats, was not limited to hotel exhibition. Later, the studios would initially labor to block the Sony Betamax due to its “time shifting” recording capabilities. Such actions culminated in a landmark decision by the Supreme Court that making using home video recorders for purposes of time shifting does not constitute copyright infringement, but is instead fair use, as well as holding that the manufacturers of such equipment cannot be held liable for copyright infringement. The decision not only opened up the

were reaching the “lost audience” that traditional exhibition strategies had been failing to capture, a discourse that would be seized upon by the industry.<sup>66</sup> Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, took notice, and became a vocal proponent of the technology, noting that the average age of a pay-per-view purchaser was 42, while the average theatergoer was just over 20.<sup>67</sup> Valenti was present, in fact, when Trans-World Productions, a subsidiary of Screen Gems (itself a subsidiary of Columbia Pictures) unveiled a rival operation at the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta in October 1971.<sup>68</sup> Trans-World had been in the close-circuit hotel business since 1968, offering convention broadcasts and tourist information, and, like Computer Cinema, saw the opportunity to move into distribution.<sup>69</sup> After the successful test at the Hyatt Regency, Trans-World

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modern VCR market for home recording, but also ultimately significantly benefited the studios and the market for pre-recorded content. See: Inc. Sony Corporation of America et al v. Universal City Studios, et al. 464 U.S. 417. Supreme Court of the United States. 17 January 1984. *LexisNexis*. Web. 19 February 2013; Peter Decherney, *Hollywood's Copyright Wars: From Edison to the Internet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) 169-181.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard Sloane, “Pay-as-You-View Movies for Hotels,” *Variety* 14 November 1971: F5. The history of the “lost audience” is a long and complicated one. In brief: Hollywood, for a variety of reasons, had been steadily losing audiences since 1946, when three-fourths of all potential spectators attended movies on a weekly basis; by 1953, that number had fallen by half. In addition to the rise of television, Douglas Gomery cites suburbanization, the baby boom, and radio as a complimentary good as the primary causes. The results were felt across the industry. An oft-cited study by Daniel Yankelovich and Associates in 1968 confirmed that two decades of slipping adult audiences had been leading to: youth (aged 16-24) accounted for nearly half of all box office admissions. Given these startling statistics, it is not difficult to see why Hollywood studios saw the potential of hotel pay-per-view exhibition to reach older viewers still interested in watching movies but not necessarily interested in seeing them in theaters.

See: Douglas Gomery, “The Coming of Television and the 'Lost' Motion Picture Audience,” *Journal of Film and Video* 37.3 (Summer 1985): 5-11; “Pix Must Broaden Market,” *Variety* 20 March 1968: 1; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America* (New York: Random House, 1975) 269-304.

<sup>67</sup> Jack Gould, “Pay-TV for Apartments Is Proposed,” *New York Times* 8 October 1971: 86.

<sup>68</sup> Columbia Pictures was not the only studio to participate in hotel exhibition: MGM held a stake in Metrovision, and Paramount Pictures was a partner in Athena Communications, Inc., two smaller companies that tested closed-circuit equipment in hotels in Toronto and Little Rock, Arkansas, respectively. Neither company survived the rapid changes in the industry. See: Albin Krebs, “Hotelevision' Introduces Uncut Movies as Part of Room Service,” *New York Times* 25 October 1972: 94.

<sup>69</sup> “Hotel Pix-for-Pay from Trans-World in Atlanta Preem,” *Variety* 6 October 1971: 31.

installed the system in four other Atlanta hotels, as well as hotels in Las Vegas, Houston, and Toronto, and scheduled installations in Honolulu, London, Los Angeles, Montreal, San Francisco, and Chicago, projecting that by the end of 1973 they would have system in 160,000 rooms in 25 additional cities.<sup>70</sup> Hotel pay-per-view was an incredible success.

Pornography lurked on the edges of these narratives, even in its absence. By the time Trans-World was ready to expand into various chains in Waikiki in late 1971, spokesperson Garry Sherman addressed, for the first time, the tension around the capability of the equipment to play all kinds of content. Trans-World would not offer X or R-rated films, Sherman told *Variety*, because children would be guests in the hotel.<sup>71</sup> By mid-1972, just as the Soundies Corporation had to deal with the question of pornography, so, too, did Computer Cinema. A *Los Angeles Times* article on the phenomenon concluded with a reassuring statement: “Right now, there is nothing to prevent the rawest X-rated films from being shown in thousands of hotel rooms except the ‘Hotel’s own taste and mine,’” according to Computer Cinema’s Paul Klein.<sup>72</sup> William Butters of Trans-World was equally adamant by the end of the year: “Under no circumstances,” according to Butters, “will X-rated movies be offered to subscribers,” and the company’s contracts with hotels prohibited adult movies.<sup>73</sup> Given the desire by the two companies (indeed, the necessity) to court the Hollywood studios for content, it made sense for both companies to avoid adult material, which, in addition to being seen

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<sup>70</sup> Bob Knight, “Older, Well-Heeled Fans Big Potential Via Hotels' Closed-Circuit Movies,” *Variety* 13 October 1971: 1, 54; Trans-World. Advertisement. *New York Times* 22 June 1972: 55. Print.

<sup>71</sup> “Columbia's Hotel Films Setup to Invade Hawaii Sometime During 1972,” *Variety* 27 October 1971: 38.

<sup>72</sup> Norman Mark, “Saturday Night at the Hotel?,” *Los Angeles Times* 25 July 1972: G10.

<sup>73</sup> Jerry Beigel, “Pay-TV System Offering Four Channels Introduced,” *Los Angeles Times* 18 December 1972: E24; “Pay TV Includes X-Rated Fare,” *Chicago Tribune* 31 August 1972: N8.

as culturally “unsavory,” was also an economic threat to mainstream films in the early 1970s.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the efforts of the hotel video distributors to keep adult films out of hotels, the burgeoning video industry as a whole had no such qualms. By mid-1970, more than fifteen companies were trying to get a home video system to market, including the CBS EVR, the PlayTape/Avco Cartrivision, the Sony U-Matic, and the RCA SelectaVision.<sup>75</sup> These manufacturers were hunting for content for their systems—including adult material. There were ample economic reasons for that inclusion: feature-length adult films were gaining in popularity in theaters, and making their producers and distributors a great deal of money. Sherpix, headed by Louis Sher, not only distributed groundbreaking adult films, they also played them in their Art Theatre Guild spaces—which totaled more

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<sup>74</sup> The economic threat of adult films to Hollywood was very real as early as 1973, when *The Devil in Miss Jones* ranked as the seventh highest grossing film of the year, right after the James Bond entry *Live & Let Die*. *Deep Throat* was the eleventh highest grosser, just after *Deliverance*. Hollywood’s response, as outlined by Justin Wyatt and Jon Lewis, was to incorporate many of the same, adult-oriented elements, push softcore into the mainstream (with films such as *Emmanuelle* in 1974), and use the ratings system to co-opt audiences looking for something different, all as a means of regaining economic control. See: Justin Wyatt, “The Stigma of X: Adult Cinema and the Institution of the MPAA Ratings System.” *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*. Ed. Mathew Bernstein. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999. 238-263; Jon Lewis, *Hollywood V. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University, 2000).

In May 1974, Columbia Pictures sold Trans-World to Computer Television, Incorporated, formerly known as Computer Cinema before its acquisition by Time, Inc. See: “Time Inc. Affiliate Buys Hotel Pay-TV Exhibitor,” *New York Times* 4 May 1974: 27; Les Brown, “Summer Brings Uplift for Hotel Pay-TV Movies,” *New York Times* 17 August 1974: 51.

These early fits and starts as I have described them led eventually to the creation of the contemporary hotel pay-per-view industry with the forming of Spectradyne in the late 1970s, which blossomed (despite its own financial problems) in the coming decades, along with its later rivals On Command and Lodgenet Enterprises. None of these companies, it is important to note, had any problem whatsoever offering adult material and, in fact, openly acknowledged it was the core of their business. See: James Sterngold, “A Room with a Cyberview,” *New York Times* 23 December 1996: D1, D9.

<sup>75</sup> “Video Cartridges: A Promise of Future Shock.” *time.com*. Time Magazine. 10 August 1970. Web. 5 October 2009; Barbara Isenberg, “Video Cassettes Offer Potential for Future but Problems for Now,” *Wall Street Journal* 16 December 1970: 19.

than 40 by the early 1970s.<sup>76</sup> Within two years, hardcore films migrated from the peep shows and downtown theaters out into what *Variety* called the “once-inaccessible class houses” throughout the outer boroughs of New York.<sup>77</sup>

Sherpix’s films, distribution methods, and exhibition strategies permanently changed the cinema landscape.<sup>78</sup> *Censorship in Denmark* (AKA *Pornography in Denmark: A New Approach*) and *A History of the Blue*, both from 1970 and directed by Alex De Renzy, were the first two nationally exhibited adult films with hardcore footage, and *Mona* (1970, produced by Bill Osco and directed by Michael Benveniste and Howard Ziehm) was the first hardcore film to play in wide theatrical release. It was also the first hardcore film to enter the *Variety* Top 50 box office list.<sup>79</sup> Osco’s Graffiti Production Corp. in Los Angeles (which made loops for peep show booths and features for distribution by Sherpix) expected to gross more than \$2 million in 1970, a number that surely caught the attention of the early video distributors.<sup>80</sup> Addison Verrill, writing in *Variety* in December 1970, described the contentious and rapidly changing landscape: “In books of cinema history yet to be written, 1970 is sure to emerge as the year of the hardcore porno explosion, a time when every screen-sex barrier crumbled before the onslaught of technically slick pornography of the type now on view in at least 10 U.S.

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<sup>76</sup> “Sherpix: The Unusual Company with an Unusual Future,” *The Independent Film Journal* (27 April 1972): 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> Addison Verrill, “Porno on 'Family' Showcase,” *Variety* 23 February 1972: 1, 69.

<sup>78</sup> Schaefer traces the transition of adult film from loops and stags to features in more detail than I am able here. See: Eric Schaefer, “Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature,” *Cinema Journal* 41.3 (Spring 2002): 3-26.

<sup>79</sup> “‘Mona’ 1st Film of Hardcore to Make Top-50 List,” *Variety* 10 February 1971: 3.

<sup>80</sup> “‘Mona’ 1st Film of Hardcore to Make Top-50 List,” 5.

cities.”<sup>81</sup> While Verrill was specifically referring to theatrical distribution, his words were similarly prescient for video.

By early 1971, sexploitation, softcore, and hardcore filmmakers and distributors such as Sherpix, Lee Hessell of Cambist Films, Ava Leighton and Radley Metzger of Audobon Films, and Russ Meyer were all deluged with offers to license their material.<sup>82</sup> While they all played down the offers, noting that they were for royalties only and no money upfront, Eve Meyer had, in fact, already made an historic deal with Irving Stimmler’s Optronics Libraries in December 1970 for the video rights to twenty of Russ Meyer’s films.<sup>83</sup> A *Wall Street Journal* reporter noted after the deal that “much gamier fare than Mr. Meyer’s films will be seen on the home screen when—or if—the cartridge

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<sup>81</sup> “‘Mona’ 1st Film of Hardcore to Make Top-50 List,” 5.

<sup>82</sup> Addison Verrill, “TV Cassettes Bid for Sex Pix,” *Variety* 27 January 1971: 1, 54.

<sup>83</sup> “Eve Meyer Sells Films to Optronics Libraries,” *Boxoffice* 7 December 1970: 7.

Stimmler had been very busy acquiring lesser-known films, public domain materials, old serials, cartoons, archives of television programs, and other material—ultimately building a library of more than 6,000 films, and assembling a board of directors that included David Frost, David Wolper, and *New York Times* drama critic Clive Barnes. A *Time* magazine article from August 1970 also describes Optronics as having a catalog of “sex films,” meaning the acquisition of the Meyer films in December came after someone else had already made a deal with Stimmler. According to my research, these unnamed films represent the first adult material licensed for home video in the United States.

Despite the ambitious start, Optronics failed to take off, mostly due to the incompatibility of the players then on the market and the general chaos within the industry. By September 1971, Optronics was primarily focused on installing EVR machines into record stores (utilizing Stimmler’s connections as a former vice president with MGM’s record division) as part of a deal with eight major record companies to advertise their bands in taped performances—essentially early music videos. In February 1972, Optronics merged with Trans America Films in order to pursue the record store deals full-time. Stimmler noted at the time of the merger that, “the [home video] industry just has not developed as quickly as we anticipated.”

See: “Video Cartridges: A Promise of Future Shock.” Web; Radcliffe Joe, “Disks Pushed in Stores Via CTV,” *Billboard* 4 September 1971: 1, 19; Radcliffe Joe, “Optronics Libraries Merges with Trans America Films,” *Billboard* 19 February 1972: 49; Isenberg 19.

TV revolution strikes,” clearly foreshadowing the inundation of hardcore material that would flood the market on only a few years later.<sup>84</sup>

Sherpix was next to broker a deal, with Cartrivision, the first of the new technologies to go to market. Debuting in June 1972 in Sears locations in Chicago, the ambitious system, a forerunner of the modern VCR, could record and play back television, and used an optional black-and-white camera for home movies. The machine, however, operated as part of a television set and was priced at an exorbitant \$1,595. It was the first attempt at home video rental—and the company had no problems including pornography in their rental program. Cartridge Rental Systems, Inc., a joint venture between Cartrivision and Columbia Pictures, included ten adult titles in their initial 200 rental offerings.<sup>85</sup> Seven of the ten were Sherpix titles, including *Censorship in Denmark*, *A History of the Blue*, and *Mona*. Cartrivision recognized the potential of adult material on their player, with a company spokesperson calling the market for pornography on home video “gigantic” during an exhibition of the equipment at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco in late 1972.<sup>86</sup> The high price, recurring technological problems, and a mostly disinterested public doomed the company, and it disappeared from the market by July 1973.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Isenberg 19.

<sup>85</sup> Cartridge Rental Systems, Inc., *Rental Program Library* (Raleigh, NC: Cartridge Rental Systems, Inc., 1972) 7.

<sup>86</sup> C.P. McCarthy, “A TV Star - and Only \$1595?,” *S.F. Examiner* 7 September 1972: 4.

<sup>87</sup> For more on Cartrivision, see: “First Home V’cassettes on View,” *Variety* 14 June 1972: 42; Dwight Newton, “A Cartridge Miracle Set,” *San Francisco Examiner* 8 September 1972; Anne Douglas, “Age of TV Cassette Recorder and Player,” *Chicago Tribune* 17 June 1972: N\_A21; Leonard Wiener, “Video Tape Promises TV of Your Choice - Someday,” *Chicago Tribune* 15 April 1974: C9; Paul McDonald, *Video and DVD Industries* (London, UK: British Film Institute, 2008) 31; Marlow and Secunda 113.; Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002) 62-63.

Perhaps sensing the growing market for the “temporary privacy” paradigm offered by adult films on tape, as well as the interest by adult film producers and distributors in licensing their content, Sensory Devices, Inc., a subsidiary of Precision Sound Centers of Miami, Florida, finally broke the adult barrier in motels. On 29 February 1972, the company placed its system into the Hotel Commodore in New York, offering mobile carts holding Zeiss-Ikon Panacolor magazine projectors capable of playing movies on cassette delivered to patrons’ rooms. Among the 25 films on offer were *Airport* (1970), *Play Misty for Me* (1971), and *A Man Called Horse* (1970)—as well as the complete Russ Meyer catalogue.<sup>88</sup> By July, the softcore adult titles (which had expanded beyond Meyer) were by far the most requested, with Meyer’s *Vixen* leading the pack. John R. Garside, the hotel’s general manager, offered some slight reassurance to those anxious about the films, saying, “The type of X films that we have are the porn-house-type movies. In other words, they’re not these out-and-out skin flicks. They’re

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<sup>88</sup> “Films in Cassettes Tee Off in N.Y.’S Hotel Commodore at \$4.50 Per Room,” *Variety* 1 March 1972: 2, 70.

The Panacolor projector, designed by Zeiss-Ikon-Voigtlander of West Germany, was introduced in 1968, and initially played two-hour cartridges inserted into a combination projector/screen. It was, in some ways, a less-than-ideal alternative to the closed-circuit systems being introduced into other hotels at the time. While it carried minimal startup cost (unlike closed-circuit systems, it required no complicated installation), but it did require patrons to order a movie and have it delivered on a cart to their room, thus eliminating the complete privacy of the experience. See: Everett H. Ortner, “12-Channel Sound-Movie Cassette Plays for Two Hours,” *Popular Science* August 1968: 83.

While the details are slightly unclear, it appears that at some point between the end of February and May 10, Sensory Devices Inc. either folded or sold its operations to Player’s Cinema Systems, a subsidiary of Player’s Computer, financed by New York Mets players Jerry Grote and Bud Harrelson. On that date, a new “experiment” was started at the Hotel Commodore, yet used all the same equipment and retained the Russ Meyer films, along with a few other softcore adult titles such as *The Naked Wytche*, *That She Blows* and *Without a Stitch*. While the earlier experiment featured well-known mainstream films, this new round offered B-movies such as *Moving Target*, *They Paid With Bullets*, and *Beware the Blob*, the last of which, in fact, premiered at the hotel four weeks before entering theaters. Whether or not the mainstream studios exited the scene due to the presence of the softcore Meyer films in the first experiment is unknown. See: Andy Grundberg, “I Lost It at the Commodore,” *New York Magazine* 3 July 1972: 56.

more the type that would play in, say, legitimate Broadway theaters.”<sup>89</sup> Garside’s words were, of course, mostly hollow: Meyer’s films were hardly “legitimate” in the sense he was implying, even if they were not hardcore, and the other softcore offerings (such as *Feugo*, the 1969 Argentinian melodrama featuring Isabel Sarli and plenty of nudity and simulated sex) were staples of the grindhouse and drive-in. The Hotel Commodore knew what it had, however: a product not offered by its competitors, and the privacy to accompany it. It was the beginning of the outrageously lucrative pay-per-view adult film industry in hotels, and it had (however cautiously) found a foothold in a “respectable” location.<sup>90</sup>

Yet, this “official” history, as important as it is to the story of home video in that it illustrates how Hollywood sensed a growing market for its products in a private setting that utilized video technologies, also avoids uncovering the details of a different set of lodging spaces that might be even more historically important. Back in Los Angeles, a group of cheap, inconspicuous motels used similar technologies to show hardcore adult films on video. These motels, and the service they provided, represented the most important missing link between celluloid and videotape for the adult film industry.

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<sup>89</sup> Grundberg, “I Lost It at the Commodore,” *New York Magazine* 3 July 1972: 56.

<sup>90</sup> By 2000, adult films in hotels were bringing in close to \$200 million per year, had a presence in at least 40% of the hotel rooms in North America, and was owned (often quietly) by corporations such as AT&T, Time Warner, General Motors, EchoStar, Liberty Media, Marriot, Hilton, and News Corporation. In hindsight, the worst possible business decision Trans-World and Computer Cinema could have made was to avoid the material. See: Timothy Egan. “Erotic Inc: Technology Sent Wall Street into Market for Pornography.” *newyorktimes.com*. New York Times. 23 October 2000. Web. 16 February 2013.

For the Hotel Commodore, however, adult films were only a temporary experiment: by February 1973, the hotel switched to the Trans-World system, without adult films, a move that had been planned for some time. See: “Pay TV Includes X-Rated Fare,” N8.

*Adult Motels: Home Away from Home*

The story of American adult motels begins with a closed-circuit television mishap in Osaka, Japan in early 1971. Osaka was home to a phenomenon of “avec” or “love” hotels, designed for sexual encounters on hourly rates, and as their featured attraction offering closed-circuit “pink films,” a softcore genre of adult film unique to Japan.<sup>91</sup> A rooftop steel railing at one of these hotels accidentally began transmitting the signal into nearby homes—prompting police to issue a very polite warning to innkeepers to make sure such accidents were not repeated. *Time* carried a story on the incident in March, including details on how some of the hotels were offering cameras and video recorders for in-room use.<sup>92</sup> Among those who read the article was Don Leon, a lawyer representing a group of motel owners in Los Angeles. Leon convinced the owners that such a model could work in the United States, and the group agreed to convert an Autolodge at 930 West Olympic Boulevard, downtown near the convention center, into a closed-circuit “adult motel” called The Experience, complete with water beds, fur

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<sup>91</sup> The first of these establishments, appropriately named “Love Hotel” (or “Hotel Love,” as the swiveling sign was two-sided) was opened in Osaka in 1968, and was quickly followed by others. Following the Osaka Expo in 1970, the term spread throughout Japan. See: Erik Slavin. “My Months in a Love Hotel.” *stripes.com*. Stars And Stripes. 25 March 2007. Web. 17 February 2013.

For more on the history of Japan’s “Love Hotels,” see: Sarah Chaplin, *Japanese Love Hotels: A Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Pink films, a complicated and evolving genre, follow a rich, complicated, and debated history far outside the scope of this dissertation. I am indebted to my colleague Michael Arnold, whose own dissertation research is on the topic, for his many insights and explanations over the years on the topic. See: Jasper Sharp, *Behind the Pink Curtain: The Complete History of Japanese Sex Cinema* (London: FAB Press, 2008).

<sup>92</sup> “Modern Living: Sinema in Osaka.” *Time.com*. Time Magazine. 22 March 1971. Web. 28 January 2013.

A similar incident occurred in Aurora, Colorado, in September 1977. Police confirmed a woman’s report that her television was playing hardcore films picked up from a nearby adult motel’s signal. See: “Family in a Dither as TV Shows Porn Films,” *Los Angeles Times* 15 September 1977: A1.

bedspreads, mirrored ceilings, and closed-circuit adult films played on Sony U-Matic machines.<sup>93</sup>

Leon correctly sensed that the Japanese model solved the problems inherent to the tensions of public versus private by taking the peep show booth and transferring it a setting more akin to a temporary home. Given the startling success of closed-circuit video in Osaka (with more than 500 locations offering the service to a population of roughly ten million), Leon surely figured audiences in Los Angeles would be ready for something similar.<sup>94</sup> By early 1973 *Variety* ran a front-page story on the trend, briefly describing The Experience and noting that its parent company, Leisure Services Inc., had plans for six more locations and was also in the business of “production, distribution, and exhibition of theatrical films.”<sup>95</sup> The motels began advertising in earnest in the *Los*

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<sup>93</sup> “Motels with X-Rated Films Thrive on Coast,” *New York Times* 17 February 1975: 22.

Leon claimed in a handful of interviews that The Experience opened in 1970 after he was inspired by a *Time* magazine article on Japanese “love hotels” and their closed-circuit adult film systems. However, given that the *Time* article in question ran in early 1971, I have dated the opening of The Experience to that period rather than 1970. Nevertheless, this detail requires further research to pinpoint a more specific timeline of events.

<sup>94</sup> While my research focuses on the Los Angeles area, particularly since it was also increasingly the home of the adult film industry through the 1970s, evidence exists for adult motels surfacing around the United States during this same period, illustrating that the idea was not limited to Southern California. Owen J. Kilbane, in December 1972, opened The Hillcrest Motel in Cleveland, Ohio, with closed-circuit adult films, a limousine with adult videos, and the option to rent a video camera to make personal tapes. Kilbane would later claim to *Playboy* magazine that this was the first such motel in the United States, countering Leon. See: Owen J. Kilbane, “As Ohio Goes...” *Playboy* October 1975: 51.

The President’s Motel in Atlantic City offered adult films—including *Deep Throat*—as an off-season “experiment” in 36 of its 137 rooms by late 1973. See: “Sex to 36 of 137 Motel Unites, until Christmas,” *Variety* 14 November 1973: 2, 69.

Finally, the Winslow Motel, in Winslow, New Jersey, around this period, offered adult films alongside “first-rate” accommodations, suggesting that not all the adult motels of the era were necessarily lower quality. See: Michael Price, “A Coward’s Guide to X-Rated Motels,” *Oui* February 1978: 120.

<sup>95</sup> “L.A.’S X-Rated Motels: Pornopix & Water Beds,” *Variety* 7 March 1973: 1, 79.

*Angeles Times* alongside the adult movie theater listings in February 1973, beginning with *The Western*, in Van Nuys, and *The Crest*, in West Hollywood. The copy read: “Adult Movies in the privacy of your own room! In color on closed-circuit TV.”<sup>96</sup> By summer *The Starlite*, *The Aloha*, *The Kona*, and *The Encore* joined them, all with similar offerings. The *Los Angeles Times*, seeing the rapid growth of the market in its own pages, carried a lengthy examination in June, the first detailed report on the motels.<sup>97</sup> By that point, the total number of motels had reached eleven—and police interest was growing, too, with four reported obscenity busts related to the adult film exhibition at motels.<sup>98</sup>

Legal pressure was certainly a concern for adult motel operators from the beginning. In addition to the questionable legality of the adult films (which were already

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I have no other traces of Leisure Services Inc., its vice president Jay Feinberg, or their supposed products. It is possible that LSI was involved in the production of adult films directly for its own hotel market—a practice by others described in this chapter.

The *Variety* article mentions advertisements for the motels, which, presumably, were running in the *Los Angeles Free Press*, a paper well known for its friendly (and lucrative) relations with adult theaters and other business. I have not yet been able to locate archival copies of the *LAFP*, and so have had to rely on advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>96</sup> Western and Crest. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 9 February 1973: H22.

<sup>97</sup> David Shaw, “The ‘X-Rated’ Motels: It’s Usually SRO,” *Los Angeles Times* 16 June 1973: 1, 22-23.

<sup>98</sup> These busts had essentially no result, and were certainly not effective in stopping the motels from operating. Leon would later tell reporters that multiple charges for obscenity eventually were reduced to “something like a \$5 fine.” See: Jim Stingley, “Squares Amid the Alien Porn,” *Los Angeles Times* 5 February 1975: 1.

Later, various municipalities tried more elaborate legal mechanisms to prevent adult motels from opening. For example, in June 1977 the city of San Clemente, alarmed at the presence of two existing adult motels, passed an ordinance requiring motel operators to obtain a permit to show adult films, modeled on the same statute that had effectively prevented adult bookstores from opening in the city. While the city could not prevent motels from showing adult films, they could instead regulate parking, traffic, architecture, and location—all with the intended purpose of making it difficult for businesses to operate, a tactic very familiar to opponents of pornography in the 1970s and 1980s, as I explore in chapter five. See: “Use Permit Required for Adult Motel Operators,” *Los Angeles Times* 6 June 1977: OC3.

The total number of adult motels in Southern California would eventually grow to more than 30 in these early years. I base this number on the advertisements I have located in various publications, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Berkeley Barb*, but also with sporadic references in other newspapers and magazines.

under increasing scrutiny given their growing popularity and presence in culture in the early 1970s), the privacy afforded by the space of the room raised questions about prostitution. Leon frequently referred to the average customers as “committed couples,” and that the whole purpose of the enterprise was to provide a safe, discreet, and pleasurable environment for married, middle-class heterosexuals. In a 1975 interview, he even noted that a marriage certificate was not required for booking a room at The Experience, but it was preferred.<sup>99</sup> In nearly every article on the motels, owners and managers stressed repeatedly that they were friendly, clean, and safe environments aimed at middle-aged couples, rather than people having affairs or those seeking prostitutes.<sup>100</sup> Such discursive strategies, obviously intended to minimize police attention, also performed the task of assigning respectability to the motels by emphasizing elements other than pleasure.<sup>101</sup> Part of the necessity of such a task was the effort to make them appear safe for female patrons, the crucial demographic that would ensure success. After all, the privacy afforded by the motel room was in stark contrast to the (often dangerous and unpredictable) public spaces of the peep booth or public theater. Female spectators who might be interested in adult material ran the risk of being mistaken for prostitutes by both other customers and police; there was also, simply put, the potential for unwelcome sexual advances or assaults by the primarily male customers in those spaces.

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<sup>99</sup> “Motels with X-Rated Films Thrive on Coast,” 22.

<sup>100</sup> B.C. Kaye, “X-Rated Motels for Adventurous Couples,” *Sexology* September 1975: 11-15.

<sup>101</sup> Needless to say, prostitution was a steady and profitable economy in and around the adult motels, despite the owners’ protestations. By 1982, the city of Hollywood had cracked down on eight adult motels, forcing them to close until they had instituted new policies that included requiring identification, names and addresses, and 24-hour minimum room rentals. See: Myrna Oliver, “City Closes 2 Motels Used by Prostitutes,” *Los Angeles Times* 15 December 1982: E3.

This particular capability, the potential of offering a private space for female viewers, represents perhaps the key point to understanding why the adult motels historically serve as the missing link between celluloid and home video. While the eventual complete privacy offered by home video certainly benefited male consumers, the profoundness with which that privacy impacted female spectators is probably impossible to calculate, given that it opened a completely safe and discreet viewing space away from potential dangers and cultural judgments. The adult motels, despite various problems, represent the first real change in the exhibition of adult material toward privacy, turning the peep booth into something resembling a temporary home, and using early versions of the technology that would later revolutionize the adult film industry. Motel owners were certainly aware of the importance of these possibilities. Albert Antiquo, owner of three motels, noted as much in mid-1973:

Some of [our customers], particularly the women, are curious now about adult movies and books. They hear about it all the time, and they'd like to see the real thing, just to satisfy their curiosity—only they're afraid a neighbor or someone else they know would see them if they went to a theater and that would embarrass them. So they come here.<sup>102</sup>

Antiquo's comments encapsulate dual discourses: on the one hand, such comments, particularly when included in an interview, reveal an economic motivation; on the other hand, however unintentionally, they illustrate the community need for just such spaces and protections. Of course, this potential remained purely theoretical, as women were not

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<sup>102</sup> Shaw 1.

Antiquo would go on to found Video Innovation, a company that specialized in installing closed-circuit systems in adult motels. See: Price 121.

allowed in the motels without male “supervision,” as I will examine below. The opportunity for women’s sexual pleasure, in other words, was once again superseded by the need to control and regulate that same element.

Once again, the tensions circulating in the interstices between public and private come to the surface. If, as I have argued, pornography and the accompanying pleasures were often contained within a particular level of public visibility rather than complete privacy, the adult motels existed in an odd, in-between space. Neither out in the open public space like adult movie theaters, nor completely private like the home video players, the adult motel was, somehow, both at once. Rather than thinking of these early adult motels as lodgings that happened to offer adult films, they might be better understood as simply bigger and more private peep show booths, and thus as a transitional space. Technology operates as the defining element in this paradigm: the adult motels utilized Sony U-Matic players in their operation, the primary precursor to the Betamax player that would change the landscape, making them literal in-between spaces. By repeatedly stressing in interviews that their facilities were intended for middle-class married people, adult motel owners attempted to invoke capitalist and patriarchal ideologies in order to stave off the regulatory cultural impulses that had long sought to limit the sexual pleasures of both the lower classes and women in general—thus reinforcing the “natural order” that I discuss in chapter one. The cultural mythology surrounding such ideologies was simple to understand: by being middle-class, one could assume the patrons would be well-educated and thus not susceptible to “inappropriate” sexual pleasures (or, at least in the imagination, arousal at all). Additionally, by being

married, one could assume that the women involved would be “respectable,” which is to say not prostitutes or, even more importantly, actively seeking their own sexual pleasure.

The adult motels faced significant obstacles to this strategy in that they were typically located in underdeveloped areas of Los Angeles, not part of corporate chains, and consisted of inexpensively fabricated structures. Yet, they did make efforts to overcome these hurdles—but these efforts, rather than pushing back and resisting the cultural regulatory efforts, instead (somewhat) participated in and reinforced them. In addition to stressing their desired clientele, many interviews featured the married couples that managed the locations, emphasized that single women were not allowed to rent rooms, and, in the case of The Aloha (located in Long Beach), even offered a wedding chapel on the premises, with the owner/manager licensed to marry the patrons.<sup>103</sup>

Circulating underneath all of these efforts was an intense effort to regulate pleasure within the narrow confines of a respectability marked by patriarchal control. Women’s pleasures, even within the “safe” space of the adult motel, were intensely contained and monitored.

The zenith of these types of respectability strategies would come in 1980, when Pete and Norma Marino, owners of The Riviera motel in San Clemente, gave an interview to the *Los Angeles Times*, tellingly titled, “A Nice Place for a Family Affair,” in

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<sup>103</sup> Lois and Walter Mansfield, the managers of The Experience, were featured prominently in one of the early articles on the adult motels, which presented a photograph of the couple. In their late 40s, the couple was the very image of middle-class the motels sought to welcome. See: Jim Stingley, “Middle Class Tunes in, Turns On,” *Los Angeles Times* 4 February 1975: 1, 6-7.

The Aloha motel, one of the earliest locations in the Los Angeles area, offered the wedding chapel, complete with photography studio, for guests who wanted the type of experience familiar to those who had “quickie” marriages in Las Vegas. The owner/manager was a minister in the Universal Life Church, infamous for ordaining people almost immediately and without any real training or requirements. The owner’s brother was the photographer. They would later claim that twelve such marriages were performed within three weeks of opening. See: Price 121.

which they sell everything *but* sexual arousal and pleasure as a component of the business, despite the adult films playing in all the rooms. The couple notes, in fact, that their adult daughter (who runs the front desk) gave them the initial idea to convert the operation into an adult motel in order to raise profits. The reporter's description spells out the ways in which such owners labored to disconnect pleasure from mere capitalist enterprise:

[T]he Marino family looks about as much like sex motel operators as the Osmond family does. And that's what makes the Riviera so, well, unusual. There are no neon signs touting the X-rated movies shown on closed-circuit TV in the motel's 21 rooms. What little advertising the Riviera does is done discreetly and in small type in family-oriented publications. The typical Riviera patron is an over-40 couple celebrating an anniversary or birthday—not a swinging couple meeting for a secret tryst.<sup>104</sup>

These types of discourses, in which pleasure is downplayed as much as possible without eliminating it entirely, assisted the motels as they reached for the elusive respectability they sought so desperately. Yet, that respectability was only possible if women's behaviors were rigorously monitored and contained, placed into a strict set of cultural ideologies in which the fantasy of the "family" was paramount—a fantasy dependent on patriarchal structures downplaying sexual pleasure. Thus, the privacy afforded by the adult motels recreated the "home" and all the familial, patriarchal space in which pleasure served as a side effect of procreation, and where women had a very specific role.

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<sup>104</sup> Shearlean Duke, "A Nice Place for a Family Affair," *Los Angeles Times* 27 July 1980: OC\_A1, 4-6.

The judicial climate surrounding the era in which the adult motels sprouted brings particular resonance to the marketing strategies that positioned such locations as being like “home.” The landmark Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California* in 1973, which I examine in greater detail in chapter five, rocked the adult entertainment landscape just as the adult motels were beginning to thrive. Offering a test for determining obscenity, and reiterating that obscenity was not protected by the First Amendment, the decision’s most important aspect was in basing the decision making process on community, rather than national, standards.<sup>105</sup> Crucially, *Miller* continued the trend of focusing the judicial lens on *public* regulation of obscenity, rather than expanding it into the private spaces of the home. For owners and patrons, the issue was complex and raised questions: was the motel truly private in the same sense as the home? Did the temporary nature of the space change that status? The possible answers to such questions did not escape adult motel owners looking for protection from the types of prosecutions that were facing others in the adult industry. For example, in August 1973, the owner of Sir Waight’s Court, an adult motel in Kansas City, publicly challenged the *Miller* decision by suggesting motels afford the same right to privacy as the home, clearly marking the temporary space as one that came with protection from legal interference.<sup>106</sup>

What the motel owners were arguing for, in effect, was to remove the focus on the

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<sup>105</sup> *Miller v. California*. 413 U.S. 15. Supreme Court of the United States. 21 June 1973. *LexisNexis*. Web.

<sup>106</sup> “Motels ‘Privacy’ Shield on Porn?,” *Variety* 22 August 1973: 11.

The pronouncement by Sir Waight’s Court was not made in relation to an obscenity prosecution or even arrest; instead, it seems more of a publicity stunt designed to alleviate community concerns in Kansas City that the motel was violating the law. I have found no records of the motel facing any sort of legal action related to exhibiting adult films, which makes this action historically curious. Additionally, it is the only record of any adult motel taking this particular stance on the issue, which seems a highly logical one given the inherent privacy of any motel.

content and place it back on space: as the Court had already shown in *Stanley v. Georgia*, adults had a right to privacy—even for obscenity—as long as it remained in the home.

This raises new historical questions: what was the content in the adult motels? Who were the suppliers, and who was performing in the films? What was the supply chain bringing adult film into the motels? A reassembling of this picture reveals an underground economy existing on questionably legal margins. The motels played a combination of stag films and loops, cheaply produced shorts, pirated copies of films then in general release in adult theaters, and possibly locally produced material made for the motels. This also answers the question posed at the beginning of this dissertation, regarding the “cheap homemade videotapes” seen by Joseph Slade in the theaters in Times Square, which were also probably a combination of these types.<sup>107</sup> A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* described the offerings in 1975: “Some are bootlegged versions of today’s porn classics such as *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Memories Within Miss Aggie* (1974). Some are old, time-worn stag flicks. All are edited, not for taste, but because they must fit on a one-hour video cassette.”<sup>108</sup> Offerings at other motels were similarly eclectic. For example, the President Motel in Atlantic City, in late 1973, in addition to *Deep Throat*, offered six films: *Mother, Brother, and I* (1973), *Pledge Sister* (1973), *Diary of a Bed* (1972), *Teenage Love Goddess* (date unknown), *Mona Gets Her Gun* (date unknown), and *Wet, Wild, and Weird* (date unknown). The first three of these, “one-day wonders” that were produced quickly and cheaply, were all playing in low-rent

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<sup>107</sup> When I asked Slade directly about the material that he had seen more than 40 years earlier in Times Square, he confirmed that the tapes were U-Matic transfers of catalogue titles or quickie productions made locally for sale directly to the theaters. Time, of course, is not on the side of historians in this regard, and it is impossible now to determine precisely what the material was and who produced it. Joseph Slade. Email with the author. 15 March 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Stingley, “Middle Class Tunes in, Turns On,” F1.

theaters in Los Angeles at the same time as the motels, while the latter three were probably quickie productions released first on 8-or-16-mm for the home/stag market and then transferred to videotape for sale to adult motel owners.<sup>109</sup> *Deep Throat*, of course, was a cultural phenomenon, and used by adult motels as a draw.

Owners were hesitant to talk about their supply chains, occasionally even venturing into absurd territory to deny knowledge of how they acquired their primary products. Leon, for example, told a reporter: “I don’t even know what kind of films they have. We show whatever the market is. I don’t know who supplies the market.” Yet, a “knowledgeable source” told the reporter off the record that “the films are pirated copies of regular porn movies and are sold on the streets.”<sup>110</sup> Clearly, an underground economy thrived in Los Angeles circulating not only the stag films and quickie productions that were a fixture in adult bookstores and the back pages of magazines, but also the feature film playing in adult theaters.<sup>111</sup>

This widespread, organized, and efficient bootlegging economy shipped pirated prints (of both mainstream and adult films) around North America and the rest of the world. In February 1975, to cite a prominent example, police arrested a Manhattan man in possession of more than 500 master copies of film prints, many of them adult titles,

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<sup>109</sup> *Diary of a Bed, Mother, Brother, and I, and Pledge Sister* all played at The 1<sup>st</sup> Run theaters in Los Angeles in spring 1973, a small venue that operated in conjunction with The Venture, The Sandbox, and The Roxie. These film titles were advertised on the same pages of the *Los Angeles Times* as the adult motels. See: The 1st Run Theater. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 20 April 1973: 114; The 1st Run Theater. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 1 June 1973: H23; The 1st Run Theater. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 20 June 1973: 114.

<sup>110</sup> Stingley, “Squares Amid the Alien Porn,” 14.

<sup>111</sup> For a first-hand account of the mechanics of piracy, see: Bob Navins and Howard Polskin, “I Knew It Was the Feds the Moment I Drove up to My Office,” *Panorama* August 1980: 39-42.

which he was transferring to video for sale to motels around the United States.<sup>112</sup> Well before the adult video industry was an established, professionalized system, bootleggers and adult motel owners already had a process in place to transfer, edit, and exhibit adult video for paying customers. Film piracy had plagued the motion picture industry from its inception, but the rise in postwar availability of 16mm projectors to the consumer market led to a subsequent increase in interest in film collecting that blossomed in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>113</sup> With the renewed interest in copyright law in the early 1970s (beginning with the Sound Recording Amendment of 1971 and culminating in the Copyright Act in 1976), film studios and the MPAA, along with FBI, began vigorously cracking down on pirates, eventually resulting in raids in 1974 and 1975 on collectors and dealers that recovered more than \$2 million in films and \$150 million in equipment.<sup>114</sup> Adult motels represent an outgrowth of such technological capability, essentially creating an alternative exhibition space based on the availability of a commodity that was already on the margins of legality.

Indeed, the question of whether or not adult films retained copyright protection in the first place was a legal gray area in the mid-1970s, offering adult motel owners a

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<sup>112</sup> The scope and scale of the evidence collected by police stunned Hollywood studios. Sol Winkler was grossing as much as \$500,000 per year on the sale of bootlegged videotapes, copied from film prints stolen (or borrowed) from television stations, film libraries, and airlines. Winkler had copies of current releases such as *Lenny* and *The Towering Inferno* in his collection, along with a massive variety of material that included hard-core pornography. The primary customers for Winkler's operation, according to police, were hotel owners who had installed closed-circuit television systems. See: Jr. Robert McG. Thomas, "Suspect in Piracy of Films Seized," *New York Times* 20 February 1975: 1, 38; "Raid on Print Pirate; Title Range Shock," *Variety* 26 February 1975: 28.

<sup>113</sup> For the most extensive history of film piracy (but no mention of adult film), see: Kerry Segrave, *Piracy in the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: McFarland & Co Inc., 2003).

<sup>114</sup> James Monaco, "Stealing the Show: The Piracy Problem," *American Film* 3.9 (1 July 1978): 57-67; Decherney 155-169; Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 448-460.

unique sense of security. Police, for example, acknowledged that the tapes in the adult motels were “not always obtained legally,” but added, “We really don’t care if they are pirated or not, since whoever is suffering these thefts is not reporting them.”<sup>115</sup> On a practical level, the companies suffering the thefts were aware that the “suffering” could garner no legal relief. As the *Miller* case decided, obscenity had no First Amendment protection—which most assumed also meant no copyright protection. Given that definitions of obscenity were in tremendous flux after *Miller*, and based in local rather than national standards, most adult film producers were wary of seeking legal protection for the continual bootlegging that plagued the industry. Even after the industry began moving toward legitimacy, piracy continued. In 1978, Norm Arno’s S&L Distributors, which produced and distributed loops (and other adult material), changed their name to VCX and moved into adult video, but did so by pirating the tapes then being produced by rival TVX.<sup>116</sup> In addition, in 1986, *Videography* magazine openly accused Show/Tapes, a small distributor in Miami, Florida, of bootlegging adult material. “The fact that the company switches addresses frequently,” the magazine wrote, “and is now operating out of a P.O. box does not help its credibility.”<sup>117</sup> In fact, it was not until 1979 that the courts recognized that whether or not an adult film was obscene was a separate issue from whether or not it had copyright protection. In *Mitchell Brothers Film Group v. Cinema*

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<sup>115</sup> “Motels with X-Rated Films Thrive on Coast,” 22.

<sup>116</sup> David Jennings, *Skinflicks: The Inside Story of the X-Rated Video Industry* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2000) 70-71.

<sup>117</sup> “Show/Tapes,” *Videography* June 1978: 26.

In the same issue, the magazine outlined the complicated web that early adult video distributors found themselves in regarding copyright. Show/Tapes was offering *Deep Throat*, which they claimed to have purchased from Sal Esposito of Scorpio Films in Reseda, California—but those rights were actually owned by Plymouth Distributors of Brooklyn, New York. See: “Star Wars Story,” *Videography* June 1978: 65.

*Adult Theater*, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a theater owner who had played a bootleg version of *Behind the Green Door* (1972) could not claim as a defense that the film was obscene and therefore not entitled to copyright protection.<sup>118</sup> Even after that point, however, the adult film industry was (and continues to be) beset by piracy problems unique to the industry given a cultural climate bent often bent on declaring pornography and obscenity to be the same thing and therefore entitled to no legal protections.<sup>119</sup> For the adult motels in the 1970s, however, the lack of established case law on the subject meant the gray area offered some protection from, at the very least, copyright violations even as they were under constant obscenity-related scrutiny.

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<sup>118</sup> Mitchell Brothers Film Group v. Cinema Adult Theater. 604 F.2d 852. United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. 16 October 1979. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 26 February 2013.

<sup>119</sup> Despite the copyright protection offered by the court in 1979, piracy never went away in the adult film industry. In 1986, Caballero Video and the Mitchell Brothers won a \$150,000 judgment against rival Worldwide Video for selling their tapes. Mark Reigel of Universal Video, based out of Akron, Ohio, was openly selling bootleg videos of virtually every title in existence at the August 1986 VSDA trade show in Las Vegas. A month later, 22 incensed adult video companies won a restraining order barring Universal from further operation until a class-action lawsuit was settled. In 1987, Movieland Entertainment Centers was ordered to pay Caballero Video more than \$90,000 in damages and costs for illegally selling twelve of their titles, a judgment that put Movieland out of business.

See: Jennings, *Skinflicks*, 125; "Courts Put Restraining Order on Alleged Video Pirate," *Adult Video News Confidential* February 1987: 9; "Texas Duper Ordered to Pay Caballero," *Adult Video News Confidential* April 1987: 4; "Universal Video Focus of Copyright Infringement Suit," *Adult Video News Confidential* November 1986: 3-4.

For a thorough legal analysis of the issues of adult film, obscenity, and copyright, see: Nicole Chaney, "Cybersex: Protecting Sexual Content in the Digital Age," *The John Marshall Review of Intellectual Property Law*.11 (Spring 2012): 815-840.

Copyright continues to haunt the adult film industry, particularly concerning films from the era in which the industry was not concerned with protecting its investment, but continue to hold tremendous monetary value. VCX and Arrow Productions, for example, submitted a stipulation that was approved by a judge that would prevent VCX from distributing *Deep Throat* (which Arrow believed it owned) and Arrow from distributing *Debbie Does Dallas* (which VCX believed it owned)—despite the possibility that both films were technically in the public domain, thus demonstrating the complicated landscape upon which adult films continue to reside.

See: Eriq Gardner. "How a Nasty Legal Fight over 'Deep Throat,' 'Debbie Does Dallas' Was Settled." *hollywoodreporter.com*. Hollywood Reporter. 26 October 2011. Web. 26 February 2013.

There was another method available to the adult motels for avoiding piracy: going into production for themselves. A detail buried in a 1973 article on the motels stands out in stark relief: an owner of three locations admitted that he had started production on his own line of videotapes—an important and overlooked moment in cinema history. An unnamed “well-known pornographer” who stayed at his motel had suggested the idea. In partnership with other, unnamed people, the owner produced more than 50 original tapes by mid-1973, and had plans for 50 more. Describing some of the tapes as “sex instruction films,” complete with clinical narration, the owner noted his clientele: “Some of our older guests have a lot of hang-ups about sex. Watching these films, in the privacy of their own room, with a bed right there to practice on, can help them overcome their problems.”<sup>120</sup> Such a strategy, however well-meaning, was also designed to preempt judicial action: given that laws (including the *Miller* decision, which came a week after this article ran in the *Los Angeles Times*) required material to have “scientific value” in order to be free of obscenity, such clinical approaches were designed to withstand possible legal challenges.<sup>121</sup> These videotapes, lost to history, represent some of the earliest shot-on-

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<sup>120</sup> Shaw 23.

This “medicalization” of sexual pleasure is a common one throughout adult film (and video) history. The mixing of pleasure and education through adult film is both historically explored and theorized by Robert Eberwein, who links it to a larger cultural system in which pleasure is simultaneously contained and encouraged. Eberwein’s efforts, linking Michel Foucault’s theories on power and pleasure to the history of medical and education “sex films,” represent an important and ongoing set of research into the various “justifications” often used by and for spectators (and the industry) regarding pornography. See: Robert Eberwein, *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

<sup>121</sup> Such framing devices became a fixture of adult video, typically in the form of an “expert” who would introduce the medical and scientific benefits of the material that follows. This fits right in to the long history of such practices in exploitation film. Schaefer details the “square up” as a standard practice in that genre, which he describes as a “prefatory statement about the social or moral ill the film claimed to combat,” while simultaneously preparing (and titillating) audiences for those same elements. See: Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 69-73.

video pornography in North America, and illustrate the ways in which adult motel owners prefigured not only the exhibition side of the adult video industry, but the production side as well.<sup>122</sup>

The mechanics of this underground economy connecting bootleggers to adult motel owners to spectators links this history back to George Atkinson. In order to identify the final pieces of this puzzle, it is crucial to examine what exactly Atkinson was doing in Los Angeles (and who he was doing it with) before the moment in which he became the “father” of modern home video rental in 1977. It is there that the pre-history of adult video finally becomes slightly clearer, and how the concerns of public versus private exhibition coalesce into an industrial solution seized by the adult film industry.

*George Atkinson and “The Privacy of Your Own Home”*

Born to a British father and Russian mother in Shanghai in 1935, George Atkinson spent two years in a Japanese prison camp during World War II before moving first to Canada and then to Los Angeles, where he graduated from UCLA with a degree

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<sup>122</sup> While details as to whether or not other motel owners were involved in production are scarce, one other, disturbing detail does recur in the discourse that might also be better termed an “urban legend” rather than a stable fact. According to police reports, at least one motel used a two-way mirror in one of the rooms in order to capture patrons’ sexual activity on camera for use in later footage. Such accounts (that might very well be true), I would argue, serve two purposes: first, they prop up a cultural belief that the police were “protecting” the public from perverted motel owners; and, second, they circulate a belief that adult motels (and pornography) were dangerous, unpredictable places that could only get patrons into “trouble.”

It is not surprising that another common discourse at the time, also circulated by police, was that the motels were running an elaborate extortion ring, in which patrons who checked in with a “girlfriend” were being subjected to blackmail plots. Both the “two-way mirror” and “extortion” discourses ultimately serve as containment strategies on pleasure, seeking to keep “innocent” members of the public from going too far in pursuit of sexual satisfaction.

See: Shaw; Stingley, “Middle Class Tunes in, Turns On,” 7.

in English.<sup>123</sup> After a decade-long effort trying to make it as an actor (which progressed as far as bit parts on television shows such as *Mannix* and *Burke's Law*, along with extra work), Atkinson was, by 1975, recently divorced, facing a growing drinking problem, and living in the back of his storefront on Wilshire Boulevard in West Hollywood.<sup>124</sup> From that base, he had been scraping together a living selling and renting various portable movie technologies since the late 1960s.<sup>125</sup> It was in roughly 1968 that he first saw the Technicolor Instant Movie Projector, an ingenious, affordable device first released in 1962 and designed to play 8mm film on "Magi-Cartridges," which allowed users to simply drop in the film and press a single button rather than tinkering with reels and sprockets.<sup>126</sup> It was another feature that jumped out at Atkinson, however: the projector allowed viewers to play back the 50-foot cartridges (4 ½ minutes) on a continuous loop. That capability, of course, mirrored the peep show booth and its ability to run back short adult films continuously for paying customers. Atkinson clearly realized the potential to take the peep show booth out of the adult bookstore and into more private spaces.

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<sup>123</sup> Bayot A23; McLellan B17.

<sup>124</sup> Greg Hernandez, "Prerecorded Visionary Creator of Videos for Rent Living Simple Life 25 Years after Concept Changed U.S.," *Daily News* 13 December 2002: B1.

<sup>125</sup> Lardner, "How Hollywood Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the VCR" N14.

<sup>126</sup> Alfred W. Lees, "Sit Back and Enjoy Yourself: New Projectors Put on the Whole Show," *Popular Science* March 1962: 73-74.

It is slightly unclear which model of the Technicolor Instant Movie Projector Atkinson saw in 1968, as the handful of accounts of the encounter lack specificity. However, two clues assist in further identifying the model: Lardner notes that the machine was designed for use as an "industrial training and promotional device," and Atkinson used the machine, as he claimed later, to rent "two hours of movies in half-hour cartridges" to his customers. These signs point to the model being the Technicolor 1000 series (either the A or B model) which was first released in 1968, used primarily for industrial films, and had the capability of playing 580-foot cartridges for a total of 29 minutes. See: Lardner, *Fast Forward* 170; "Conversations with George Atkinson," *Videography* June 1982: 50.

In James Lardner's two primary (and seminal) historical accounts of the birth of the home video industry, as well as Atkinson's own brief recollection, this discovery of the Technicolor projector led to the realization that older, public domain films could be rented to the public for "parties."<sup>127</sup> Atkinson, as Lardner describes it, "sold the idea as a form of free entertainment to Howard Johnson, Holiday Inns, and Shakey's Pizza, among other clients," who set about showing Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin films on continuous loops.<sup>128</sup> He also installed the Sony U-Matic in area bars after its release in 1971, using closed-circuit channels to play boxing tapes that he had licensed from Jimmy Jacobs, whose companies The Greatest Fights of the Century and Big Fights Inc. companies distributed classic boxing matches on film.<sup>129</sup>

In these various activities, Atkinson participated in the economy of film distribution outside of conventional, mainstream exhibition sites, joining others in that small, but thriving, pre-video public domain industry. Blackhawk Films, Thunderbird Films, Cinema Concepts, Reel Images, and MalJack Films were just a few of the early distributors of public domain material, making steady income renting and selling film prints to collectors, school, churches, and museums.<sup>130</sup> MalJack, headed by Waleed and Malik Ali, operated in the Midwest, and very successfully cornered the public domain

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<sup>127</sup> Lardner, "How Hollywood Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the VCR" N14; Lardner, *Fast Forward* 170; "Conversations with George Atkinson," 51.

<sup>128</sup> Lardner, *Fast Forward*, 170; "Conversations with George Atkinson" 51.

<sup>129</sup> "Conversations with George Atkinson" 51.

Jacobs, an avid boxing film collector (and world champion handball player), founded the two companies with fellow collector Bill Clayton in 1959, and the two ultimately amassed nearly 30,000 boxing films. See: Robert H. Boyle. "Really the Greatest." *sportsillustrated.cnn.com*. Sports Illustrated. 7 March 1966. Web. 2 March 2013.

<sup>130</sup> Samuel K. Rubin, *Moving Pictures and Classic Images: Memories of Forty Years in the Vintage Film Hobby* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004).

market before turning to video distribution and production in the 1980s with MPI Home Video. Like Atkinson, MalJack supplied Shakey's Pizza locations with the Laurel and Hardy and Chaplin films that the company relied upon as part of its nostalgic image.<sup>131</sup> Public domain film distribution was a grey area that frequently tipped into outright piracy. The most famous example was Tom Dunnahoo, owner of Thunderbird Films, who began his career as a bootlegger, until federal marshals raided his operation in 1971 and charged with selling an illegal print of *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965). Eleven major Hollywood distributors subsequently sued him for copyright infringement, and he agreed to abide by a court order to stop selling pirated material. He turned instead to selling films that had fallen out of copyright, building a successful operation by the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, Dunnahoo, like other members of the underground film economy in the early 1970s, maintained his own lab to process duplicates from prints.<sup>132</sup> It is not surprising that Atkinson maintained links during this period to public domain distributors, given that they were the source of much of the available material his business depended upon.

What these "official" histories leave out is that much of what Atkinson's business depended upon was pornography. Well before his 7 December 1977 advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times*, the moment in which he became the "father" of home video rental, Atkinson was renting adult films to consumers in Southern California on cassette, and

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<sup>131</sup> Nicholas Jarecki, *Breaking In: How 20 Film Directors Got Their Start* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001) 190-201; Waleed Ali, "Home Video's Pioneers: In Their Own Words," *TWICE: This Week in Consumer Electronics* 17-21 August 1987: 32-33.

<sup>132</sup> Vernon Scott, "Pirates of the Film Kingdom," *Los Angeles Times* 23 April 1976: E22; Joe McBride, "28-Yr. Renewal Failure Throws Films into Public Doman, and onto Ex-Pirate's Lawful List," *Variety* 28 August 1974: 5, 28; William K. Knoedelseder Jr., "Confessions of a Hollywood Film Pirate," *Los Angeles Times* 22 July 1977: G1; David Pierce, "Forgotten Faces: Why Some of Our Cinema Heritage Is Part of the Public Domain," *Film History* 19.2 (2007): 125-143.

circulating within the same underground economy as the pirates, public domain operators, bar owners, and adult motel managers. Indeed, traces of evidence from this era point squarely to Atkinson being an integral part of the supply chain providing adult films to all non-theatrical exhibition spaces in Los Angeles in the mid-1970s. The Technicolor projector and Magi-Cartridges, the films to motels, and the U-Matic machines he was supplying to bars were, in fact, the cornerstones of an adult film business. Before 1977, Atkinson called his company Home Theater Systems, and it was located in the same 600-square-foot storefront that would later rent the first Hollywood films on tape in the United States.

Home Theater Systems began advertising in the *Los Angeles Times* on 8 June 1975. The first ad, located on the “adult movies/entertainment” page alongside the adult movie theater listings, made the company’s product offering perfectly clear:

Revolutionary film cassettes are here! Now like never before enjoy adult entertainment in the privacy and comfort of your own home! With the simple push of a button, you can now have instant BIG SCREEN ENTERTAINMENT in your own LIVING ROOM. We RENT the entire show—Automatic Technicolor Projector, Large 5x5 ft. Screen and a large variety of ‘X’ Color Featurettes—all for a low price. Have an exciting Movie Party with your friends.<sup>133</sup>

The emphasis in the advertisement on both privacy and a rental system reveals the ingeniousness of Atkinson’s business model and its importance to the adult film industry. By 1975, well before moving on to Hollywood films, he knew there was significant

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<sup>133</sup> Home Theater Systems. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 8 June 1975: T48.

audience interest in watching pornography in the home, rather than in public, and in renting, rather than purchasing, the material. Atkinson, essentially, figured out how to sell *temporary* privacy. Where the adult motel owners used their business model (private rooms with closed-circuit television systems available for short-term rental) to expand the peep show booth, Atkinson went one step further, taking the peep show booth out of the public space altogether and dropping it, temporarily, into the most private (and legally protected) space possible: the home. It was nothing short of prefiguring what home video would bring to the market only a few years later.

With only slight variations in the copy, graphics, and layout, Atkinson ran the ads for Home Theater Systems in the *Los Angeles Times* in the “adult entertainment” section alongside the adult movie theater listings for the next 18 months. By early fall, Atkinson had a San Diego outlet—and was listing a price of \$25 for a 24-hour rental of “hundreds of films” from “Denmark, Hollywood, and France.”<sup>134</sup> The San Diego outlet was gone within a month, replaced by a second location in Orange County that would eventually be joined by a third in Santa Ana.<sup>135</sup> In June 1977, the advertisement added a historically significant second option beyond just the Technicolor projector and Magi-Cartridge tapes: “Betamax tapes also available” was added to the standard copy, making Atkinson among the first people in the United States to offer adult films on the format.<sup>136</sup> The

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<sup>134</sup> Home Theater Systems. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 24 August 1975: P46.

<sup>135</sup> Home Theater Systems. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 7 September 1975: R44; Home Theater Systems. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 18 September 1975: G16.

<sup>136</sup> The initial Betamax to go to market in the late 1975 in the United States was the LV-1901 console, consisting of a SL-6200 videocassette recorder built in to a 19" Sony Trinitron television set, retailing for \$2,495. The more common and familiar SI-7200 recorder/player deck was marketed the following spring, in early 1976, and retailed for \$1,400. For an overview of the creation and introduction of the Sony Betamax, see: Home Theater Systems. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 23 June 1977: G18; Marlow and Secunda 118-121.

material on the tapes, while not specified, was probably identical to what Atkinson was offering on the Magi-Cartridges, and the same that was being playing in the adult motels in the area at the same time: loop and stag films, and bootlegged versions of adult films then in general release.

The links between adult motel managers, bar owners, bootleggers, public domain operators, and Atkinson remain crucial for historians as they begin to unearth the transition of the adult film industry to videotape, as well as the pre-history of home video more generally. Atkinson was a major figure in the Los Angeles adult economy, but even the evidence as I have examined it fails to describe the significance of what Atkinson was doing between 1975 and 1977. For example, the adult motel owners obtained their films via a bootlegging underground frequently made up of the same people who were involved in the distribution of public domain films; at the same moment, Atkinson was supplying public domain films to area motels and restaurants. Furthermore, bars in Los Angeles—another of Atkinson’s customers—were playing pirated adult films over closed-circuit channels during this period.<sup>137</sup> While the only concrete extant evidence that Atkinson was involved at all in the underground adult film economy remains the Home Theater Systems advertisements, it is entirely reasonable to conclude that his inventory included pornography after he transitioned to a more professionalized business model foregrounding mainstream titles. The most important detail in this history is the *location* of Atkinson’s primary practices. While the adult motels extended the privacy of the peep show booth to the larger space of the rental room, Atkinson took the next logical step into the full privacy of the home, laying out the business model that he would take to

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<sup>137</sup> Kalton C. Lahue, “Get Ready for X-Rated TV!,” *Velvet* December 1978: 90.

tremendous success only a few years later. What happened to Home Theater Systems, and why Atkinson changed the business to Video Cassette Rentals, triggered the onset of the modern home video rental industry.

### *The Professionalizing of Home Video*

On 1 July 1977, publisher Arthur Sulzberger announced that the *New York Times* would begin limiting the size and content of adult film advertisements. Pornographic films, Sulzberger claimed, “are as much a blight in print as the displays for pornographic films are a blight on our city streets.”<sup>138</sup> While not an outright ban, the guidelines limited content to the name of the film, the name and address of the theater, the hours of performance, and the label “adults only.” On 23 August, Otis Chandler, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, inspired by that decision, instituted an outright ban on adult entertainment advertising. Chandler’s rigidly moralistic accompanying statement blasted the adult film industry, ignored legal precedent (such as the *Miller* decision), and fed directly into a growing cultural belief that there was something inherently “wrong” with pornography. “The truth is,” wrote Chandler, “we have been dealing with an indefensible product, one with absolutely no redeeming values, and this phenomenon shows no sign of leaving the contemporary social scene.”<sup>139</sup> Marketing Director Vance Stickel, mindful of the \$3 million in annual advertising revenue brought in from adult entertainment, disagreed strongly with Chandler’s decision—but the publisher held firm. Eventually, the adult theaters sued for \$44 million, claiming violations of their First Amendment rights

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<sup>138</sup> Anna Quindlen, “The Times Will Curb Ads for Pornographic Films,” *New York Times* 21 June 1977: 46.

<sup>139</sup> Otis Chandler, “Times Rejects Porno Ads,” *Los Angeles Times* 23 August 1977: G1.

and that the newspapers had conspired with Hollywood studios to put adult theaters out of business, but their claims were denied.<sup>140</sup>

The effect on the adult entertainment industry in Los Angeles should have been significant. The decision immediately shut out the adult motels, theaters, and Atkinson's Home Theater Systems from their primary advertising space. The final Home Theater Systems advertisement ran on 17 August 1977, less than a week before Chandler's decision, and then the company disappeared from print.<sup>141</sup> What Chandler could not have predicted, however, was that the technology that would eventually change an entire industry had already been lurking in the pages of *Los Angeles Times*. Just as Atkinson himself had advertised the availability of Betamax tapes in June 1977 in his advertisements, others, too, were sending the message in the newspaper's pages that adult films were available on the new format. On 20 January 1977, an audio/video store in Los Angeles named Video Visions advertised the availability of "adult video tapes for your Betamax," and, by 15 May, classified advertisements began running regularly in the video section for adult films priced at \$69.<sup>142</sup> For Atkinson, however, Chandler's decision left him scrambling for something new. In the interval between the final Home Theater Systems advertisement on 17 August and the first Video Cassette Rentals advertisement

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<sup>140</sup> Dennis McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001) 317; Marshall Berges, *The Life and Times of Los Angeles: A Newspaper, a Family, and a City* (New York: Atheneum, 1984) 208-209.

The Pussycat Theater chain, desperate to find a new advertising space, briefly ran television commercials in Southern California after the *LA Times* ban. See: "Take Hardcore Ads into Homes Via TV," *Variety* 11 January 1978: 1, 82.

<sup>141</sup> Home Theater Systems. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 17 August 1977: F16.

<sup>142</sup> Video Visions. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 20 January 1977: SE2.; Classified. Advertisement. *Los Angeles Times* 15 May 1977: A23.

on 7 December, Atkinson learned about a groundbreaking effort by Andre Blay's Magnetic Video that allowed him to make the next major move in home video history.

In mid-1977, in the Farmington Hills suburb of Detroit, Michigan, Blay was finally implementing a strategy he had been contemplating since graduate school: licensing Hollywood films for sale on home video.<sup>143</sup> The owner of a moderately successful audio/video operation that included distributing and servicing equipment, as well as some minor production of industrial and educational films, Blay had the two things most necessary to implement the sea change in the entertainment landscape: the idea (and moxie to approach the Hollywood studios), and the duplication facilities necessary to make that idea a reality.<sup>144</sup> Blay sent a letter to all the studios in 1976 (except Universal, which, based on industry reports, Blay did not think would be interested) seeking the right to license their catalogues. He received two responses. MGM was not interested, but Twentieth-Century-Fox was, leading to a contract in July 1977 that gave Magnetic Video the nonexclusive rights to 50 titles (chosen by Blay from a list of 100) for an advance of \$300,000, plus a minimum of \$500,000 per year against a \$7.50 royalty per tape.<sup>145</sup> While gearing up for the mass production of the tapes, to be distributed as part of the Video Club of America beginning in October, Blay thought of

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<sup>143</sup> As part of Michigan State University's Executive MBA program, Blay wrote a thesis in 1970 on the future of the consumer home video market. He based his research primarily on the sales of edited versions (usually 20 minutes long) of Hollywood film on 8-and-16-mm, sold typically in photography shops for around \$50. That research, right down to the price, formed the basis of his plan later for Magnetic Video. See: Andre A. Blay, *Pre-Recorded History: Memoirs of an Entertainment Entrepreneur* (Centennial, CO: Deer Track Publishing, 2010) 60-61.

<sup>144</sup> For an examination of Magnetic Video prior to the company's entry in licensing home video, see: Blay, *Pre-Recorded History*; Radcliffe Joe, "Magnetic Video Enters CTV Software as Triple-Front Producer," *Billboard* 3 April 1971: 35.

<sup>145</sup> Lardner, *Fast Forward* 163-170; McDonald 113; Ali, "Home Video's Pioneers: In Their Own Words," *TWICE: This Week in Consumer Electronics* 17-21 August 1987: 36-37.

an idea to reach a wide audience: advertise in the pages of *TV Guide*.<sup>146</sup> The first advertisement ran in the 26 November – 2 December issue, and the result was immediate success: from what was estimated to be 200,000 home video player owners, nine thousand people joined the Video Club of America.<sup>147</sup> Blay effectively professionalized the home video industry and pulled it out of the shadows of the bootlegging economy. One of the people Blay’s advertisements reached was a primary member of that economy: George Atkinson.

With a \$3,000 investment from a high school classmate, and through a local retailer willing to make the purchase (as it was under the \$8,000 wholesale minimum), Atkinson purchased two copies of each tape—one Beta and one VHS.<sup>148</sup> He put the 100 tapes on his store shelves, ran the 7 December advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times*, and put into motion what would become the home video rental industry.<sup>149</sup> While no

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<sup>146</sup> A membership in the Video Club of America cost \$10, which would then be applied to the first order. Tapes ran either \$39.95 or \$49.95 (\$69.95 for movies that were more than two hours—which had to be on two cassettes, as Blay decided to use only the two-hour tape format). Customers could return the cassettes for 50% off their next order. There were also tie-ins with Sony and RCA for discounts on the Betamax and SelectaVision players. See: Lardner, *Fast Forward: Hollywood, the Japanese, and the Onslaught of the VCR* 168-169.

<sup>147</sup> Video Club of America. Advertisement. *TV Guide* 26 November - 2 December 1977: 48-49; Lardner, *Fast Forward* 168.

<sup>148</sup> Lardner, *Fast Forward* 171; Hernandez, “Prerecorded Visionary Creator of Videos for Rent Living Simple Life 25 Years after Concept Changed U.S.,” B1.

<sup>149</sup> Atkinson initiated his rental concept even before thinking through the potential consequences. A month after opening, at the January 1978 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, he approached Blay and asked him if he could rent the Magnetic Video tapes to customers—to which Blay said he could not give permission. Atkinson then contacted Steve Roberts, President of Telecommunications at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, and asked him the same question. Roberts was curious, and suggested Atkinson outline the plan, which he assumed would include royalties. Eventually, Fox sent consultant Robert Townsend to visit Atkinson’s store, and he followed up a few weeks later with a phone call warning Atkinson off the rental strategy.

It was at that point that Atkinson’s attorney realized that the “First Sale” doctrine of the Copyright Act of 1976 (in which the copyright owner loses control of the copy after the first sale, permitting the new owner to dispose of the item as they see fit—including renting it to others) allowed Atkinson’s business model to stay intact. So long as he did not make unauthorized copies or publicly exhibit the films, Atkinson could rent the tapes without royalty payments. Atkinson would go on, particularly as the President of the Video

clear evidence exists, I would unhesitatingly argue that there were actually more than 100 tapes in that first video rental store. Given Atkinson's history as a participant in the underground adult film economy in Los Angeles, his prior marketing of adult films on the Betamax format, and his knowledge of the market for adult material in private spaces, there can be little doubt that his early inventory also included pornography. The first Video Cassette Rentals store, in other words, was also the first adult video rental store.<sup>150</sup>

### *Adult Films on Video: The Beginning*

All the elements were in place for the professionalization of the home video rental industry—including certain members of the adult film industry who were starting to make efforts at legitimizing the material by moving out of the bootlegging shadows. This early period, between 1976 and 1980, was a wild and somewhat disorganized era, made up initially of distributors searching for available catalogue titles. It started with Joel Jacobson, who had operated Cinema Concepts in Connecticut since the 1960s, a small company specializing in public domain art film distribution to churches and schools. As home video began expanding, Jacobson added U-Matic and Beta tapes to his inventory, and then, in 1976, realized there was a market for legitimately distributed adult material. In July 1976 Jacobson licensed exclusive video rights from Russ Meyer for five of his films: *Vixen* (1968), *Cherry, Harry, and Racquel* (1970), *Faster Pussycat, Kill, Kill* (1965), *Finders Keepers, Lovers Weepers* (1968), and *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959).

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Software Dealer's Association, to be a relentless champion of the First Sale doctrine. The accompanying struggles between early retailers and studios, in many ways, define the 1980s. See: George Rush, "Home Video Wars," *American Film* 10.6 (1 April 1985): 61-62; Lardner, *Fast Forward* 173-174.

<sup>150</sup> There was some precedent for renting adult films on celluloid. At least one adult bookstore, Party Time in San Jose, California, was renting celluloid adult films as early as February 1977. See: Party Time. Advertisement. *Berkeley Barb* 25 February - 3 March 1977: A12.

Jacobson gave Meyer a \$5,000 advance and 50% of the revenue for the deal.<sup>151</sup> Jacobson later added two films (with non-exclusive rights) from Radly Metzger, *The Lickerish Quarter* (1970), and *The Libertine* (1968), along with a French import, *Her and She and Him* (1970, dir. Max Pécas).<sup>152</sup> He started a new company, Home Cinema Service, to distribute the films, on U-Matic and Betamax tapes, and began advertising in *Videography* magazine in October 1976.<sup>153</sup> Given Jacobson's sole position in the market, he priced the tapes at a staggering \$300 (but quickly dropped prices to \$229, then \$129, then \$89.95, and finally settled at \$59.95).<sup>154</sup> A graduate school roommate of Jacobson's passed the story to a friend at *Playboy*, which published a short item on the company in

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<sup>151</sup> Jacobson graduated with a degree in Radio-Television from the University of Michigan in 1961, and then received an MA in Communications from the Annenberg School in Philadelphia. He worked at the William Morris Agency in New York with the hopes of becoming a literary agent, and started Cinema Concepts with his wife, Sue, as a side business. The two sold public domain prints on 8mm and 16mm to churches and schools, but Jacobson stressed to me that their were always "licensed" and legitimate, and that he did not deal in pirated material as he was trying to become an agent at the time and did not want to get into trouble. Jacobson contemplated adding hardcore to his Home Cinema Services catalog numerous times in the 1970s, but, again, wanted to avoid legal trouble. He continued to sell public domain films through his Cinema Concepts division after starting Home Cinema Services.

His deal with Meyer did not end well: when MCA tried to license the Meyer catalog through Jacobson for its DiscoVision player, the company insisted that Meyer also sign the contract, even though Jacobson had the sole non-theatrical rights to the films. Meyer refused to sign, and ended up suing Jacobson, arguing that the financial reports he was receiving were incorrect. Jacobson counter-sued, and ultimately was vindicated. At the end of the five-year deal, Meyer went with another distributor.

Jacobson ended up opening five very successful mainstream video stores in Hartford, Connecticut in the 1980s (all of which offered adult titles), and served on the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Video Software Dealers Association. However, in a familiar tale to anyone who studies home video history, the arrival of Blockbuster Video across the street from his primary location in the late 1980s eventually shuttered all of his stores—leading to his decision to open an adult video-only store to stay in business and make a living, given that adult video was the one element Blockbuster refused to offer. Eventually, Jacobson closed that store and now operates an online-only adult video operation under the name Cinema Concepts. See: Joel Jacobson. Personal interview. 18 June 2012; Joel Jacobson. Email with the author. 2 July 2012; Howard Polskin, "Pornography Unleashed," *Panorama* July 1980: 35-39; Mike Boone, "Business in Erotic Videotapes Booming," *Montreal Gazette* 2 October 1981: 1, 12.

<sup>152</sup> Jacobson also eventually signed a deal with Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine, to distribute "best of" compilations of Goldstein's public access television show *Midnight Blue*. See: Polskin 35-39.

<sup>153</sup> Cinema Concepts. Advertisement. *Videography* October 1976: 55.

<sup>154</sup> Polskin 37-38.

December.<sup>155</sup> The first widespread public advertisement for adult video occurred when Cinema Concepts (in a partnership with distributor Valentine Productions) ran an advertisement in *Oui* magazine in July 1977, representing a turning point in the professionalization of the adult video industry.<sup>156</sup>

Mark Slade, founder of Entertainment Video Releasing (EVR), was another pioneer. In October 1975 the former fashion photographer placed an ad in the *New York Times* seeking capital: “Investors sought for 500 motion pictures to be transferred to video disc for sale to the new upcoming mass consumer market.”<sup>157</sup> Though there is very little extant information on Slade, it seems clear that he was another of the public domain operators, amassing a huge variety of non-Hollywood material for this venture.<sup>158</sup> Yet he was also one of the earliest distributors of adult video: beginning in March 1977, EVR began offering several dozen exclusively licensed hardcore films on U-Matic and Betamax formats, including *Sometime Sweet Susan* (1975, dir. Fred Donaldson) and *Teenage Cowgirls* (1973, dir. Ted Denver).<sup>159</sup> A year later, Slade spun off that portion of EVR into National Video Marketing, as well as the International Video Movie Club, to distribute adult material as part of the “Movies at Midnight” series, which by then

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<sup>155</sup> “Tube Job!,” *Playboy* December 1976: 268.

<sup>156</sup> Valentine Products. Advertisement. *Oui* July 1977: 134.

Valentine Productions was headed by a friend of Jacobson’s who primarily distributed magazines in the United States and England and had favorable advertising deals in publications such as *Oui*. Jacobson gave him a 50% split to advertise and distribute the Home Cinema Service tapes using these deals. Joel Jacobson. Personal interview. 18 June 2012.

<sup>157</sup> Entertainment Video Releasing. Advertisement. *New York Times* 12 October 1975: 224.

<sup>158</sup> Polskin 37.

<sup>159</sup> “Erotic Entertainment,” *Videography* March 1977: 63.

included *Memories Within Miss Aggies* (1974) and *Portrait* (1974), both directed by Gerard Damiano.<sup>160</sup>

Other companies entered around this time, too, with similar models. In March 1977, Magnetic Communications of Oklahoma City sent flyers to 3,000 industrial video equipment dealers advertising 20 adult videos—which they began offering to the general public in June.<sup>161</sup> Astronics Tele-Cine debuted in late 1977, with U-Matic, Betamax, and VHS offerings, eventually including Alex DeRenzy’s titles such as *Babyface* (1977) and *Pretty Peaches* (1978), and advertising in *Penthouse* and *Billboard* magazine.<sup>162</sup> Adult film producer and director Beau Buchanan started the International Home Video Club in spring 1978, aggressively taking out full-page advertisements in *Variety* and *Hustler* magazine to market his collection of adult titles, which included his own 1977 film *Captain Lust* (written, coincidentally, by Stephen Ziplow) and selections from the Mitchell Brothers such as *Behind the Green Door* (1972). He also offered mainstream material.<sup>163</sup> Buchanan, echoing Atkinson’s Home Cinema Services strategy, trumpeted the potential of his products in advertisements: “X-Rated and other exciting movies in the privacy of your own home! Watch what you want when you want to watch it!”<sup>164</sup> The Mitchell Brothers, in addition to licensing their vast (and highly profitable) catalog to

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<sup>160</sup> “Porn Again,” *Videography* March 1978: 85; “National Video Marketing,” *Videography* June 1978: 25; “International Video Movie Club,” *Village Voice* 28 August 1978: 65; “X Marks the Spot,” *Videography* June 1977: 25.

<sup>161</sup> Polskin 37.; Magnetic Communications. Advertisement. *Videography* June 1977: 62.

<sup>162</sup> Astronics Tele-Cine. Advertisement. *Videography* December 1977: 51; Astronics Tele-Cine. Advertisement. *Penthouse* December 1978: 207; Astronics Tele-Cine. Advertisement. *Billboard* 17 November 1979: HV-10.

<sup>163</sup> “X Marks the Spot” 25.

<sup>164</sup> International Home Video. Advertisement. *Variety* 5 May 1979: 247.

others, formed their Film Group in mid-1978 to distribute their tapes, advertising widely in places such as *Penthouse* and *Home Video* magazines.<sup>165</sup> They even opened a video store at their famed O'Farrell Theater in San Francisco, and began taping the live sex shows in the "Ultra Room," a live performance space, for offer to the home market, which eventually included *Never a Tender Moment* (1979) and *Beyond De Sade* (1979), both featuring Marilyn Chambers, as well as *Honeysuckle Divine, Live!* (1979), featuring the titular performer in her notorious stage act.<sup>166</sup> Freeway Video Enterprises, a spinoff of Freeway Films, founded in the 1960s by Armand Atamian, Lee Frost, and Bob Cresse, began marketing their well-known Golden Age productions starring John Holmes and directed by Bob Chinn (known as the "Johnny Wadd" series) in early 1979.<sup>167</sup>

Many small distributors entered the scene in the late 1970s, and nearly all disappeared just as quickly as they had arrived. Between 1978 and 1979, for example, *Videography* magazine ran advertisements for Diverse Industries, Erotic Tape Company, Discotronics Films, Inc., Channel X Video, A-1 Video Services, Video Home Entertainment, Video Dimensions, Brentwood, and Hollywood Film Exchange, all of which quickly faded from the landscape.<sup>168</sup> All of these companies were selling catalogue titles, digging into the past to offer customers adult material on home video formats, and profiting from the huge archive of adult material that producers were happy to license. By April 1979, in fact, *Playboy* magazine claimed that "just about every top-quality X-rated

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<sup>165</sup> Mitchell Bros. Advertisement. *Videography* June 1978: 70; Mitchell Bros. Advertisement. *Penthouse* November 1978: 202; Mitchell Bros. Advertisement. *Home Video* March 1981: 64.

<sup>166</sup> "Video Porn," *Velvet Talks!* 5 (1979): 25; "Mitchell Bros.," *Videography* July 1978: 65.

<sup>167</sup> "Freeway Video Enterprises," *Videography* March 1979: 100.

<sup>168</sup> See *Videography* magazine, between January 1978 and June 1979.

movie made in the past several years can be legitimately purchased over the counter,” and that adult titles made up two-thirds of all available content on the new format.<sup>169</sup> The promise of Atkinson’s business model, which took the pleasures of the peep booth private, finally found fruition, albeit in a wild landscape lacking stabilization and long-term strategy.

While these early distributors helped to establish the market, others solidified it and laid the foundation for the staggering success that followed. In the spring of 1977, Robert Sumner’s lease on the World Theater in New York, where he had premiered *Deep Throat* in 1972 to record crowds, was set to run out. As president of Mature Pictures in New York, he decided to make his library available on video, as well as licensing the films of the Mitchell Brothers, Alex De Renzy, and Radley Metzger. He also claimed to have developed a proprietary system that would prevent the pirating of his material, which he would duplicate himself rather than outsource. With a \$75,000 initial investment, Sumner began selling an inventory of thirty cassettes for \$110 each at the East World Theater, another location he managed.<sup>170</sup> His booth at a video convention in Manhattan in the summer of 1977 was the only one to offer actual films of any kind on cassettes, let alone adult material, and business grew so rapidly that he formed a separate company, Quality X, for the venture.<sup>171</sup> In October 1977, he began advertising in *Screw*

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<sup>169</sup> “Tuning into the Video-Tape Scene,” *Playboy* April 1979: 203.

<sup>170</sup> “Video Tapes & Cable Add up to Increased Profits for Mature Films,” *The Film Journal* 4 May 1981: 20; James Cook, “The X-Rated Economy,” *Forbes* 18 September 1978: 81-92; Lahue 29, 89-91; Polskin, 35-39; “Small Screen Porno.” NBC Evening News. Nbc. New York, 15 February 1979. Television.

<sup>171</sup> Tony Schwartz, “The TV Pornography Boom,” *New York Times* 13 September 1981: 44, 120, 122, 127, 132, 136.

magazine, the first major adult video distributor to offer hardcore material through such methods, making the company the first significant player in the market.<sup>172</sup>

Others in that group of significant early companies included TVX, founded by legendary exploitation filmmaker Dave Friedman with former notorious pirate Curt Richter and Phillip Bernstene in 1975 (though it is unclear when their tapes officially entered the market). The two would rapidly turn the company into one of the largest early distributors, boasting that they were they were the “first and largest manufacturer,” carrying an enormous inventory and supplying more than 400 stores by 1979.<sup>173</sup>

Friedman, like Sumner and others in this early period, recognized the potential of legitimizing the industry and moving it out of the bootlegging shadows. The 1979 TVX catalog, in fact, stressed the link between legitimacy and quality that TVX was aiming for: “TVX Features: The finest quality adult film video cassettes. Because of their immense popularity, TVX tapes are pirated. Why buy from these bootleggers? Why get ripped off by fly-by-night pirates who sell you 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> generation copies of TVX tapes?”<sup>174</sup> It was all part of a strategy (much like Sumner’s) to garner a larger, more legitimate market—which TVX captured, in part, by also distributing mainstream titles.

Friedman’s influence extended beyond Los Angeles. In July 1978, he convinced longtime adult film producer, distributor, and theater owner Arthur Morowitz (who, along

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<sup>172</sup> Quality X. Advertisement. *Screw* 10 October 1977: 29.

<sup>173</sup> Chute, “Wages of Sin, II,” 60; TVX. Advertisement. *Videography* June 1979: 40; “TVX Distributors,” *Videography* June 1979: 46; TVX. Advertisement. *Billboard* 14 April 1979: 60.

For more on Friedman’s immense importance to adult film history as an exploitation filmmaker, see: Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*; David Chute, “The Wages of Sin,” *Film Comment* 22.4 (July 1986): 32-48.

<sup>174</sup> TVX Distributors, *TVX Video Cassettes: X-Rated Motion Pictures on Video Tape, 1979 Catalog* (1979).

with Howard Farber founded Distribpix in 1965) to sell TVX tapes in the lobby of one of his adult theaters in New York.<sup>175</sup> Morowitz later recounted what happened next: “After one week I sold seven cassettes [for \$100 each] and I was paid 50% each, so in a short time I made \$350 without doing anything. At that point I committed myself totally to video.”<sup>176</sup> That commitment turned into two of the earliest video stores in the United States, Sweetheart’s Home Video Center, located in the lobbies of The World Theater and the Manhattan Twin theater. By October 1978, Morowitz was advertising the stores in *Videography* magazine as having “the largest stock of adult rated video cassettes in New York,” carrying TVX tapes from Friedman, Quality-X tapes from Sumner, and his own line, called Video-X-Pix, which offered the Distribpix catalog. Prices were set at \$89.50 for Betamax and \$99.50 for VHS.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Schwartz 44.

Friedman, in late summer 1979, similarly convinced Lou Sher, owner of Sherpix and the 28-location Art Theatre Guild adult movie house chain, to sell adult videos in his theater lobbies. By early 1981, more than 75 adult theaters sold videotapes in their lobbies, carrying mainstream titles alongside the adult offerings, with the mainstream fare selling at twice the rate of adult. Friedman and Morowitz spoke on the subject at the 1981 Show-West convention in Reno, Nevada, urging theater owners to adopt the model—or, as Morowitz had done, to lease property nearby and set up dedicated video stores. See: Will Tusher, “Sexplicit Sites Turn Lobbies into Porn Videocassette Marts; Also Find Non-Erotica Sells,” *Variety* 4 February 1981: 5, 30.

While the “video store inside the movie theater” concept never really took off, some smaller chains and independent theater owners did occasionally try the strategy in the mid-1980s after it resurfaced at the 1984 ShoWest convention in Las Vegas. With the larger established chains not interested in having the competition directly inside their primary business, however, the trend quietly disappeared. See: Alan Karp, “Selling Video in the Theatre,” *Box Office* June 1984: 9-10, 16-19; Randy Lewis, “Movies: Popcorn and Videos,” *Los Angeles Times* 30 August 1984: 1, 4; Dick Polman, “Pornography Is Moving from the Big Screen to the Living Room,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 28 August 1985: D1.

<sup>176</sup> P.D. Rastee, “Video Porn: The Retail Lowdown from Video Shack’s Arthur Morowitz,” *The Film Journal* 4 March 1983: 41, 49.

<sup>177</sup> Sweetheart’s Home Video Centers. Advertisement. *Videography* October 1978: 97

That one of the first Sweetheart’s locations was in The World Theater, and that Quality-X tapes were among those stocked, is not a historical coincidence. Robert Sumner was the manager of The World just before this period, as I have outlined, and his connections to Morowitz were extensive. It seems Morowitz took over the lease at The World when Sumner left. Sumner was also president of Sam Lake’s Mature

By January 1979, Sweetheart's was doing well enough that *Screw* publisher Al Goldstein even mentioned the stores in an interview (along with TVX), and Morowitz began making plans to expand the operation.<sup>178</sup> In spring 1979, Morowitz opened Video Shack in a small, 500-square foot storefront, which carried all manner of mainstream and adult titles.<sup>179</sup> Shortly after, Morowitz moved to what would become his flagship store in a 3,000 square-foot location on Broadway, eventually growing into a multi-store chain and establishing him as a powerful player in the video rental industry, culminating in a decade-long stint as the president of the Video Software Dealer's Association.<sup>180</sup> Like Atkinson, Morowitz's early history as one of the key participants in the foundation of the adult video industry (not to mention his prior work in adult film) have been overlooked in favor of focusing on the formation of Video Shack; meanwhile, Sweetheart's Video, arguably the first adult video store in the United States, has been all but ignored.<sup>181</sup>

Among the many other companies who joined the field in the late 1970s and assisted in establishing the adult video distribution marketplace and solidifying its business structures and practices were Arrow Video with Lou Peraino, Cal Vista

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Pictures, which was purchased by Morowitz and Farber and folded into Distribpix (where it became known as Maturpix). At some point Quality-X and Video-X-Pix merged into a single company, further complicating the situation (at least for historians). These kinds of intricate webs are extremely common in adult film history.

<sup>178</sup> "Conversation with Al Goldstein," *Videography* January 1979: 44-49.

<sup>179</sup> Video Shack. Advertisement. *Videography* June 1979: 47; "Videotape Libraries: Pre-Recorded Tape," *Billboard* 12 May 1979: TAV-16, 17.

<sup>180</sup> Tom Cech, "Retail/Distrib Network Shaping," *Billboard* 17 November 1979: 62, 66; Joel A. Samberg, "The Video Shack: Spotlight on Success," *The Video Programs Retailer* January 1981: 42-45.

<sup>181</sup> An exception to this is Josh Greenberg's work, which is where, in fact, I first discovered a reference to Sweetheart's Video, which led to further research. See: Joshua M. Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster: Video Stores and the Invention of Movies on Video* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008) 72.

International with Sidney Niekirk, Select/Essex with Joe and Jeff Steinman, VCX with Norm Arno, Adult Video Corporation (AVC) with Fred Hirsch, General Video with Reuben Sturman, Caballero Home Video and Swedish Erotica with Al and Noel Bloom, Video Taping Services (VTS) with Joe Donato, Video X Home Library with Andre De Anici, and Wonderful World of Video with Harry Mohney. Russ Hampshire and Walter Gernert started Video Company of America (VCA) in 1978, building the company into a powerhouse committed to superior products, enlisting the best talent in front of and behind the camera, and investing in their own duplication facilities and in-house AVID editing systems before even major Hollywood studios.<sup>182</sup> Hank Cartwright founded King of Video in 1979, which distributed the Eros line of adult videos, before creating Major Video, the first “superstore” concept later directly copied by David Cook as the basis of Blockbuster Video, a history outlined in chapter five.<sup>183</sup> These companies advertised at video trade shows as well as in their catalogs, which were universally a collection of Golden Age films and contemporary theatrical releases transferred to videotape.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Tim Connelly. “It’s Now Official: Hustler Acquires VCA; Deal Comes a Year after Vivid Pact.” *avn.com*. Adult Video News. 22 May 2003. Web. 17 March 2013.

<sup>183</sup> William M. Alpert, “What’s Wrong with This Picture?,” *Barron’s* 21 September 1987: 8-9, 46-48.

<sup>184</sup> The adult video industry’s history with conventions, expos, and trade shows has long been contentious, further illustrating how the “taint” of pornography can result in the fear of losing respectability by mere association. At the Video Expo at Madison Square Garden in October 1978, for example, multiple adult video distributors purchased floor space to show off their wares—but were exiled by the organizers to “software Siberia,” an area in the rear of the hall, where they were not allowed to show any of the material. Describing the incident, *Variety* wrote: “It’s understood that some equipment manufacturers complained that the presence of porn distributors lowered the status of the whole exhibit.” See: “Home Video Market Puts Accent on Porn,” *Variety* 1 November 1978: 2.

By January 1980, the Consumer Electronics Show, sponsored by the National Association of Recording Merchandisers and the Electronics Industries Association/Consumer Electronics Group, enforced a strict “no viewing” policy at the annual Las Vegas event. Adult distributors were again segregated from other parts of the convention as well. Such policies continued through the 1980s, and the adult portion of CES was eventually moved to the basement of the convention in Las Vegas and to a tent in the parking lot in Chicago. In 1999, the *Adult Video News* created the AVN Expo, a separate convention for the adult entertainment industry held annually in Las Vegas at the same time as CES. In 2012, the AVN Expo was

The established adult film producers seemed hesitant to reconsider their products as being primarily *for* the new medium, preferring instead to worry about the gradually diminishing lines at the adult theaters as home video began to increase market share.<sup>185</sup> There was still plenty of economic incentive to stick with the traditional methods: in 1981, Friedman claimed that an “A-line” feature film would gross, on average, \$350,000 in theaters, but only \$35,000 on video.<sup>186</sup> However, that was changing. Sumner’s Mature Pictures, in 1979, broke new ground when it released Gerard Damiano’s *People and Misbehavin’* simultaneously to theaters and on video, the first time such a strategy had been attempted.<sup>187</sup> In 1981, VCX, which had previously only distributed the work of others, invested heavily in their first production, *High School Memories*, with acclaimed director Sam Weston (who used the pseudonym Anthony Spinelli in his films), and established actors such as Annette Haven, Jamie Gillis, and John Leslie. The marketing campaign, however, stands out: full-page newspaper advertisements and billboards featured a *videotape* image as the background, rather than the cast. Yet, as VCX marketing director Saul Saget noted, “We didn’t really produce *High School Memories*

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moved, for the first time, to a different set of dates, breaking what had been a decades-long association between the two conventions. See: “Video Expo Draws Video Community to New York; Software Presence Grows,” *Videography* November 1978: 11; Stephen Traiman, “Winter CES Is SRO; Video, ‘Super-Fi’ Grow,” *Billboard* 1 September 1979: 49-50; Brian Caulfield. “Sex and CES.” *forbes.com*. Forbes. 7 January 2009. Web. 31 March 2013; Amanda Finnegan. “Gadgets and Garters: CES, Porn Convention Sharing Annual Space.” *lasvegassun.com*. Las Vegas Sun. 7 January 2010. Web. 31 March 2013; Nick Wingfield. “Silicon and Silicone Split, as C.E.S. And Adult Entertainment Expo Part Ways.” *gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com*. New York Times. 9 January 2012. Web. 31 March 2013.

<sup>185</sup> David Rensin, “Tuning in to Channel Sex,” *Playboy* November 1981: 220-221.

<sup>186</sup> Jennings, *Skinflicks* 157.

<sup>187</sup> “Piracy and Porno,” *Videography* April 1979: 77.

for theaters. We're into selling tapes."<sup>188</sup> Theatrical distribution still mattered, but *why* it mattered was changing; as David Chute pointed out in 1981, "The success of an explicit cassette seems still to be linked to the success of a movie in theaters."<sup>189</sup>

That would prove especially true in 1981 when VCA released *Insatiable* (dir. Stu Segall, credited as Godfrey Daniels), a comeback film for Marilyn Chambers, who had ventured into mainstream films such as David Cronenberg's *Rabid* (1977) after her success in the Mitchell Brothers' *Behind the Green Door* (1972) and *Resurrection of Eve* (1973). *Insatiable* was a box office success, earning over \$2 million in theaters (while only playing in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Denver)—but it exploded on home video, selling 12,000 copies in the first day of release at \$99.50. Eventually it went on to be the top selling video (not just adult) of the year, and fans waited more than hour at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January 1981 to see Chambers.<sup>190</sup> These tensions illustrate the industry's position in 1981: still clinging to an older, and gradually failing, exhibition model, but acknowledging where that model was headed. Already by that point, two companies were already officially shooting directly on the new medium, foreshadowing what would eventually be an industry-wide change, and completing the journey from the Panoram to the home.

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<sup>188</sup> David Chute, "Tumescent Market for One-Armed Videophiles," *Film Comment* 17.5 (September/October 1981): 66.

<sup>189</sup> Chute, "Tumescent Market for One-Armed Videophiles," 66.

<sup>190</sup> Connelly, "It's Now Official: Hustler Acquires VCA; Deal Comes a Year after Vivid Pact." Web; Rensin, "Tuning in to Channel Sex," *Playboy* November 1981: 224; Gregg Kilday, "Inside Marilyn Chambers," *Home Video* 2.1 (January 1981): 24-27; Frank Segers, "Porno Pushers' Big Promotion at Chi Show," *Variety* 10 June 1981: 1, 84.

### *Conclusion: From Public to Private*

While plenty of trace evidence exists for unknown people shooting adult material on video almost immediately after such technology was available, the first effort to monetize it as part of a corporate strategy occurred in the summer of 1978. David Jennings, a producer, camera operator, and director for Norm Arno at VCX, began making preparations for a series of loop productions, a task he had been performing for Arno going back to the fall of 1977.<sup>191</sup> This time, however, Jennings planned to shoot the loops simultaneously on Sony U-Matic video and 16mm film, an idea concocted after he had seen the affordability of video equipment at Muntz Electronics in Los Angeles. The result was *Lights! Camera! Orgy!*, produced in late summer 1978 at Jennings' apartment in Van Nuys, California. Later that summer, Jennings and Joe Loveland, a musician and adult film enthusiast who frequently rented his home in Northern California to Jennings for loop productions, formed Love Television Enterprises (later renamed LTV Enterprises), the first company designed completely from the ground up to produce and distribute adult videos, the first being *Lights! Camera! Orgy!*.<sup>192</sup>

By fall 1978, Jennings produced three additional shot-on-video features, *The Perfect Gift*, *Teenage Playmates*, and *Bound*, all one hour long, on a budget of \$10,000 each. Advertisements for Love TV began appearing in March 1979, listing the tapes at

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<sup>191</sup> Jennings, a 1970 UCLA film school graduate, worked for an advertising agency in Grand Rapids, Michigan before returning to Southern California and working in the adult film industry. He recorded his experiences on audiotape, planning from the beginning to write a book on the subject. That book, one of the few in-depth accounts of the adult video industry's creation written by an insider, is invaluable to historians and scholars. Much of this history comes from Jennings' book, and other portions from his emails with the author. See: Jennings, *Skinflicks*; David Jennings. Email with the author. 10 February 2012.

<sup>192</sup> Throughout his book (and, indeed, his career), Jennings remains cautious to use real names, including his own, making it difficult for historians to verify and cross-reference his assertions. "Joe Loveland," for example, is a pseudonym. Despite my strong wish to use Jennings' real name as a part of acknowledging his immense contribution to film history, he requested that I do not, which I respect.

\$75 each, and claiming that they were “shot... by industry pros who preferred that their names not be mentioned, according to company spokesman who also preferred that his name not be mentioned.”<sup>193</sup> Jennings, knowing that video technology was going to make some viewers nervous with its visual differences from film, advertised the films as being “shot live on videotape,” thus attempting to make the tapes seem more “real” than celluloid productions, and emphasized the “reality” that video aesthetics presented. The company’s first advertisement, in fact, read: “LIVE performances by top sex stars. Shot with BROADCAST TV CAMERAS. Gorgeous color. Stunning detail. BEST POSSIBLE STATE OF THE ART IMAGE QUALITY!”<sup>194</sup> The first review of the Love TV tapes commended Jennings on his understanding of television aesthetics:

They’ve brought the camera in close and held it there so you can see the action. Theatrical films transferred to tape often include many medium and long shots, which will appear satisfactorily on the theater screen but lose all detail when reduced to the size of the tube. Love works mainly with a few close-ups, leaving nothing to the imagination. It’s one of the big advantages of shooting specifically for video and Love makes the most of it.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Love TV. Advertisement. *Videography* March 1979: 101.

<sup>194</sup> Love TV. Advertisement. *Videography* March 1979: 101.

Jennings’ concerns about audiences and video proved to be well founded. Even as late as August 1985, a consumer poll found that 70% of “active adult video renters” thought shot-on-video productions were of poor quality. Respondents noted that they were “cheap looking” and “poorly produced.” See: “Problems with Shot-on-Video Features,” *Adult Video News Confidential* August 1985: 4.

<sup>195</sup> Kalton C. Lahue, “Video Porn,” *Velvet Talks!* 6 (1979): 12-13.

Jennings' contribution to adult film history was significant: if, by summer 1978, video had already shown the industry the future for distribution and exhibition, Jennings demonstrated the medium's potential for production. It would eventually take over completely. However, he was not alone.

In December 1978, Sal Esposito, who had been distributing adult video out of Reseda, California since late 1977, approached Maria and Carlos Tobalina, owners of Hollywood International Film Corporation of America, to license their catalog for video distribution. Unsure of a price, they asked Bill Margold, their public relations director, who suggested \$10,000 per title.<sup>196</sup> Esposito angrily declined, phoning Margold the next morning to complain. Margold told him that for that price Esposito should just make his own films, directly on the new medium, which he described as “shot live-on-video,” a paradigm remarkably similar to how Jennings perceived the new medium. Intrigued, Esposito arranged to have dinner with Margold, particularly since Margold told him he would bring along a “guaranteed moneymaker” for the venture, the rising star Seka.<sup>197</sup> At

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<sup>196</sup> Bill Margold, one of the elder statesmen of the adult film industry, could (and would probably volunteer) to be the subject of an entire dissertation. Born 2 October 1943 to prominent Civil Rights attorney Nathan Ross Margold, Bill graduated with a degree in journalism from Cal State Northridge and began writing for Los Angeles newspapers including the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* and *Hollywood Press* in 1968, in which he wrote about the adult film industry. He began working for Reb Sawitz at the Sunset International modeling agency in 1973 as a casting agent for adult films, which led to his work in the industry as a performer, writer, director, and jack-of-all-trades, eventually appearing in more than 200 films and directing more than 20. In 1976, he created the Worth Mentioning Public Relations Agency and was hired by the Tobalinas. He later served as director of the Free Speech Coalition, was a co-founder of Fans of X-Rated Entertainment (FOXÉ) and Protecting Adult Welfare (PAW), which serves as a charity for adult film performers. He memorably testified before the Meese Commission in 1986, and has been endlessly quotable on subjects related to adult film. Along with his late friend Jim Holliday, Margold is unquestionably among the people most knowledgeable about the inner workings of the industry. The late UCLA psychiatrist Robert Stoller interviewed Margold extensively for his groundbreaking works on pornography, and he graciously answered my questions. See: Bill Margold. Personal interview. 30 March 2013; Robert Stoller, *Porn: Myths for the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Robert J. Stoller and I.S. Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>197</sup> Seka (born Dorothea Hundley in 1954) became arguably the first adult video star. After starting as a clerk in an adult video store, she eventually, with a partner, owned seven stores in Virginia and Maryland,

the dinner, Margold had further suggestions: make the tapes in 30-minute installments, modeled on television sitcoms, and release one per week. Esposito hired Margold and Seka, formed Scorpio, Etc. Productions, and prepared to shoot. While adult video, by early 1979, was thriving in terms of catalog distribution, Margold's idea would tear the adult film industry from its foundations and set it on an entirely new, shot-on-video course.<sup>198</sup>

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but was consistently dissatisfied by what she was seeing in the peep show booths and magazine and thought she could do better. In May 1978 she and husband Ken Yontz met with Bill Margold at the Sunset International modeling agency, where, according to Margold, "She dared me to make her famous." Giving her the names and phone numbers of adult magazine photographers, Margold ultimately told her to go back to Virginia and wait for the right offer. She took the name Seka from a blackjack dealer in Las Vegas.

In August 1978 Margold co-wrote *Dracula Sucks* (AKA *Lust at First Bite*) for director Phil Marshak, which was assembling an all-star cast: John Holmes, Jamie Gillis, John Leslie, Serena, Kay Parker, Paul Thomas, and Annette Haven. Margold sensed the opportunity and convinced Marshak to cast Seka. Her first scene, with Holmes, was shot in September 1978, and she received top billing in the film. She went to appear regularly in Caballero's *Swedish Erotica* loop series, starred in hundreds of loops and features, and appeared regularly in adult magazines. She retired in the early 1980s before returning with the award-winning *Careful, He May Be Watching* (dir. Richard Pacheco) in 1988, which she wrote and produced. She returned again in 1993 with *American Garter* (dir. Henri Pachard). Outspoken, fiercely protective of her career, and overtly feminist (without invoking feminist discourses), Seka, as she frequently admitted, was in the right place at the right time. Her Caballero loops were quickly transferred to video, flooding video stores. As the industry transitioned from theaters to video, Seka was everywhere. Her stardom, however, was also based on her platinum blonde hair, performances alongside other stars (particularly Holmes), unique name, and aloof, even distant sexual personality, which producers played up to make her seem more unattainable. As Margold put it to me, if there was a Mount Rushmore of female adult video performers, Seka would be on it (alongside Marilyn Chambers, Ginger Lynn, and 1990s performer Jenna Jameson). She was the subject of the 2002 documentary *Desperately Seeking Seka* (dir. Christian Hallman and Magnus Paulsson), and remains among the most popular of all adult film performers.

See: Ian Jane. "God Created Man, William Margold Created Himself: An Interview with the Renaissance Man of Porn." *dvdmaniacs.com*. DVD Maniacs. N.D. Web. 31 March 2013; Margold. Personal interview. 30 March 2013; "Seka," *Video X* August 1980: 12-13; "Daughter of the Video Revolution," *Playboy* October 1984: 49; Bad Brad. "Legendary Adult Movie Star Seka Sits Down with RSR to Talk About Her Career and Love for the Sport of Boxing Part I." *ringsidereport.com*. Ringside Report. 11 April 2010. Web. 18 March 2013; John Parks. "XXX Hall of Famer and 70s/80s Icon Seka Gets Down with LRI." *legendaryrockinterviews.com*. Legendary Rock Interviews. 15 August 2011. Web. 18 March 2013; John Reed. "Seka, Raising Penises for Three Generations." *vice.com*. Vice Magazine. July 2012. Web. 18 March 2013; Michelle Craven, "Seka: Hollywood's Hottest New Sex Star Sells Passion—with Pride," *Cheri* March 1980: 57-64; Jill C. Nelson, *Golden Goddesses: 25 Legendary Women of Classic Erotic Cinema, 1968-1985* (Duncan, OK: BearManor Media, 2012) 534-563.

<sup>198</sup> When pressed, Margold told me that he came up with the idea "spontaneously," and was not aware of anyone else shooting directly on video, though he did know about companies like TVX releasing their catalog titles on the format. He further noted that he did not purchase his own VCR until 1982—an

In late January 1979, Esposito, along with director Daniel Symms (as David Summers), writer Maxine Hall (as Max Lyon), and performers Seka, Margold, and others, shot *Football Widow* and *Love Story* over a weekend. They followed these with *High School Report Card* in March with the same crew and *Super-Ware Party* in July with Margold directing. Advertising began in March 1979 in *Videography* magazine.<sup>199</sup> These four films adhere to Margold's original idea: all 30 minutes, shot on video, presenting comedic, sitcom-like plots, and starring Seka. In early 1980, Scorpio produced two more entries with Alan Colberg (as Rene Deneuve) directing, *Inside Hollywood: The Anne Dixon Story* and *Inside Hollywood: The John Barfield Story*, intended to be the first two of a six-part, unproduced, "soap opera" series.<sup>200</sup>

The Scorpio group sensed that Margold's narrative ideas might balance the fear that video would decrease visual quality, and used them to court the respectability that might lead to female viewers. Colberg (who used a female pseudonym on the films), in an interview on the set of the *Inside Hollywood* series, makes that appeal blatant, and even invokes soap operas as a marker of quality rather than a deterrent:

[The series] is catered toward the demographics of a male and female relaxing in their living room. The story is really rather sophisticated. It's not designed for a male only, it doesn't degrade females in any way, it

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astounding detail given his direct responsibility for changing the industry. See: Margold. Personal interview. 30 March 2013.

<sup>199</sup> Scorpio. Advertisement. *Videography* March 1979: 101.

The editors of *Videography* placed this Scorpio advertisement next to ads for Love TV (its first) and Sweetheart's Home Video Centers. Given the historical significance of these three companies, this remains one of the most unique and important magazine pages in home video history.

<sup>200</sup> Preston Johns, "Inside 'Inside Hollywood,'" *Adam* September 1980: 22, 84.

doesn't call them sluts or prostitutes, or put them in impossible situations that only a woman could be in. It takes a lot of the chauvinism out of it.

And the minimum look we expect is equal to any prime time TV soap.<sup>201</sup>

No evidence remains as to how well the tapes sold, and it is impossible now to determine their popularity with potential female viewers—but this type of appeal became increasingly common, and eventually even formed the basis of Candida Royalle's strategies with Femme Productions, outlined in chapter four. While Margold's initial idea of modeling adult video on narratives, structures, and strategies familiar to television production carried through with Scorpio, his suggestion of releasing one per week did not; after the two *Inside Hollywood* productions, in fact, Scorpio seems to have disappeared.<sup>202</sup>

Scorpio and Love TV permanently changed the landscape of the adult film industry, illustrating the new production and distribution methods that soon everyone would employ—but they also demonstrated the complete alteration of a much bigger paradigm. If the anxiety surrounding pornography had always been rooted in the tensions between public and private enactment of pleasure, then home video fully provided an escape for the industry into the safe space of the home. By 1978, *Variety* reported that 50% of all material available on videocassette was pornography.<sup>203</sup> The adult industry demonstrated for Hollywood the potential profits in video—a role that some tried to obscure even as it was happening. In 1979, for example, Bob Brewin, at the annual

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<sup>201</sup> Jared Rutter, "Video Interview: Alan Colberg," *Adam* September 1980: 24.

<sup>202</sup> Colberg also shot *Nanci Blue* and *Bad Girl* directly on video in 1979, often mistakenly credited as Scorpio productions. Margold confirmed to me they was not.

<sup>203</sup> "Home Video Market Puts Accent on Porn," 2.

Consumer Electronics Show, admitted as much: “No one in a leadership position that promises to revolutionize home entertainment really wants to admit that the first stage of that revolution is to bring what used to be called pornography and is now dubbed ‘adult entertainment’ from the local theatre into the home.”<sup>204</sup> On its journey from the Panoram through the peep show booth and adult motel rooms and finally into the home, pornography transformed technologically, finally becoming a private mechanism for spectators, away from the regulations governing public space.

That transformation, however, came with new challenges. If the industry had long been obsessed with attaining respectability, typically through the mobilization of markers of quality, that attitude did not change with video, even if the technological capabilities ensured rapid production cycles and a glut of new material flooding the market. In the early 1980s, as the industry grew, it retreated, somewhat, back into the shadows, unable to find a way to connect to larger audiences wary of its content and cultural associations. The industry struggled to find respectability. In 1981, David Chute observed “industry spokesmen are nearly unanimous in the belief that only a significant improvement in the quality of the films themselves can ultimately snag a substantial number of new hardcore patrons.”<sup>205</sup> The type of quality that industry members meant, of course, was deeply connected to the notion that adult film must do something “more” that simply produce pleasure. Even Atkinson, the man who had, in many ways, initiated the entire enterprise, noted in 1986 that the cultural pressure on mainstream video stores to drop adult tapes (examined in chapter five) might, perhaps, be somewhat justified: “It ain’t exactly like

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<sup>204</sup> “Electronics Show Gives Glimpse of Show Biz Technology of Future,” *Variety* 10 January 1979: 116.

<sup>205</sup> Chute, “Tumescent Market for One-Armed Videophiles,” 68.

defending D.H. Lawrence.”<sup>206</sup> This suggestion illustrates the ongoing tension regarding pleasures of the body versus pleasures of the mind, and ultimately suggests that adult video was somehow “lesser” than a work like Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928).

The solution for the industry was to link the two elements together. Rather than eliminating the core product, the mediated presentation of sex, it had to be repositioned, recategorized, and aligned with the something “more” that would ease the tensions about simple pleasures being enough. Jeff Steinman, president of Essex Video, made such links clear in 1984: “Video has opened new doors and avenues by bringing a quality, adult-oriented product into the living room and the bedroom. It has meant more money and higher quality in X-rated productions. We’re no longer selling just shock value. We’re now presenting our product on a silver platter. Eroticism is the key to success in this business.”<sup>207</sup> Such concerns with quality and respectability, marked by the impulse to create something “erotic” rather than pornographic, inevitably link back to efforts to contain female pleasure. Elliot Abelson, an attorney for various adult film distributors, made that connection perfectly clear in a 1981 interview: “We will see the audience change drastically, and the major influx will be women.”<sup>208</sup>

In the next chapter, I examine a discursive mechanism created precisely to address these concerns: *Adult Video News (AVN)*, a publication designed as a fan newsletter but eventually growing into a trade journal. The quality and respectability

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<sup>206</sup> Dick Polman, “Store Owners Divided on Adult Tapes,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 7 September 1986: J1.

<sup>207</sup> Ben Pesta, “X-Rated Video: Will It Make Adult Theaters and Men’s Magazines Obsolete?,” *Hustler* October 1984: 38.

<sup>208</sup> Chute, “Tumescent Market for One-Armed Videophiles,” 68.

strategies it employed forever changed the industry, and brought new and lasting meaning to those terms—as well as reproducing and recirculating the same gendered anxieties and tensions surrounding them. Atkinson may have initiated the legitimization of the industry, but it would take a publication peripheral to that industry to continue that process. If strategies to find ways to make pornography private defined, in many ways, the birth of the adult video industry, *AVN* looked for ways to make it public all over again.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Selling Adult Films without the Sex: *Adult Video News* and “Quality”**

There are basically two kinds of XXX-rated movies: sophisticated and unsophisticated.<sup>1</sup>

I.L. Slifkin, 1983

Accessibility leads to acceptability.<sup>2</sup>

Steven Hirsch, 2004

In May 1983, between an interview with performer Lisa DeLeeuw and a series of short synopses of adult films then in theatrical release, the adult magazine *Video-X* offered a ten-page pictorial featuring model April May.<sup>3</sup> Now a long-forgotten actress who appeared in only a handful of films in the late 1980s, May never achieved even a remote measure of stardom. With brief boilerplate “quotes” from May accompanying the nine photographs, the section follows a familiar template: May, lounging on a bed, nude save for a silk robe and high heels, stares directly into the camera, seemingly attempting for eye contact directly with the reader. The fact that these ten pages exist in the magazine hardly comes as a surprise; after all, since *Playboy* first began publication in 1953, countless similar features, all presenting women in various stages of undress,

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<sup>1</sup> I.L. Slifkin, “Exotic Adventures of Lolita,” *Adult Video News* February 1983: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Clint O'Connor, “Cleveland's X-Rated Connection,” *The Plain Dealer* 4 January 2004: A1.

<sup>3</sup> *Video-X* May 1983: 68-77.

directly addressing the camera, have gone to print.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the specific reason why May appears in *Video-X*, particularly as that month's "Video Vixen," is somewhat unclear: her first film role was two years later, in *Lust American Style* (1985, dir. Michael Carpenter), where she performed under the name Collette Martin. Furthermore, the ten pages offer no connection whatsoever to adult video or even film more generally other than the "Video Vixen" headline. On close examination, then, a question arises: why would *Video-X*, a magazine devoted to adult video, include the pictorial?

The answer resides in the confusion within the adult film and magazine industries about how to market the representation of sex, which is, of course, their primary product. Magazines, one of the only spaces in which the industry could reach out directly to potential customers, were the main marketing arm for adult film producers and distributors. Like any industry seeking to retain existing customers and capture new ones, the adult film industry used magazines such as *Video-X* to offer samples of its products in the form of synopses and still images, as well as interviews, all part of standard marketing and publicity strategies. In the early days of adult video, these magazines did what they had always done: present pictorials of nude women, accompanied by loose "narratives," often in the form of anecdotes, quotes, or simple stories told in pictures. As Rick Altman notes, "In every era, new representational technologies have initially been configured to conform to the codes established by already existing technologies."<sup>5</sup> In keeping with this, very little effort was made to move away from this

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the history and importance of *Playboy*, see: Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Russell Miller, *Bunny: The Real Story of Playboy* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 17.

practice, which I will call “sampling,” or to think of new or creative ways to sell sex to readers. Readers (and the industry) had certain long-standing expectations as well as familiarity with a particular system. It would be naïve to suggest that these expectations did not include, simply put, material for masturbation; nevertheless, sampling did not offer much *beyond* that paradigm to the industry in terms of marketing.

The ten pages in *Video-X* of April May adhere perfectly to this pattern. The magazine included the pictures because offering such content, even without any connection to adult video, is what adult magazines had always done. After all, what else could they sell? Content *was* the product. As Andrew Ross notes, “Increasingly, the porn magazines [were] tailored to function as trailers, previews, fanzines, and supporting literature for the main attraction of the videos and their stars.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, a fundamental problem percolated under the surface of this model that plagued the adult industry in terms of legality, cultural associations, and economics. As the industry moved away from theaters to video it needed to find a way to give its products an air of quality and respectability, while magazines needed to find new readers interested in content. How advertising and marketing of the content developed and changed, by moving away from the sexual representations at its core and toward something more respectable through its various definitions of quality, represents a major piece of adult video history and is the focus of this chapter.

In tracing this history, I begin with an analysis of how the magazines of the era partnered with the industry to market adult films—but also how their adherence to familiar strategies and practices prevented the industry from making significant gains in

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Ross. "The Popularity of Pornography." *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

terms of respectability. Starting with an examination of three publications from 1980 to provide examples from the early days of adult video, I then move to three titles from 1983 to illustrate the changes as the dramatic escalation of public interest in home video (brought on, in part, by reduced entry costs) spurred sales of both equipment and adult titles, initiating the full technological transition of the industry to video-based production.

Following the analysis of the adult video magazines, I move specifically into a detailed examination of *Adult Video News (AVN)*, a newsletter created in 1982 by Paul Fishbein, Irv Slifkin, and Barry Rosenblatt in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, as a monthly guide to the adult film industry. Currently, the average issue of *AVN* magazine has a circulation of 40,000, primarily targets video retailers, and features up to 500 video reviews per issue, which appear alongside copious amounts of industry advertising. The parent company, known as the AVN Media Network, maintains a large web presence from its corporate headquarters in Chatsworth, California.<sup>7</sup> The company is widely regarded as the premier “voice” of the adult film industry, a claim it frequently self-advertises. Given the powerful (and profitable) contemporary status of the magazine, it seems self-evident that the success of the venture was a foregone conclusion. In the early 1980s, however, the idea was risky and groundbreaking in that it gambled on the possibility of a willing (and reachable) audience and an industry amenable to new publishing paradigms and discourses.

Starting with its first issue, *AVN* built what had not existed for adult film: a space to cover and market the industry in the vein of mainstream publications such as *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. While other magazines of the era offered industry news,

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<sup>7</sup> Information taken from the AVN Media Network website: *avn.com*. Adult Video News. Web. 24 March 2013.

gossip about the performers, and updates on upcoming productions, they nevertheless maintained a particular status quo in terms of sampling industry content in the form of traditional photo layouts, centerfolds, and set pictorials. *AVN* sensed a market gap and formulated a groundbreaking strategy designed to alter preconceptions about pornography while giving readers something different. Over time, the newsletter, initially aimed at consumers, would become an invaluable resource for producers, distributors, and retailers.

In doing so, *AVN* also solved a seemingly impossible problem that would ultimately lend respectability to the industry: offering a publication designed to market the adult film industry without sampling its products for readers. In other words, *AVN* modeled the very notion of quality it hoped to encourage within the industry even as it was writing about it. Embedded deeply within this discourse of quality, however, were deeply problematic gendered assumptions about consumers that trouble simple readings of the magazine's place in adult film history as being either simply politically regressive or progressive. The goal of respectability, in other words, came with the historically specific set of meanings revolving around gendered rather than merely sexual behavior, with the resulting accompanying ideological battleground over women's bodies, behaviors, and sexualities. In *AVN*'s case, the superficial calls for increased respect for the industry mask the underlying discourses creating links between narrative, appropriate female behavior, and quality, perpetuating the very patterns stretching back, as I showed in chapter one, far beyond the advent of home video.

### *Adult Video Magazines: Sampling the Industry*

By 1980, more than 200 hard-core and 165 soft-core magazines offered nudity and sex as their primary content.<sup>8</sup> The most well known among these, *Playboy*, *Hustler*, and *Penthouse*, offered film reviews to some degree, but were not devoted to adult video or covered the industry in detail. Other, lesser-known magazines such as *Cinema-X*, *Adam Film World*, *Video-X*, and *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide* focused on the industry—but did so from squarely within the same sorts of paradigms that adult magazines had always maintained, which is to say the sampling model.

The first three titles I examine—*Adam Film World*, *Video X* (not to be confused with *Video-X*), and *Cinema-X*—come from 1980, the tail end of the Golden Age of theatrical adult film and a moment when home video equipment was still mostly an expensive curiosity to the average consumer. Adult video, however, was very much in the public discourse and becoming available throughout the United States. A market for adult video was steadily growing, as was the need for mediation between producers, retailers, and consumers. While my July 1980 selection of *Adam Film World* is the eleventh issue of the seventh volume from the long-running and successful magazine, the *Video X* issue is that publication's first, while the issue of *Cinema-X* is that publication's second. These three choices represent unique viewpoints. *Adam Film World* was the established veteran, with experience covering the theatrical arm of the industry going back to 1966 (and even more history before that, counting parent magazine *Adam* stretching back to 1957 and its efforts to compete with *Playboy*) as *Adam Film Quarterly*. It was renamed *Adam Film*

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Schipper, "Filthy Lucre: A Tour of America's Most Profitable Frontier," *Mother Jones* April 1980: 32.

*World* in 1969, and, by 1980, was still slightly unsure of how to deal with video. *Cinema-X* positioned itself as a rival to *Adam Film World* in terms of both tone and content, maintaining the status quo in terms of industry coverage. Finally, *Video X* purported to cover video rather than film, thereby constructing a new space not widely available to consumers. My choice of *Adam Film World* in this trio, however, is not random: this is the first issue in which the publication devoted space to adult video. While their similarities (particularly in their adherence to the sampling strategy) ultimately vastly outnumber their differences, each magazine provided the market with something slightly different—yet none would overcome the primary problem of the content and its accompanying lack of respectability.

Long in the business of covering the adult film industry, *Adam Film World* was primarily a collection of stills from various films, alongside a few pages of what it called “the latest scuttlebutt on the adult film scene.”<sup>9</sup> That “scuttlebutt” typically offered a combination of mainstream Hollywood news related to sex along with items from the adult industry, as well as letters from readers. For example, in the July 1980 issue, a report from the annual meeting of the Adult Film Association of America is followed by speculation that *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981) would “strain its R rating to the limit” due to the sex scenes between Jessica Lange and Jack Nicholson.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the issue also contains book reviews (all of mainstream publications—ranging from biographies of Alfred Hitchcock to Colin Shindler’s *Hollywood Goes to War: Films and the American Society, 1939-1952*), as well as features on mainstream Hollywood

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<sup>9</sup> *Adam Film World* July 1980: 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Adam Film World* July 1980: 4.

performers Suzanne Somers and Mamie Van Doren, foreign film news, and Hollywood gossip. In the final four pages, *Adam Film World* presents a pictorial from *Angel in White*, a Japanese “Pink Film” from Nikkatsu studio, a feature that regularly appeared in the magazine. All of this content, from the book reviews to the feature on Somers, seems remarkably similar to the type of material found in *Playboy* from the era, probably a deliberate strategy designed to appeal to a particular middle class audience. The presence of the mainstream content was perhaps an attempt by the publishers to position the samples from adult films alongside more traditionally respectable material.

There was very little advertising for anything outside sex-related industries in *Adam Film World*, unlike *Playboy*, which gathered advertising revenue from liquor companies, automobile manufacturers, and home stereo producers. Toward the back of the issue of *Adam Film World*, for example, an ad for Mark Richards Movies offers ten 8mm films through direct mail at \$24.95 each, describing them as “full length, full color feature super sharp, well lit, [with] breath-taking detail.”<sup>11</sup> Accompanied by ten thumbnail images of topless women (presumably the stars of the “full length” films), the ad is typical of the era in that the orders go to a post office box in Los Angeles for a format that was still affordable and widely available. Ads like this encapsulate an era in home entertainment in terms of both content and marketing—but also illustrate the limitations and challenges faced by adult magazines in seeking advertising.

The coverage of home video and the adult content available on the new medium in the pages of *Adam Film World* was certainly limited as compared to the coverage of theatrical features, but that was to be expected; after all, theatrically released adult films were still a booming business in 1980, while video was in its infancy. Beginning with the

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<sup>11</sup> *Adam Film World* July 1980: 52.

cover, however, *Adam Film World* was committed to the new format: “Latest X-Raters on Videotape.” The sampling, however, sold copies. Featuring stills from eight films then in theatrical release, *Adam Film World* is primarily a collection of nude photographs, some in color and others in black-and-white. Carefully chosen to hide erect penises and images of penetration, the magazine is perhaps most similar to *Hustler* at that time, which is to say the images of nudity and sex, while boundary pushing, are not hard-core.<sup>12</sup> A typical example would be the two-page spread on *Summer School* (1979, dir. Stu Segall). Seven photographs (four production stills and three publicity shots) accompany a small block of descriptive text.<sup>13</sup>

Even though the piece occupies only two pages, myriad sampling tactics are on display: the brief paragraph efficiently outlines the narrative, presenting a fantasy of young, inexperienced women as well as “lesbian” sex. A caption on the following page reads: “She comes to the private academy as a wide-eyed innocent but the girls soon break her in—and before long she’s head sister of the swinging sorority and balling every

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<sup>12</sup> Until much later, when *Hustler* would cross over into hard-core imagery, the only publication with a substantial budget, widespread marketing, and professionally designed graphics and presentation willing to feature fully explicit sexual imagery was *Puritan*, founded in part by Dian Hanson. Later, she would go on to edit *Oui*, *Partner*, *Video X*, and *Hooker*. She moved on to *Leg Show* and *Juggs*, which, surprisingly, garnered acclaim from mainstream critics who recognized Hanson’s nuanced and fairly sophisticated understanding of human sexuality and desire. In 2001, Hanson was hired by Benedikt Taschen to be the editor for a line of his well-known coffee table art books that would focus on sexuality, such as *The Big Penis Book*, *The Big Pussy Book*, and *Vanessa del Rio: Fifty Years of Slightly Slutty Behavior*, among many others. Taschen and Hanson permanently altered the landscape in terms of public acceptance of sexual imagery with their deliberate strategy of re-branding pornography as “art,” releasing books on a wide variety of sexual topics, but all with remarkably high production values and sophisticated aesthetics. Taschen, who once insisted that “even hard-core material presented in the proper context would be taken as art,” might be what I would call one of the leading perpetrators of the high/low divide, determined to keep “pornography” in a lower, less acceptable place, while simultaneously re-packaging it and selling it to consumers who can safely insist that its aesthetics free them from any association with “dirty” material. See: Bob Massey. “The Reigning Queen.” *Baltimore City Paper*. 27 September 2006. Web. 13 January 2013; Marshall Sella. “Soho Love Goddess.” *New York Magazine*. 31 January 2000. Web. 13 January 2013; Julie Ma. “A ‘Sexy Book’ Editor Unveils Porn’s History.” *nymag.com*. *New York Magazine*. 20 March 2013. Web. 23 March 2013.

<sup>13</sup> *Adam Film World* July 1980: 60.

stud from the dean to the janitor!”<sup>14</sup> Typical of the other content in the magazine, such an approach is primarily an opportunity to market the film by sampling titillating content for readers. In short, *Adam Film World* in this era had a dual identity. While reaching for respectability through book reviews and Hollywood news, as well as providing the beginnings of informative coverage on home video and the adult content available on cassette, the publication also sampled the same sort of nudity and sexual content found in “mainstream” adult magazines such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*, de-emphasizing narrative in favor of visual content.

The February 1980 issue of *Cinema-X*, running 100 pages, makes no pretense at the type of respectability partially employed by *Adam Film World*, yet it does present its traditional content with a professionalized aesthetic and full-color graphics, as well as a visible effort to guide readers in the adult marketplace. From its beginning in this second issue, *Cinema-X* was not interested in pushing very many boundaries and instead offered more of the standard practices. Interviews with director Chuck Vincent and performer Annette Haven, a “letters from readers” feature with performer Leslee Bovee, a piece of erotic fiction, a fan club offering that would link readers to their favorite stars, and a gossip column were all familiar to adult magazines. A “Rising Stars” section introduced Scarlett Kennedy, Sue Leighton, and Susanne Nero as having “appeared in numerous films, but are just now being recognized.”<sup>15</sup> The magazine, serving as a “guide” for readers, thus acts as a mediator between the industry’s offering of new product and a curious public seeking variety. That Bovee would appear on the cover, in an interview, as

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<sup>14</sup> *Adam Film World* July 1980: 61.

<sup>15</sup> “Rising Stars,” *Cinema-X* February 1980: 69.

the centerfold, answer fan mail, as an addressee in the fan club, and in a two-page advertisement for her films speaks to the way *Cinema-X* partnered with the industry as a marketing platform, sampling its products for readers almost as a catalog.

In another familiar move, but with a new twist, *Cinema-X* offered a three-page “open call” section that carried the potential of stardom for the average reader. “Each month,” the copy reads, “Cinema-X will provide a free forum for aspiring erotic actors and actresses (18 and older) to present themselves to the adult film industry and the viewing public. The winners will be chosen by popular ballot and will be flown to New York City for a first class, weekend stay at our expense... The winners will be introduced to producers and directors and be given the opportunity to appear in an adult film.”<sup>16</sup> The eight featured “readers,” all female, pose nude for the camera, in medium-shots that mimic “amateur” photography—but nevertheless stand out as (presumably) professional models being used by the magazine to concoct a fantasy for readers.

While the “open call” feature presented a fantasy of amateur sexuality, more traditional industry sampling strategies are on display throughout. Five lengthy reviews accompanied by soft-core images from the films make up the centerpiece of the content. For example, a six-page review of *Intimate Desires* (1978, dir. Gloria Leonard) encapsulates the magazine’s overall approach and tone. Fifteen photographs, mostly taken from the production, offer a wide-ranging view of various scenes. Concluding with an overall rating of “85%,” the analysis begins with a lengthy plot recap before finishing with a brief critical review:

[T]he film is long on plot and this interferes with some of the sex scenes, but on the whole it has many things working for it. All the actors are

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<sup>16</sup> “Open Call,” *Cinema-X* February 1980: 55.

adequate with Marlene Willoughby standing out above the rest. The technical aspects are all top-notch as are the settings and other production values. Unfortunately, the only part of the story that really stands out is the Marlene Willoughby/John Leslie scene and even though it succeeds wildly, it cannot carry the rest of the film.<sup>17</sup>

This tone, balancing praise with criticism, reappears consistently in *Cinema-X*, and exemplifies the supportive and encouraging voice that defined the magazine's editorial approach. Gently pushing the industry toward quality and consistency, *Cinema-X* was not afraid to call out technical flaws, subpar acting, or poor direction—all designed to inspire confidence in the reader in making viewing selections.

Much like in *Adam Film World*, the infancy of home video technology meant that *Cinema-X*'s coverage and content of the new medium were minimal at best, but not completely ignored. The cover, for example, advertises “Video Tape Tips!” and teases “Adult Home Movie Reviews!” The latter, which would be interpreted today as indicating videotape technologies, was actually a series of reviews of 16mm loops from three of the major distributors: Pleasure Productions, Joys of Erotica, and Diamond Distributors—all very recognizable from the late 1970s and widely available at affordable prices in adult bookstores. The copy accompanying the reviews illustrates the ways in which adult film magazines of the 1980s still maintained a strong connection to the loop manufacturers of the 1970s: “Each month this section will be devoted to reviewing the finest in adult home movies. [T]hese films... often feature top stars and

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<sup>17</sup> “Out of the Can: *Intimate Desires*,” *Cinema-X* February 1980: 82.

quality production values to recommend them.”<sup>18</sup> Home video would soon render the celluloid loops obsolete, but in the early 1980s, “home movies” still referred to celluloid. Indeed, the majority of the advertising in this issue is for 16mm loops, aside from a handful of ads from Cinema Tech that offered its products on film or videotape—including the aforementioned Leslie Bovee collection.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps illustrating the vague and as-yet undetermined nature of adult video, the “Video Tape Tips!” story teased on the cover of *Cinema-X* does not even appear in the table of contents. “Video Corner,” which would become a recurring feature, does appear, however, and offers a snapshot of the medium in its early days.<sup>20</sup> Presenting a “ten best sellers” list (with *Deep Throat*, *The Devil in Miss Jones*, and *Debbie Does Dallas* topping the list) and an offer to readers to write in with questions, the piece also gives readers a brief history of adult films on tape and the promised “tips” for maintaining video equipment. These last two elements acknowledge the curiosity of the reader regarding the mysteries of the new technology: where did it come from? How do I care for it? Where might it be going? Will it last or is it a novelty? Are the films the same quality as those playing in theaters? Though brief, the “Video Corner” feature does foreshadow the work done by video magazines later in the decade (and by *AVN*) to legitimize and bolster the industry by focusing on quality, acknowledging history, and emphasizing technology. *Cinema-X*, ultimately, in its early days, might have firmly embraced sampling as a

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<sup>18</sup> “Private Stock,” *Cinema-X* February 1980: 38.

<sup>19</sup> Cinema Tech. Advertisement. *Cinema-X* February 1980: 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> “Video Corner,” *Cinema-X* February 1980: 28.

strategy, but it also looked ahead (however slightly) to the technological change that was already charging over the horizon.

*Video X* magazine, started in March 1980, combines the approaches of both *Adam Film World* and *Cinema-X*, which is to say the “news and information” structure alongside the sampling, expertise, and marketplace paradigms. The images throughout this first issue of *Video X* show stills from various films in both color and black-and-white, much like the other magazines, if lacking their production values and investment. Yet the real difference is in the way the magazine even more blatantly partners with the industry to market its products, moving beyond earlier paradigms and into new territory. The first issue begins with a checklist of “how to get the most from the world’s greatest adult entertainment magazine.” First, “Save money by previewing extensive pictorials from no less than 15 major adult video features each month.” Second, the magazine offers the opportunity for readers to purchase videotapes “directly from our mail-order department, which just happens to boast the world’s largest selection of adult video titles at all times.” Thus, the magazine was more than just a marketing platform for adult video producers—it was also a distributor. Readers could find news and information on sex toys, home video industry updates, and equipment trends—and, conveniently, submit orders, all in one place.<sup>21</sup>

The direct sales approach taken by *Video X* was a bit of a smokescreen, however, for the real partnership that was covertly taking place. The catalog of titles from the magazine’s “mail order department” clearly gives an address for Vydio Philms of Surfside, Florida—many miles away from the magazine’s offices in New York. Vydio

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<sup>21</sup> “The Source!,” *Video X* March 1980: 5.

Philms, one of the largest of the early adult video distributors, whose ads appear in all the major magazines of the era, acted as a clearinghouse for the larger producers and distributors of the era: Video Classics, Quality X Video Cassette Company, Cinema-X, Tenaha Timpson Releases, Leisure Time Booking, Gail Palmer's Pleasure Productions, and Wonderful World of Video. *Video X* magazine operated as a marketing arm not just for Vydio Philms, but essentially all of the adult film industry—and thus served as a catalog for potential customers rather than simply as a magazine.

The adult video industry, by 1983, was well on its way to establishing its economic presence in the marketplace. While the earlier magazines had a growing curiosity about the new medium, they still favored celluloid loops and Golden Age stars. The next three publications I wish to analyze all come from 1983, a date deliberately chosen for its alignment with the creation of *AVN*. *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide*, *Adult Cinema Review*, and *Video-X* chart the growth of adult video by examining a snapshot of its marketing, and its continued insistence on sampling as the dominant strategy. They also offer a compelling portrait of why *AVN*'s creators saw a need for a new kind of publication in the marketplace, one that would carry a discursive differentiation in nearly every aspect of its construction. Ultimately, what emerges from this snapshot is a clear need for something *outside* the industry, a radical step away from the status quo and with something that might appeal to those readers (and store owners) who might not have the interest in sampling so much as the potential for information and education. It also carried an appeal to quality de-emphasizing the sex at the core of the product.

The January 1983 issue of *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide* follows the same general pattern of *Adam Film World*, minus any interest whatsoever in mainstream Hollywood or

even culture more generally, but maintaining the glossy production values and color photography. Offering the standard adult film industry news, interviews, and gossip, the magazine takes a slightly sophisticated approach in terms of its editorial content, including a report from the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Erotic Film Awards, sponsored by the Adult Film Association of America (AFAA) and a wide-ranging interview with legendary actor Harry Reems, who had been arrested and convicted of obscenity for his participation in *Deep Throat*, a case later overturned on appeal. Like *Velvet*, its long-running parent publication, *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide* is primarily interested in sampling from adult films then in release. However, a clear effort emerges to heighten the tone slightly, to create a trustworthy, “expert” voice, in an attempt to appeal to the growing customer base.

In the conclusion to the coverage on the Erotica Film Awards, for example, the editors of *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide* offer a comparison chart featuring the actual winners and what the magazine would have chosen. Noting that the organizers of the awards picked a panel of seven judges from non-adult magazines to pick the winners, the editors offer a completely different set of choices, as well as criticisms of each “wrong” selection.<sup>22</sup> Most importantly, the editors suggest that the victory in the Best Picture category by *Nothing to Hide* (1982, dir. Anthony Spinelli) might have had something to do with that film’s producer, Sidney Niekerk, also being the AFAA President.<sup>23</sup> Such a bold editorial move illustrates *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide's* desire for a position of “expert.”

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<sup>22</sup> *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide* January 1983: 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> *Velvet's Erotic Film Guide* January 1983: 7.

Alongside this willingness to offer contrasting opinions forming the basis of their own expertise, the magazine hired performers DeLeeuw, Candida Royalle, and Ron Jeremy as Associate Publisher, New York Correspondent, and Contributing Editor, respectively, thereby demonstrating their commitment to partnering with the industry and giving readers an “insider” perspective, even if the decisions were based on circulation and required little actual work (if any) from the performers, who were paid for their names and likenesses.<sup>24</sup> In the “Video Porn” section, that partnership becomes more literal: producer Suze Randall’s *Centerfold Collection #6* is featured in a five-page photo feature that includes a direct mailing address and phone number for Newave Productions to order the tape for \$49.95.<sup>25</sup> Thus the lines between advertising and content become blurry in the magazine’s pages, yet the intention is clear: *Velvet’s Erotic Film Guide* wants the reader to trust its expertise—and, subsequently, to order the industry’s products. Despite all these efforts, however, the core problem still remained: the nude photographs and explicit language sampled in the magazine’s pages, clearly making up the majority of its content, illustrate how the ongoing tension of how to market sex in a respectable manner.

If *Velvet’s Erotic Film Guide* focused on samples alongside industry news and an effort at creating expertise, *Adult Cinema Review* suffered no such identity confusion.

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<sup>24</sup> This “insider’s perspective” was standard practice for adult video magazines. Just a few examples: Velvet Summers wrote for *Video-X*; Sharon Mitchell and Ron Jeremy worked for *Adult Cinema Review*, and, taking the tactic to the extreme, Juliet Anderson, Leslie Bovee, Mitch Berger, David Davidson, Vanessa Del Rio, Erica Eaton, Carl Esser, Annette Haven, James Murray, Tina Russell, Jack Smith, and Russell Smith all wrote for *Cinema-X*. Even *AVN* got into the act: Ron Jeremy wrote an “insider’s” column for the magazine in the early years. Of course, whether or not these columns were actually written by the performers or by magazine staffers remain a mystery, but it is likely that many of them were, like the “letters,” fabricated. Royalle’s work in this area (which she definitely did do herself) is described in chapter four.

<sup>25</sup> *Velvet’s Erotic Film Guide* January 1983: 91-95.

The October 1983 issue, packed with full-color stills from more than ten films, still avoids penetration while nevertheless offering much more than *Adam Film World* in terms of explicit content. There are no efforts to provide news (mainstream or otherwise), no book reports or editorials, and the “letters” from readers (clearly fabricated) serve only to provide even more erotic content for the magazine.<sup>26</sup> For example, the six-page feature on *Intimate Action* (1983, dir. unknown) concludes with yet another mailing address for readers to send in a \$79.95 check to obtain the cassette directly from Intact Productions, which, while similar to the structures in place at *Velvet’s Erotic Film Guide*, occurs without that publication’s efforts elsewhere to establish expertise.<sup>27</sup> If *Velvet’s Erotic Film Guide* tried to attract readers who might be looking for guidance as well as samples, *Adult Cinema Review* existed solely to market films to spectators by providing those samples *and* a link from distributors to consumers without any of the distractions of the other publications.

Featuring “reviews, previews, and hot news for the home viewer,” *Video-X* followed right along with *Adult Cinema Review* in avoiding the “clutter” in a publication such as *Velvet’s Erotic Film Guide*. The fourth issue of the fourth volume, from May 1983, offers 100 pages of content dedicated solely to sampling. The ubiquitous “letters,” a gossip column by Velvet Summers, an interview with DeLeeuw, and a “new stars”

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<sup>26</sup> The frequently fictional letters were created with industry marketing in mind by constructing fantasies about well-known adult performers. For example, “Joe R.” from Omaha, Nebraska, writes: “Dear Brigitte Monet, I am your biggest fan, and I do mean BIG. I’ve seen every one of your films a dozen times and I dream every night of sticking my nine-inch poker into your hot fireplace. [...] I’d really like to meet you in person and take your luscious 5’10” frame home to my place.” “Letter,” *Adult Cinema Review* October 1983: 2-3.

For an inside perspective on the process of creating adult magazine letters and responses, see: Robert Rosen, *Beaver Street: A History of Modern Pornography* (London: Headpress, 2010) 49.

<sup>27</sup> *Adult Cinema Review* October 1983: 44.

feature fill up a few of the pages, as does a brief story on adult-oriented video games.<sup>28</sup> Multiple reviews, however, make up the bulk of the content, consisting primarily of hardcore samples from the films (with images of penetration covered with black dots) wrapped with minimal and adulatory copy. The magazine did not make much of an attempt to be critical or offer the guidance that other publications presented, nor was it particularly interested in pushing or encouraging narrative.

Typical in this regard would be the review of *Foreplay* (1982, dir. Vinni Rossi), with seven images from the film bracketed by a synopsis and a conclusion illustrating the magazine's overall tone:

Director Vinni Rossi has succeeded in making a film that leaves redeeming social value to the birds. This is hardcore at its hardest, wham bam, and do it again. *Foreplay* is crammed with tasty hot cooze. And in the world of porn, where quim is queen, the frills don't matter. On that level, *Foreplay* is a winner. For a luscious, lusty look, take a look at *Foreplay*.<sup>29</sup>

This review, like all those in the magazine, used samples as a springboard to add copy that mimicked the film itself. *Foreplay*, an all but forgotten film, was hardly a "winner"

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<sup>28</sup> These games, *Custer's Revenge*, *Beat 'Em and Eat 'Em*, and *Bachelor Party*, were developed for the Atari game system in 1983 by Mystique, an offshoot of adult film producer Caballero Control Corporation, one of the longest-running and most successful adult companies in the industry. Marketed under Caballero's "Swedish Erotica" imprint (which had nothing to do with Sweden), the games were a notorious success and received heavy criticism and protest from the National Organization for Women, Women Against Pornography, and Native American groups. *Custer's Revenge*, in particular, which allowed players to control General Custer through a desert in order to reach a Native American woman and gain points by raping her, was the target of cultural pressure. While Atari sued Mystique for denigrating their brand, but Atari's third-party developer policies allowed outside game creation for the system. Mystique went bankrupt in 1983. See: Eric Freedman. "8-Bit Porn: Atari after Dark." *flowtv.org*. FlowTV. 9 June 2007. Web. 1 August 2012; "The Brouhaha over X-Rated Games," *New York Times* 24 October 1982: 145.

<sup>29</sup> Lou Meyers, "Foreplay," *Video-X* May 1983: 26.

according to other critics; it receives barely a mention in other review guides from the period.

The real mission of *Video-X* was to present as much visual content as possible. Two photo features with only tenuous connections to adult film at all fill more than a quarter of the magazines pages; in addition to the “April May” piece, a second pictorial offers Ambrosia, who had appeared in six adult films prior to her appearance. Thirteen pages, with eighteen photographs, including a centerfold, highlight Ambrosia as a “succulent newcomer to the world of X-rated film.”<sup>30</sup> Ambrosia (André Nelson) would go on to make only six more films, and disappear from the industry by 1985. No copy accompanies these photos (although a brief interview appears before them), and the aesthetics are at a minimum in terms of lighting and staging. *Video-X* made little effort to distinguish itself from other publications, and it was hardly a magazine that readers seeking information on the adult video industry could turn to—nor was it, in any way, a useful guide for store owners looking for expertise. It was primarily a vehicle for sampling.

What all these magazines had in common was their position as the *de facto* marketing arm for the adult film industry, consistently sampling its products and, for the most part, wholeheartedly supporting its content with positive reviews. This served a particularly useful purpose during the transition from celluloid to video, as the industry undoubtedly benefited from the reliability of its unofficial marketing partner—even if, as I have outlined, it did not necessarily overcome the problems of that same sampling. Later, when the transition was complete, adult film screenwriter Rick Marx criticized

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<sup>30</sup> “The Softer Side of Ambrosia,” *Video-X* May 1983: 45.

those same practices, noting, “The reviews in these magazines have become a direct adjunct of the film companies’ publicity departments.”<sup>31</sup> If that was indeed the case, it illustrates a larger point: the industry, in order to be legitimized for a larger, more mainstream audience, needed to find a way, while maintaining its content, to find respectability.

*Adult Video News: XXX Without the Sex*

What set *AVN* apart from other publications, and served as a groundbreaking step forward for the marketing of the adult film industry, was that the magazine was a forum one step removed, talking *about* the industry and its products rather than sampling them. In other words, *AVN* radically de-emphasized the sexual content at the core of the industry and turned instead to foregrounding discursive expertise as the guiding strategy. Selling the *idea* of the content rather than the content itself was something that elevated *AVN*, which in turn encouraged the industry to move beyond simply being short-term profit seekers dishing out sexually explicit images and into long-term strategists seeking to redefine the paradigm associated with the product. Such an approach hinged on the creation and deployment of quality as a means to garner respectability. *AVN* would sell adult films without the sex. An understanding of the importance of *AVN*’s position as a key figure in adult video history necessitates an unpacking of this process and its development.

From its first issue, *AVN* acted as an important mediator in that it legitimized the product for retailers, provided a marketing space for producers, and offered information

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<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Cohn, “Pornmakers Surface in the Mainstream,” *Variety* 9 March 1988.

and expertise for viewers. The only antecedents for the magazine's formula were the "swapper" publications that had existed, somewhat underground, since the Sony Betamax had debuted in 1976. *The Videophile's Newsletter* was the first of these, founded by Jim Lowe that same year. The 36-year-old pop culture collector placed an ad in *Movie Collector's World* seeking others who might be interested in trading Betamax tapes. The handful of responses he received led to the creation of a newsletter. His subscriber list grew into the hundreds, then thousands, and Lowe turned it into a glossy magazine with full-color, professionally photographed covers. Reaching its peak with 8,000 subscribers and newsstand sales in 1979, the magazine typically included industry advertising alongside classified ads from collectors—many seeking to trade adult material.<sup>32</sup> It was a groundbreaking publication for home video, connecting users in their specific interests.

Similarly, *Video Swapper*, founded in Fraser, Michigan in early 1981, filled its pages with industry news, ads for equipment, and a classifieds section in which readers made offers to trade collections. It was also replete with adult material. The eleventh issue, from January 1982, for example, features a full-color advertisement on the inside back cover for TVX, one of the earliest and most successful companies, as described in chapter two.<sup>33</sup> A similar advertisement for TGA Video, Inc. fills the back cover.<sup>34</sup> While TGA had nowhere near the success of TVX, its presence here illustrates the need early companies had for *any* marketing and advertising outlets. That these companies would so

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<sup>32</sup> Joshua M. Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster: Video Stores and the Invention of Movies on Video* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008) 23-40.

<sup>33</sup> TVX. Advertisement. *Video Swapper* January 1982: 59.

<sup>34</sup> TGA Video. Advertisement. *Video Swapper* January 1982: 60.

deliberately purchase space in *Video Swapper* illustrates that need: finding consumers for a new technology meant casting a wide net to hone in on specific audiences.<sup>35</sup>

The publishers of *Video Swapper* furthered that process when they released a spinoff publication in September 1983. Like its parent publication, *Adult Video Swapper* aimed for early video collectors. Unlike the more polished aesthetics of *Video Swapper*, however, this new publication came to readers on newsprint. Populated by cheap advertisements from independent producers, and mostly made up of classified postings from collectors seeking to trade material, *Adult Video Swapper* made little or no historical footprint. Yet, it did capture the unique nature of the early adult video industry as it was taking shape. The fourth issue, for example, from December 1983, features an interview with performer Vanessa Del Rio (who also appears on the cover), along with four nude photos from Caballero Home Video releases, demonstrating the magazine's effort to create a professional publication, in part by sampling content from the industry in the traditional style of an adult magazine.<sup>36</sup>

The issue also contained an advertisement for an unnamed producer in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, willing to produce custom adult tapes with one of three

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<sup>35</sup> Adult video distributors in the early days advertised wherever they thought home video consumers might be looking, as related to me by Joel Jacobson (whose history is detailed in chapter two), who noted that *Popular Science*, *Popular Photography*, and *Popular Mechanics* were among the most popular early venues. VCX, another of the early adult video distributors, placed its first advertisements in spring 1978 in magazines like *Merchandiser*, *Dealerscope*, and *Electronics Wholesaler*. *Videography* magazine, a technical journal mostly devoted to the technical side of the burgeoning video production industry, was one of the earliest places to locate adult advertisements. For example, in the December 1977 issue, Scorpio Video, Home Cinema Service, and Astronics all advertised their wares, among the first advertisements anywhere in the United States for adult video. See: Scorpio Video. Advertisement. *Videography* December 1977: 50; Home Cinema Service. Advertisement. *Videography* December 1977: 51; Astronics. Advertisement. *Videography* December 1977: 58; Joel Jacobson. Personal interview. 18 June 2012; Home Cinema Service. Advertisement. *Videography* November 1976: 10; David Jennings, *Skinflicks: The Inside Story of the X-Rated Video Industry* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2000) 79.

<sup>36</sup> Ricky Jones, "Interview with... Vanessa Del Rio," *Adult Video Swapper* December 1983: 6-7.

pictured performers. “Have your dreams come to life on your custom made video tape,” reads the ad, clearly produced on a typewriter. “Send in your outline and choice of girl. Please keep it within reason.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, two ends of the spectrum come into focus in a magazine aimed primarily at individual collectors: the professional and established side, with Del Rio and photos from Caballero, and the amateur, with an unnamed company hawking its custom products with a handmade advertisement. When *Adult Video Swapper* folded, in February 1984, publisher Gary Mancuso gave his 1,100 subscribers to *AVN*, which promptly extended them all one-year subscriptions.<sup>38</sup> *AVN*, always quick to spot an opportunity, was eager for the subscribers list—an invaluable piece of data in the early days of adult video when tracking such specifics were difficult to obtain.

The position carved out by *AVN* in the adult entertainment industry raises questions, answers to which may begin to fill in critical gaps in the history of adult video: what brought about the need for a connection between producers, retailers and consumers of adult film? How did *AVN* fill that gap so quickly? Much as Josh Greenberg suggests that mainstream home video was “invented” in the relationship between distributors and retailers that positioned distributors as educators and experts, I propose that the something similar occurred in the realm of adult video that structured *AVN* as both “voice” for the industry and “expert” for distributors, retailers, and consumers.<sup>39</sup> A critical part of this role was the recognition by Fishbein and Slifkin that, by 1983, VCR sales had exploded—and that the massive new audience was hungry for content,

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<sup>37</sup> “Amateur Video Collection,” *Adult Video Swapper* December 1983: 17.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Fishbein, “Editorial for Our Readers,” *Adult Video News* February/March 1984: 12.

<sup>39</sup> Greenberg 6.

including the adult material that was steadily becoming available in the video stores sprouting all over the United States. *AVN* recognized that this new audience, many of whom were unlikely to visit adult movie theaters or adult bookstores for fear of being associated with “dirty” movies, might have an interest in adult films in the privacy of their homes, and thus might have need for a publication matching that paradigm. In other words, *AVN* saw the tremendous economic potential of new types of discourses that might emphasize respectability. That is to say, the founders of *AVN* saw the potential monetary value of de-emphasizing the sex in adult films as an appeal to those consumers more comfortable with the paradigm positioning narrative as a marker for quality.

Fishbein and Slifkin certainly saw a market in the early 1980s for a respectable publication devoted to adult video. The two worked for Movies Unlimited beginning in 1980 while attending Temple University in Philadelphia, and witnessed firsthand, in one of the earliest and largest mainstream video stores, the explosive growth and profitability of adult tapes.<sup>40</sup> By 1978, Americans had purchased fewer than 175,000 VCRs. After a steep drop in price, that number exploded first to four million by 1982, and then 26 million by 1985.<sup>41</sup> Adult film’s share of the content market for the new machines was substantial, accounting in some estimates for at least half of all tapes available to consumers.<sup>42</sup> Adult industry veteran David Friedman noted in 1980 that of the roughly 600 adult films made between 1975 and 1980, nearly all were available on video, evidencing the quick embrace by the industry of the new format even before a substantial

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<sup>40</sup> “King Smut.” *phillymag.com*. Philadelphia Magazine. November 2004. Web. 6 November 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Cahill. “The United States and Canada.” *Video World-Wide: An International Study*. Ed. Manuel Alvarado. Paris: UNESCO, 1988. 127-128.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Coopersmith, “Pornography, Videotape, and the Internet,” *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* Spring 2000: 27.

customer base existed for the material.<sup>43</sup> In 1984, Keith Justice catalogued more than 2,250 titles in his *Adult Video Index*; by 1986, Robert Rimmer estimated a total count of more than 5,000 adult titles, far more than he could include in his *Adult Video Tape Guide*.<sup>44</sup> This was a sea change from the average of 120 adult films released to theaters per year in the late 1970s, illustrating the need for mediators to sift through the information on behalf of retailers and consumers.<sup>45</sup> Fishbein noted in 1988 that Caballero Video, Video-X-Pix, Essex Video, Cal Vista, and VCX were already “huge companies” when *AVN* began publication in 1983.<sup>46</sup> Yet, they lacked marketing and communications platforms with access to retailers and consumers that might be interested in more than just the literal representation of its content, or had the curiosity to learn more but wanted to do so within the pages of a slightly “safer” publication than *Adam Film World*, *Cinema-X*, *Video X*, or the other magazines of the time.

The steady influx of video retailers seeking to provide consumers with content for their new machines in this period followed a similar pattern, growing from 4,000 stores in 1978 to 10,000 in 1983 and 22,000 in 1985, and estimates suggest that single-store operators owned and managed 90% of the video stores in the early-to-mid 1980s.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Howard Polskin, “Pornography Unleashed,” *Panorama* July 1980: 35.

<sup>44</sup> Keith Justice, *Adult Video Index '84* (Jeferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1984) 1; Bob Rimmer, *Bob Rimmer's Continuously Up-Dated Adult Video Tape Guide* (Quincy, MA: Challenge Press, 1986) 1.

<sup>45</sup> Chuck Kleinhans. "The Change from Film to Video Pornography: Implications for Analysis." *Pornography: Film and Culture*. Ed. Peter Lehman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 154-167.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Fishbein, “The Five-Year Roller Coaster,” *Adult Video News* February 1988: 5.

<sup>47</sup> Cahill 132.

Future research in this area will require a more complete and sophisticated analysis of these statistics, in order to assemble a more complete portrait of the video store landscape accounting for detailed rental

Before Blockbuster and Hollywood Video established their massive corporate dominance (and refused to carry adult video, outlined in chapter five), the average video store was a single location, locally owned business with roughly 1,500 mainstream titles in stock—and a very profitable selection of adult tapes. Profits from adult video, in some accounts, equaled that of children’s tapes, illustrating an early rental pattern of “one for the kids, one for the adults.”<sup>48</sup> Fishbein and Slifkin, like speculators sensing an impending gold rush, recognized the untapped territory of unfamiliar (but curious) retailers and consumers seeking out respectable information about adult video. The two were particularly familiar with such needs from their encounters with customers at Movies Unlimited explicitly seeking such advice. Fishbein later described these interactions, foreshadowing a tone and approach later familiar in *AVN*:

All these new people getting VCRs, the one thing that was common amongst them was, “Hey, can you recommend an adult film?” Cause everybody wanted to see an adult film. So, I didn’t know. I’ve maybe seen half a dozen in my life. You know, snuck into theaters when I was 17, that whole deal, like everybody, but I’ve only seen a few films on video. So we would just go by box cover and what other people rented. So it dawned on us that maybe we could do like a newsletter for all these new consumers who were, you know, renting VCRs but didn’t know anything about adult, because for most of these people, they had never gone into a theater to see an adult film, so they were new to adult. They just knew they wanted to

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versus sales numbers, how many stores were dedicated completely to adult video and how many carried mainstream and adult titles, a breakdown of rural versus urban locations, and so forth.

<sup>48</sup> Kleinhans 157.

see it, but they didn't know why, you know. So, we decided we would do a newsletter for consumers, like a consumer report type thing, and it would be, here's what's coming out on video and this is what you should rent and this is what you shouldn't.<sup>49</sup>

That Fishbein would consider a print publication as the best way to reach consumers was, in some ways, very predictable. As a teenager, Fishbein, along with classmate Stuart Franks, created his first magazine, *Universal Wrestling*, selling subscriptions for \$10 per year, printing copies at the Franks' family print shop.<sup>50</sup> While at Temple University, Fishbein and Slifkin, both journalism majors, created *In Print* magazine, featuring entertainment and articles aimed at college students. The magazine, described by Fishbein as "cutting edge" in terms of design and content, reached a circulation high of 30,000, and won a Hearst Foundation journalism award.<sup>51</sup>

The two self-confessed "film buffs" also wrote a home video column for the *Philadelphia Bulletin*, a now-defunct daily newspaper, and briefly considered national syndication as a possible career path. Reaching readers on the topics of entertainment and home video was very familiar ground, and their experience in mainstream film criticism lent them an outsider's perspective on adult film, as did their Pennsylvania location far away from the San Fernando Valley adult film world. In 1982, the 24-year-old Fishbein and his partner Slifkin each contributed \$300 to the project and Barry Rosenblatt, a graphic design student, put in another \$300 and created the magazine's design. They

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Fishbein, by Josh Greenberg. Personal interview. 15 April 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Layser. "Porn Supremacy." *Philadelphia Weekly*. 9 January 2008. Web. 7 November 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Fishbein. Personal interview. 15 April 2003; "King Smut." Web.

assembled a first issue, obtained classified ads from a few mail order companies, purchased space was in the back of adult magazines to advertise the venture, and declared themselves “experts.” In reality, however, their lack of personal interest and investment in adult film lent a particular tone to the newsletter giving it a detached credibility.

While contemporary issues of the magazine present glossy aesthetics and voluminous industry advertising, the early offerings had a much different aesthetic, tone, and purpose. Released in February 1983, the first issue of *Adult Video News* was a two-color newsletter running eight pages. Mailed to 27 subscribers, the issue cost two dollars. Fishbein and Slifkin continued to work at Movies Unlimited, running the new business out of a post office box in the same shopping center as the video store.<sup>52</sup> Alongside seven reviews, the issue also offered a small section of industry news and an interview with actress Veronica Hart. Later, executive editor Gene Ross described the original idea as a desire to “publish a magazine that would be a classy, intelligent, and informative critique of the goings-on in the adult film, and the soon-to-come-on-like gangbusters, shot-on-video industry.”<sup>53</sup> Of the first seven reviews, only *Valley Vixens* (1983, dir. Bobby Hollander) was shot directly on the new medium; the others were theatrical releases transferred to videotape, a sign that the industry was still in the process of making that transition.

Most importantly, the editors made the deliberate and groundbreaking decision to ensure that the magazine had no nudity or explicit language, a radical departure from the standard approach at the time, and precisely what Ross meant by “classy” and

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<sup>52</sup> Clyde DeWitt. “Legalese.” *thedigitaleditiononline.com*. Adult Video News. March 2012. Web. 21 November 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Gene Ross, “Adult Video News: The First Five Years,” *Adult Video News* February 1988: 46.

“intelligent.” The initial masthead read, “A Monthly Newsletter for Today’s Sophisticated X-Rated Viewer,” a clear image of the credibility, expertise, and sincerity sought by the editors, but also an indication of the type of audience they were hoping to *avoid*. In other words, the paradigm embodied by a publication such as *X-Rated Cinema*, which debuted only a month earlier, could not have been more different from what Fishbein and Slifkin had in mind. Rather than page after page of samples, accompanied by graphic and explicit descriptions, *AVN* went an entirely different route. The editors were relying on readers trusting the magazine’s proclaimed expertise and approach *to* the industry, rather than sampling the content *from* the industry, a deliberately crafted strategy intended to produce something different, something respectable. Such an approach, as I have shown, taps directly into the mind/body split, privileging psychology over physical pleasure—and, as will become clear, towing with it all the accompanying gendered baggage.

This respectability strategy stemmed from a commitment to what the editors deemed quality, a discourse that would come to define *AVN*’s approach to reviewing adult videos and in their self-positioning as “experts” both on and within the industry. It also formed the centerpiece of the problematic associations between quality and gender that underpin much of *AVN*’s relationship to the industry. In the second issue, Fishbein and Slifkin co-authored “I Want One With a Story!,” an essay exemplifying the respectability that they sought for the magazine, for the industry as a whole, and for the types of readers they thought might be their target. It also echoes their experiences as retail clerks:

The young couple had been married merely a month, and already they needed a spice added to their sex lives. They walked into their local video shop and headed right for the adult films. Leslie, a blonde vixen who really hadn't even seen an X-rated film ("I saw part of *Emmanuelle* once at the drive-in!") looked sheepishly at the salesman, lowered her head, and let herself be dragged into that section of the shop. Max, her husband, had seen some adult films. He knew that there had to be films sexy enough to turn his new wife on. The salesman trotted into the X-rated area and chirped, "May I help you?" Leslie was quick to answer, "I want one with a story." The salesman had heard that request before. He even had a list of the adult films that had plots interesting enough to keep both the novice and the experienced viewer hot and happy.<sup>54</sup>

This opening paragraph reveals the mediation role played by *AVN*, particularly in its inclusion of the perspectives of both retailer and consumer within a single narrative—a crucial link making an explicit and literal connection between segments of the industry that other magazines were not attempting.

Numerous discourses serve here to both bolster and legitimize the adult film industry. Even as they do so, however, they also subtly reprimand the industry's long-standing practices of alienating consumers through the marketing of the very content making up their products—which thus encourages the industry to do more than just sample the films. Yet, while the piece initially appears to offer a progressive view of the adult video rental landscape, it ultimately crafts a set of mechanisms reifying very

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Fishbein and I.L. Slifkin, "I Want One with a Story!," *Adult Video News* March 1983: 5.

particular gendered stereotypes. The depiction here of a heterosexual married couple works to deflate the long-standing mythology that adult films are the provinces of perverted single men (typically referred to as “raincoaters”). Furthermore, by positioning the fictitious wife as a novice, the piece also acknowledges that women new to renting adult material might appreciate guidance and a sense of professionalization.<sup>55</sup>

*AVN* quickly (and strategically) assigns the burden of assistance to the clerk, painted here as a cheerful and well-trained professional, non-judgmental or threatening, and ready to help customers. The portrait of the retail experience in this piece removes any sense of danger or illicit behavior by offering a portrait of a transaction typical to any business, rather than one involving sexually explicit material. That this encounter takes place at a local video store rather than an adult bookstore illustrates the growth of a new market and a reassurance to anxious customers that such encounters were commonplace and carefree, as well as easy to understand in familiar customer service terms and behaviors. The reassurance does not end with the customers: it extends to retailers as well, previewing potential transactions and interactions. Most importantly, *AVN*

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<sup>55</sup> Mainstream Hollywood also attempted to court viewers seeking “adult” material by using very similar “guidance” and “professionalization” strategies that emphasized inherent links between narrative, gender, and quality. Justin Wyatt details how, in 1974, Columbia Pictures released *Emmanuelle*, a soft-core feature designed and marketed to women by, in part, disassociating itself from pornography by highlighting all the elements of “quality”: narrative, European origin, intelligence, elegance, and beauty. Columbia president David Begelman noted as much when he recalled his decision to obtain the film for American release, having seen the audience composition in Paris: “The line outside the theater was made up of about 75 to 80% women. We would have had no interest in the film if its appeal was totally to men. Then it could be taken as pornographic.” Later, Columbia’s advertising strategy would play even further on these elements. The copy on the film’s poster read: “X has never been known for other things. At Columbia Pictures we’re proud to bring you a movie that will change the meaning of X. A movie that begins with the sensual and takes it to places X has never been before.” Columbia, much like *AVN*, was clearly trying to sell sex without the sex—emphasizing narrative as a means of guaranteeing quality. Not coincidentally does *AVN* use *Emmanuelle* in the “I Want One With a Story!” essay. See: Justin Wyatt. “The Stigma of X: Adult Cinema and the Institution of the MPAA Ratings System.” *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*. Ed. Matthew Bernstein. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999. 238-263.

subsequently provides the “list” the clerk references, positioning the magazine as the expert, ready and able to provide customers (and, crucially, store clerks) with recommendations and advice—much as Fishbein and Slifkin had done during their time at Movies Unlimited. Here, then, was the mission statement of *AVN*, spelled out and literalized: whether a viewer was a “novice” or “experienced” (implicit code for female and male), the magazine was prepared to offer reliable, trustworthy, and expert advice, devoid of judgment, in a safe and reassuring tone.

This strategy became more important as the industry slowly transformed from celluloid to video production, raising technological issues related to *visual* quality. Producers, retailers, and consumers initially had little faith in the reproduction quality of shot-on-video productions as compared to film. As late as 1986, when the industry had nearly completed its technological transition, critic Jim Holliday still referred to adult film produced directly on magnetic tape as “shit-on-video,” and suggested such material was “critically and creatively impoverished,” including them in his seminal guide to adult film with extreme reluctance.<sup>56</sup> A pair of letters to the editor in *AVN*’s March 1985 issue illustrates the discourses around such skepticism and the solutions offered by the magazine. The first, from a consumer, angrily asks why manufacturers refused to identify video or celluloid production on the box. “The people where I shop have absolutely no idea what’s going on and I’m getting sick and tired of going home and finding these lousy quality videos when I was expecting a movie.”<sup>57</sup> If this letter illustrates *why* the industry desperately needed a mediator like *AVN*, the second offers evidence of *how* such

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<sup>56</sup> Jim Holliday, *Only the Best* (Van Nuys, CA: Cal Vista Direct, Ltd., 1986) 187.

<sup>57</sup> R. Smith, “Bad Boxes,” *Adult Video News* March 1985: 3.

a mediation strategy could work: “I am opening a new store in my town,” it reads, “and I must say that my subscription to *Adult Video News* has been very helpful in stocking the store. When it opens next month, I feel it will have the best adult section in the area.”<sup>58</sup> This letter, much like the “I Want One With a Story!” piece, captures how the magazine increasingly addressed retailers—in this case even seeming to answer the disappointment of the first writer and his dissatisfaction with “lousy quality” videos by locating the solution squarely in the friendly, and well-educated (by *AVN*), neighborhood store.

The frustrations regarding visual quality also illustrate a larger tension around new technologies that *AVN* worked to alleviate. Altman describes the way in which audiences draw on prior knowledge to understand new technological forms, but that, in this process, unreasonable expectations and subsequent disappointments become inevitable:

Inheriting from existing media a set of assumptions about the nature—the look and the sound—of reality, new technologies are typically judged to be failures if they prove unable to reproduce reality in the way that contemporary audiences expect. New technologies thus tend initially to be configured not according to their own inherent representational possibilities, but according to current notions, derived from other media, about how reality should be represented.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, these early tensions around the visual quality of video are highly predictable. Given that celluloid-based film had been the dominant form for the adult industry for decades, it

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<sup>58</sup>Jack Bailey, “Store Help,” *Adult Video News* March 1985: 3.

<sup>59</sup> Altman 18.

is not surprising that viewers might develop anxieties around the aesthetics of the new medium. Technological change, in other words, always brings anxiety as a passenger.

In its self-appointed role as calming and mediating voice, *AVN* ran numerous, lengthy articles about the positive potential of the new medium, interviewed veteran directors and newcomers about the change, and criticized those producers who flooded the market with fancy but misleading box covers containing otherwise shoddy content.<sup>60</sup> Yet, they also incessantly praised the legacy of adult film *on* film, linking that medium's aesthetics and technological capabilities with quality. Given the magazine's name and genesis, it seems slightly odd that *AVN* would maintain a nostalgic tone toward the Golden Age of adult films, reviewing theatrical releases in the early years and consistently segregating shot-on-film and shot-on-video reviews throughout the 1980s. This tone, however, encouraged retailers and consumers alike to seek out quality, regardless of the medium (though there is no question they favored the theatrical transfers in the early years). It also illustrates the cultural stakes *AVN* sensed were at play: if the video format were to succeed in transforming the industry, its public discourses would need to emphasize possible artistic merits rather than explicit imagery or lurid details. The editors knew early on that the economic benefit afforded by the technology could also have the consequence of a rapid drop in attention to aesthetic and narrative detail given the rapid production speed that video equipment provided.<sup>61</sup> An emphasis on high-

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<sup>60</sup> Mark Kernes, "Shot-on-Video: The Future Is Now," *Adult Video News* June 1986: 16.

<sup>61</sup> Mark Carriere, who started a mail-order company, Multi-Media Distributing, in 1980 in Merrillville, Indiana with his brother Brad, probably achieved the inevitable endgame of the new technological capabilities. In 1983, they moved to Canoga Park, California, in the heart of the San Fernando Valley adult video scene, and opened Video Exclusives, a production company specializing in rapid production methods, often shooting entire films in a single day. Growing into a \$30 million dollar annual business, Video Exclusives opened a 7,500 square-foot warehouse and began releasing more than 70 titles per year, with Carriere often directing under the name "Mark Curtis" and for his other related companies, including

profile directors such as Chuck Vincent, Cecil Howard, Anthony Spinelli, and Henri Pachard dominates the early issues, not surprising given that their films represented precisely the type of quality *AVN* hoped could transfer to shot-on-video productions.

### *Quality, Respectability, and Gender in AVN*

There is another, gendered, discourse circulating underneath the more overt narrative, one of quality that haunts adult film in every aspect, from production to distribution to regulation. As evidenced by the woman's desire for "one with a story," a particular interest in the promotion of narrative permeates virtually every issue of the newsletter in the first few years and was the cornerstone of its respectability strategy. The editors' primary means of legitimating adult movies was to foreground artistic merits, which meant portraying them as sophisticated entertainment. As the history of "quality" in chapter one shows, such discourse play into long-standing frameworks built on

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Leisure Time Entertainment. See: John Johnson, "Demand Is Strong, but Police Crackdowns and a Saturated Market Spell Trouble for One of L.A.'S Biggest Businesses," *Los Angeles Times* 17 February 1991: 8. On July 7, 1989, Carriere's brother-in-law, John Laolagi, who performed under the name John Stallion and was partners with Carriere in Stallion Productions, rented the historic Clark Residence in downtown Los Angeles for, ostensibly, a "documentary film production." Instead, the duo embarked on a four-week film shoot that would later come to be known as the "pornathon," in which they shot 47 full-length adult videos. While causing the YWCA considerable embarrassment, and resulting in various efforts by the Los Angeles Police Department to (unsuccessfully) find something illegal about the activities, the real outcome was the somewhat disturbing revelation that the industry was capable of and deliberately seeking to shoot that much material that quickly. The "one day wonder," while not conceived of by Carriere (indeed, that production method dates back to the earliest days of adult film and the "loop" system), was certainly bolstered by his outspoken desire to make it a reality. "I'm always looking to cut corners, to cut people out of the picture," Carriere noted in 1991. "I came up with the idea that instead of shooting over two to three days, you could do it one day." The subsequent flooding of the market resulted in a price drop from the standard \$100 per tape in the early days to as little as \$5 with the plethora of Video Exclusives' titles on the market. See: John Johnson, "Adult Movies Filmed at YWCA Building Pornography," *Los Angeles Times* 23 December 1989: 3. Federal agents raided Multi-Media Distributing in 1989, and Carriere and his brother (who later committed suicide) were charged with tax evasion. Carriere later plead guilty to filing a false tax return. In later years, he would face a barrage of obscenity prosecutions, and in 1992 was ordered to serve four months of house arrest and a \$3.5 million forfeiture of assets for sending obscene material to Tallahassee, Florida, the largest obscenity-related forfeiture in U.S. history. See: John Johnson, "Sex-Film Maker Pleads Guilty to Tax Evasion," *Los Angeles Times* 23 August 1991: 3; John Johnson, "Suit Filed to Determine If Tape Is Obscene," *Los Angeles Times* 24 November 1992: 1.

tensions and anxieties around female sexuality. The industry, hungry to increase profits, long sought the female audience for its products. *AVN*, by linking the concept of “one with a story” to potential female viewers, tapped directly into these frameworks, positioning narrative as the key to increasing respectability.

A deep and unintended irony emerges from the continual deployment of this strategy: *AVN*, while actively encouraging the industry to increase quality as a means to attract female viewers, fell back on narrative as a marker of that concept. In doing so, it thus relied on essentialized notions of women as the “moral guardians,” afraid to venture too far into the territory of “simple” bodily pleasures. The active, even incessant, encouragement of “one with story” as an industrial strategy seems, on the surface, designed to motivate the industry toward attention to detail, careful construction of its products, and an investment in the manufacture of sophisticated material—none of which seem superficially like negative qualities. After all, what industry (particularly those under a cultural microscope) would *not* want to be associated with those characteristics? Yet, the encouragement also reified notions that women would not want—or should not have—access to pornography *without* the attempts at elevation to “higher” pleasures than simple arousal.

These sorts of efforts at elevation recur frequently in the magazine’s pages. In September 1985, for example, a brief interview with distributor Steffanie Martin of distributor Femme-X makes the connections clear. “We pre-select tapes geared toward the couple’s market,” notes Martin, “Our criteria includes that it is a quality production, not offensive to women, good story, good acting, and not shot on a low budget.”<sup>62</sup> Much like the magazine as a whole, Martin leaves out sex as part of her criteria, creating a

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<sup>62</sup> “Femme-X Picks Films for Stores,” *Adult Video News Confidential* September 1985: 2.

strange absence marketing pornography without its primary generic feature. A longer piece in June 1985 studying the successful marketing of recent adult titles stressed the importance of quality and narrative for storeowners, and used Hal Freeman's 1984 film *X-Factor* as a case study. The editors write, "A love story... the film has appealed to the 'couples' crowd, one of the major reasons for its success... Even customers who do not normally view X-rated films could watch this film without being embarrassed, thereby demonstrating that there is an audience beyond the 'raincoat' crowd."<sup>63</sup> They go on to praise *X-Factor* for its sophisticated narrative construction and labeled it as one of the "good ones" that belong in any private collection. "Embarrassment" here might have something to do with arousal—suggesting that "customers who do not normally view X-rated films," another code, this time for women, required something more, a justification rooted in intellectual pleasures rather than in the body. Narrative, as always, was that something "more" that legitimated the accompanying pleasures.

This returns the discussion to Kendrick's formulation of pornography as a "thought structure" rather than a thing. Part of that structure, as he traces, is the fear that women's pleasure, if uncontained, will dismantle the "normal" social order. When it comes to cultural beliefs regarding pornography, he writes, "women's innocence is just depravity on hold."<sup>64</sup> Thus, the debates around quality narratives in pornography and female spectatorship take on much deeper significance. It is not just *pleasure* that is at stake; it is the apparent moral center of society itself. In her work on what she terms "unruly women," Kathleen Karlyn, drawing on Rabelais, argues that comedy is a genre

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<sup>63</sup> Alex Thomas, "The Marketing of Three Major Titles," *Adult Video News Confidential* June 1985: 18.

<sup>64</sup> Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1987) 261.

that momentarily inverts the social hierarchy as it disrupts notions of appropriately gendered behavior.<sup>65</sup> I would extend her reasoning to include pornography—which is often the literal representation of female sexual pleasures of all kinds, and can be the focal point for similar social inversion. If culture labors to prevent women’s “unruly” pleasure, then pornography represents a possible epicenter of representational and participatory fear, thus giving it tremendous political potential, as well as marking it as a dangerous object.

Anxiety surrounding the disruption of the “normal” social order explains, in part, this fear, as well as the possibility that “appropriate” gender roles and their linked behaviors (including sexuality) could be overturned. In terms of pornography, part of that “normal social order” rests on the belief that narrative “justifies” pleasure, particularly for women. Judith Halberstam, in her analysis of female masculinity, argues that the taking up of “masculine” behaviors by women is “generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach.”<sup>66</sup> Along with Karlyn’s “unruly woman,” then, Halberstam’s formulation suggests that a politically transgressive power lies in the disruption and dismissal of narrative pornography. Narrative, along with being a marker of quality, also marks the “normal” social order, in which bodily pleasures are contained and justified through “higher” pursuits of the mind.

Of course, as is always the case, these discourses were not without contradiction as they arose in *AVN*’s pages. The tensions and anxieties circulating around women’s

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<sup>65</sup> Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995) 19.

<sup>66</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) 9.

pleasure in relation to pornography inevitably erupt, and often in places that call out the impossibility of a “one size fits all” mentality in relation to pleasure. In November 1984, *AVN*'s only female columnist, Darla Hewitt, wrote, “[P]roducers of adult films... think that less sex and more story will appeal to women. Well, guys, not all women want something like [that]. Some of us—including me—often want to see juicy, up-close, raw sex scenes... I don't always need sensitivity.”<sup>67</sup> For *AVN*, this is as close as someone would come to writing a story where a woman walks into a video store and tells the clerk, “I want one *without* a story.” For the most part, quality adult films of the era marked themselves by their attention to story (followed by other various elements of *mise-en-scène*), rather than their dismissal of its presence.

Many of the early 1980s films praised in *AVN*'s pages played in theaters before transfer to home video, leaned heavily on plot and character, featured performers interested in their craft (both sexual and dramatic), and emphasized aesthetics. A film such as *Talk Dirty to Me* (1980, dir. Spinelli) exemplifies these traits: starring Golden Age stalwarts Richard Pacheco, John Leslie, and Jessie St. James, the film loosely follows the plot from *Of Mice and Men*, with Leslie and Pacheco undertaking a series of erotic adventures replete with all sorts of extratextual Hollywood references. The film, combining a layered storyline, nuanced acting, and intense eroticism, represented progress to *AVN*. Key to the “sophistication” of a film such as *Talk Dirty to Me* was its emphasis on narrative. The film, an ideal recommendation for the clerk helping a customer looking for “one with a story,” was squarely in line with the Golden Age mode of incorporating sex scenes around a well-crafted storyline.

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<sup>67</sup> Darla Hewitt, “Darla's Eye View,” *Adult Video News* November 1984: 23.

Much of the industry, seeking to expand its customer base, primarily by adding female viewers, undoubtedly saw *AVN*'s efforts in this regard as a positive set of strategies. Over time, as the magazine grew, these strategies, which had an appeal to much more than a nervous group of new consumers seeking reassurance that adult film offered more than just “simple” bodily pleasures, gradually found a readership in the industry itself—from the producers and distributors seeking a marketing space, to the new crop of store owners looking for advice and guidance on how to sell the material to the expanding customer base streaming their doors. *AVN*, ultimately, became a trade journal.

#### *AVN's Transition to Trade Journal*

By covering industry developments, reviewing content, and offering myriad business suggestions, the newsletter linked producers (responsible for making the content), retailers (instructed to maintain a professional demeanor and provide information), and consumers (encouraged to seek out the product). By joining them in a discourse encouraging quality, *AVN* attempted to foster in all three a sense of respectability regarding the adult film industry, a desire further echoed in its emphasis on the narrative and aesthetic forms of successful theatrically released films. Furthermore, it established the newsletter as a voice of authority and expertise in its role as a partner to the industry. The combination of these functions—mediation of the distribution chain and partnership with the industry—moved the journal from a small newsletter for fans to an industry platform aimed at video rental store owners unparalleled in the history of adult film.

The self-positioning of *AVN* as ready and willing to be a marketing and advertising platform for the industry, connecting producers to distributors, was evident from the beginning. For example, a small news item in the second issue announced that Video-X-Pix, one of the leading adult video distributors, would release *The Erotic World of Angel Cash* (1982, dir. Howard A. Howard) for \$39.95, well below the typical \$60-\$100 prices common for tapes at the time. The item makes reference to Paramount Pictures' decision to lower prices on *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982) to "sell through" directly to customers at affordable rates, a decision that would fundamentally and permanently change the home video industry. The piece quotes Vicki Langer of Video-X-Pix, using Paramount's logic: "This will stimulate higher sales while bringing in additional viewers to the industry."<sup>68</sup> Three issues later, an ad for *Angel Cash* appears, prominently displaying the lowered price.<sup>69</sup> This trajectory demonstrates the commitment by *AVN* to cover the day-to-day operations of the adult film producers *and* to provide a marketing platform for the results. While the first two issues contained very little advertising, by that fifth issue producers had seized the opportunity to market their films in large, graphic ads. By late summer 1983, such ads begin to occupy as much space as the content.

A few months earlier, in mid-summer 1983, Fishbein noticed that his subscription list was filling up with video rental storeowners. Much like the customers who might not have been familiar with adult films but had curiosity and equipment, owners of the era

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<sup>68</sup> "Angel Cash to Retail for \$39.95," *Adult Video News* March 1983: 6.

<sup>69</sup> *The Erotic World of Angel Cash*. Advertisement. *Adult Video News* July 1983: 5.

were eager to capitalize on the exploding market but might not have had the knowledge of what to stock in their inventory. As Fishbein later explained:

These stores needed the information. So that's when we said we'd switch deals and said, alright, let's do it as a trade publication instead of saying that this is a hot sexy movie that you should rent, this is a hot sexy movie that you should stock in your store. And so, when we did that, we started giving it away for free to video stores. That's when all of a sudden the business started to grow and then people wanted to really advertise because it was a whole different, you know, a whole different attitude about why they would advertise. They would advertise because of the reaching in and getting wholesale rather than retail.<sup>70</sup>

This was a tonal change from the early issues, which targeted individual viewers. In addition to the masthead tagline, early subscription ads suggested that the newsletter “will help you select your monthly adult entertainment” and could be “delivered to your door.” The interviews presented questions to industry members from a “fan’s perspective,” and reviews made clear the entertainment value for the home spectator. Yet, even that early tone clearly appealed to retailers seeking reliable ordering advice from the perspective of their potential customers. Producers and distributors, too, were quick to seize the obvious opportunity presented by the newsletter.

Targeting video storeowners and managers rather than consumers (in both content and advertising) marks the turning point for the newsletter as it moved away from an ostensibly fan-oriented discourse to industry mediation. Structural changes reflecting this

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<sup>70</sup> Fishbein. Personal interview. 15 April 2003.

shift began to appear. In May 1984, a new feature called “Newslines” appeared in the magazine, offering industry coverage and news aimed at retailers. Much of this information described the legal challenges facing adult filmmakers and distributors, a shift offering further evidence that *AVN* desired a closer relationship with the industry. Sales and rental data appeared beginning in June 1984, as did editorials covering a wide range of industrial, political, and economic issues pertaining directly to retailers rather than consumers. Distributors willing to sell complete video collections to retailers started running full-page ads in September 1984. “Guides to stars” and “essential collections” essays also became fixtures, designed to assist new owners in purchasing initial inventory or to revitalize stale collections.

The advertising in *AVN*'s pages also began discursively changing, shifting in tone to seek a different customer base. Caballero Video, in March 1984, placed an ad addressing video retailers instead of individual viewers, thus initiating a strategy other distributors were quick to follow.<sup>71</sup> In subsequent issues, Essex Video targeted video storeowners by offering various in-store promotions, giveaways, and special rates. These changes are visible in the January 1985 issue: VCA Pictures, arguably the leader in adult video as the industry transitioned into maturity, placed an ad aimed at retailers suggesting that its titles were “guaranteed to bring you explosive profits.”<sup>72</sup> Only a few pages later, Starlet Video was still offering a “video club” membership to individual consumers, an outdated model that would soon fade from the landscape, as would Starlet itself,

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<sup>71</sup> Cabarello. Advertisement. *Adult Video News* February 1984.

<sup>72</sup> VCA Pictures. Advertisement. *Adult Video News* January 1985: 5; Jim Holliday, “The Changing Face of Adult Video,” *Adult Video News* March 1987: 88.

indicating, perhaps, how such models were no longer economically viable.<sup>73</sup> Circulation figures further reflected the emphasis on retailers. Subscriptions increased in the second year to 9,000, of which 4,000 went free to stores as publicity for both *AVN* and the industry—a strong indication of *AVN*'s growing presence in rental locations rather than individuals' mailboxes.<sup>74</sup> Increasingly, retailers turned to the magazine for advice and expertise on what to order.

This timeline of discursive change parallels the explosive growth of VCR sales beginning in 1984.<sup>75</sup> By 1985, as adult movie theaters across the United States continued closing left and right, the local video store transformed into the primary outlet for sexually explicit material—not just for those spectators migrating from the theaters, but also those new initiates now willing to try the material with the privacy of home viewing. Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine, went so far as to say in 1984 that, if he owned an adult theater, he would tear it down and build a parking lot—a prescient move that other owners would have been wise to follow.<sup>76</sup> Adult magazines, too, were losing customers to the new technology. In November 1986, *Playboy* cut its advertising rates by 17 percent after a tumble in subscriptions, and *Hustler* lost more than half its readership as home video grew.<sup>77</sup> Ben Pesta all but ceded the race to video in an October 1984

*Hustler* essay: “Cassettes are more involving, more dynamic and more erotic than

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<sup>73</sup> Starlet Video. Advertisement. *Adult Video News* January 1985: 8.

<sup>74</sup> Fishbein, “Editorial for Our Readers,” *Adult Video News* February/March 1984: 4.

<sup>75</sup> Cahill 128.

<sup>76</sup> Ben Pesta, “X Rated Video: Will It Make Adult Theaters and Men's Magazines Obsolete?,” *Hustler* October 1984: 52.

<sup>77</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof, “X-Rated Industry in a Slump,” *New York Times* 5 October 1986: 6.

magazines. They have no pages to turn and no difficult words to read. Their images move and talk. They give buyers of men's publications more of what they're looking for—erotic entertainment—than magazines ever could.”<sup>78</sup>

Magazine publishers also tried the new medium, to varying degrees of success. Perhaps the first of these was *Partner* magazine, which unveiled its first issue in June 1979. In a unique cross-promotion, the magazine offered a companion video via mail order (for an additional \$64.98) that it called *The Partner Television Show*, a 60-minute tape (on Beta or VHS) that presented four softcore “stories” matched up with content from the magazine. “Now, for the first time ever,” the magazine suggested, “you can watch great erotic episodes spring to life in the privacy of your own home.”<sup>79</sup> The awkward efforts to describe the tape (as a “television show,” a “cable TV show with a *60 Minutes*-type format,” and “as actual documentary films”) speak to the ways in which the industry was not quite sure how video was different from print. The first tape consisted of photo shoots with models, interviews with swingers, and a look at a female wrestling league, all detailed in the magazine's pages with photos.<sup>80</sup> It is unclear precisely how long *The Partner Television Show* lasted, but the magazine's masthead dropped that subheading beginning in June 1981, though it still offered eight sets of previous tapes by

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<sup>78</sup> Pesta 54.

<sup>79</sup> “The Partner Television Show,” *Partner* June 1979: 79.

<sup>80</sup> “I Fucked Five Men!: An Uninspiring Sexual History,” *Partner* June 1979: 80-81; “New York Couple Advertises: ‘We Want a Girl with Big Boobs to Swing with Us,’” *Partner* June 1979: 82, 94, 96; “The Mad Professor & His Loco-Dildo: Turning a Blueprint into a Blue Reality,” *Partner* June 1979: 83, 94; “Squashed Tits & Stinky Pits: Amateur Grapping Comes of Age in Connecticut,” *Partner* June 1979: 84-85, 94. The magazine lists former editor of *Cheri* magazine Peter Wolff and former *Puritan* magazine staffer Dian Bailey as in charge of the video productions, but Carter Stevens (born Malcolm Worob), Golden Age director of such films as *Teenage Twins* (1976) and *Rollerbabies* (1976), confirmed to me in an interview that he was the director of these segments. Carter Stevens. Email with the author. 15 February 2013.

mail order.<sup>81</sup> *Velvet Talks!*, another adult publication from the late 1970s, even experimented with audio—including a vinyl record with the centerfold, ostensibly to include the models talking directly to the consumer.<sup>82</sup>

Other magazines, such as *Hustler*, *Penthouse*, *Playboy*, and *Screw*, perhaps seeing the popularity of alternative programming on video (the model of which might have been *Jane Fonda's Workout*, an exercise tape featuring the actress released in 1982 that had extraordinary success), all offered video versions of their magazines beginning in 1984.<sup>83</sup> *New Look*, created by Andre Blay (founder of Magnetic Video, described in chapter two)

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<sup>81</sup> *The Partner Television Show*. Advertisement. *Partner* June 1981: 82.

<sup>82</sup> “Disco Sex Action,” *Velvet Talks!* 4 (1979): Centerfold.

<sup>83</sup> *Jane Fonda's Workout*, one of the great success stories of early home video, was born when Stuart Karl, a former waterbed salesman and publisher of *Spa and Sauna*, thought there might be a market for home videos other than Hollywood films. He began producing home-and-self-improvement tapes under the Karl Home Video banner, as well as creating *Video Store* magazine, among the earliest publications devoted to the new format. His early efforts included *The First Aid Video Book* and *New Speed Reading*, and sales picked up with *John Lennon: An Interview with a Legend*, taken from the Tom Snyder Show. In 1979, he approached Arthur Morowitz (whose history is detailed in chapter two) at the CES show, and sold him \$10,000 worth of material for distribution in the Video Shack chain. Karl, more than any other early video pioneer, created what became the very lucrative “special interest programming” niche.

In 1981, seeing the success of *Jane Fonda's Workout Book*, which went to #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list (as well as her two workout studios in Los Angeles, started two years earlier, which led to the book), Karl was convinced by his wife to approach Fonda to shoot a companion video. Fonda agreed, and asked Sidney Galanty, who had previously done the Senate campaign ads for her then-husband, Tom Hayden, to direct. Fonda had already been considering a workout tape, as had RCA, and the three parties formed the joint venture. The astonishing results surprised everyone involved. While the original projections called for 25,000 tape sales, by the end of the first year more than 250,000 copies were purchased, and spent 41 weeks at the top of Billboard's sales chart, more than any other film of any kind since the inception of that data in November 1979. Eventually, more than 23 additional *Workout* tapes with Fonda joined the first, and Lorimar acquired Karl Home Video, renaming its new company Karl-Lorimar Home Video. Undoubtedly one of home video's early successes, the *Workout* series helped define the new market.

Karl, like so many other early pioneers in home video, had a connection to adult film as well. *Video Store* magazine ran advertisements for adult products, and in January 1980, before the *Workout* phenomenon, Karl unsuccessfully tried to partner with David Jennings to market and distribute the LoveTV tapes (described in chapter two) in the pages of *Video Store*. See: Jane Fonda, *Jane Fonda's Workout Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981); *Jane Fonda's Workout*. Dir. Sid Galanty. RCA Video Productions, 1981. VHS; Jane Fonda. “30th Anniversary of My First Workout Video.” *janefonda.com*. 24 April 2012. Web. 26 March 2013; Marc Mancini, “Video S.I.P.,” *Film Comment* 23.1 (January 1987); Richard W. Stevenson, “From Fonda and Hart to Flops and Hot Water,” *New York Times* 7 February 1988: F11; Jennings 130-138.

entered the market as a video-only venture in early 1982, featuring interviews with Bob Rafelson and Francis Ford Coppola in its first issue, alongside the “world’s first video centerfold,” but did not make it to issue two.<sup>84</sup> Even adult film producers attempted to seize the potential of a video “magazine”: VCX, among the biggest and most successful producers, introduced *Men’s Video Magazine* in 1984 with a dazzling example of video marketing hyperbole:

VCX’s Men’s Magazine is a glittering showcase of video and artistry and visual fireworks which combines state-of-the-art technology with some of the most gorgeous *femme fatales* ever to grace the television screen. VCX introduces this first installment of MVM to our millions of seasoned video lovers who want to experience high-quality, non-explicit adult programming without sacrificing the power of the erotic image. The format is a lively mixture of single girl video layouts; an interview with adult film superstar Kay Parker; a voluptuous oil-wrestling free-for-all; and an eye-popping abstract dance sequence with a bevy of beautiful bodies.<sup>85</sup>

As with *New Look*, *Men’s Video Magazine* did not make it to issue two. Even Fishbein, seeing the potential for discourses *about* video to be disseminated *on* video, released a test issue of the magazine on videotape in August 1986, calling it “Volume 1,” and

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<sup>84</sup> *New Look: The First Video Cassette Magazine for Men*. International Videopresse, 1981. VHS; “Blay Back with Spicy Vidcassette ‘Magazine,’” *Billboard* 23 January 1982: 45; “‘Big Time’ Lures Blay,” *Dealerscope II* July 1982: 37.

<sup>85</sup> *Men’s Video Magazine*. VCX, 1984. VHS.

including reviews, news, and a “video centerfold” of performer Ginger Lynn.<sup>86</sup> There was no volume 2, and *AVN* dropped the venture.

Back in the print magazine, *AVN* offered a supportive space for owners seeking reassurance, advice, industry information, and expertise on a topic related to the flood of customers entering their stores. Typical in this regard were essays that questioned stereotypes and misconceptions, carefully informing retailers that rape, child pornography, bestiality, and extreme violence were not condoned by the adult film industry, nor were those elements present in mainstream titles making up a potential inventory, thus offering reassurance to those fearful of the potential legal problems associated with the material.<sup>87</sup> *AVN*'s long-standing role as unofficial legal advisor to mainstream video owners served as one of the first attempts to link the industry together against concentrated government efforts to limit, contain, and eradicate pornography during this period, and, in many cases, was probably the only voice on such topics for independent store owners. Structural changes also occurred in the magazine's management in the early years. Slifkin left, amicably and without compensation, after the first year; Rosenblatt, on the other hand, later used legal means to negotiate his exit.<sup>88</sup> Fishbein, saddled with debt but more committed than ever to the venture, turned to his former classmate (and wrestling magazine co-creator) Franks, who came on as a silent

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<sup>86</sup> *Adult Video News, Volume I*. Adult Video News, 1986. Betamax; *Adult Video News Video Magazine*. Advertisement. *Adult Video News Confidential* July 1986: 17.

<sup>87</sup> Jim Holliday, “Truths, Misconceptions, and Observations,” *Adult Video News* October 1986: 4, 50.

<sup>88</sup> “King Smut.” Web.

partner. Franks, whose Printers Trade business served as printer for *AVN*, deferred the \$200,000 owed in back printing costs as part of the arrangement.<sup>89</sup>

In February 1985, the magazine switched to a full-color, glossy publication, finally allowing Fishbein to leave his job at Movies Unlimited. The following month, he released a spinoff, *Confidential*, aimed squarely at retailers seeking marketing and legal advice. The new publication connected the industry and retailers even more explicitly, and in a manner conducive to reassuring storeowners that carrying adult videos was not only profitable, but also perfectly safe—from both legal and cultural perspectives. Much of this had to do with the by-now familiar tone of respectability, created, as usual, through the encouragement of quality, stemming from the de-emphasis on explicit content in favor of “expertise” and “good taste.” A preview of *Confidential* in the February 1985 *AVN* makes the links clear: “Attention: video retailers, distributors, manufacturers... this publication features NO nudity and NO foul language. It is very professionally written and produced. Everything is handled in a clean and tasteful manner. It’s essential for every video store owner!”<sup>90</sup> The new publication, which described itself as “The Adult Marketing Guide to the Video Industry,” offered promotional ideas, coverage of legal issues, consumer feedback, national sales data, and product recommendations. In June 1985, *AVN* sponsored their first seminar at the annual Consumer Electronics Show on marketing strategies for rental store owners, furthering their growing core identity as the mediator between producers, retailers, and consumers.

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<sup>89</sup> “King Smut.” Web.

<sup>90</sup> *Confidential*. Advertisement. *Adult Video News* February 1985: 38.

Nothing in *Confidential* was new or different from *AVN*, though the editors did amplify the direct address to retailers, as well as increasing coverage of the issues pertaining to video rental. Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify a substantial difference between the two publications, which may be one reason it eventually folded.<sup>91</sup> The experimentation continued in March 1987, when the parent company repackaged *AVN* as a mass-market publication complete with glossy pages and limited color printing. Like *Confidential*, however, *AVN*'s venture in newsstand sales proved brief, ending after four months. Further experimentation occurred in 1989, when Fishbein released yet another publication for the industry: *Free Speech: The Confidential Bi-Weekly of Obscenity Legislation Defense*, a 16-page newsletter for producers, distributors, store owners, lawyers, and law libraries focused on the mounting legal problems facing the adult industry (much of which is outlined in chapter six). The publication, with a circulation of 1,000, cost \$129 annually, and took no advertising.<sup>92</sup> Despite Fishbein's good intentions, however, the cost was prohibitive and the information was mostly the same (although in greater quantity) as in *AVN*. The venture folded after a year.<sup>93</sup>

Fishbein's most ambitious project was *Sexposé*. A partnership between Fishbein and phone sex entrepreneur Ted Liebowitz, the publication, beginning in December 1996, took *AVN*'s reviews (printing them in a special "adult entertainment guide" insert in black and white on newsprint) and added the missing element of sampling. The magazine

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<sup>91</sup> It is unclear how many issues *Confidential* ran in the end because the Kinsey Institute (where this research was undertaken) does not have the complete set. My own collection goes to volume 1, issue 29. It seems likely that the publication ceased before 1990.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Matza, "The Black and White of Paul Fishbein," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 27 September 1989: F1.

<sup>93</sup> Clay Calvert and Robert Richards, "Law and Economics of the Adult Entertainment Industry: An Inside View from the Industry's Leading Trade Publisher," *University of Denver Sports & Entertainment Law Journal* 4 (Spring 2008): 39.

was an effort to create a newsstand publication aimed at the general consumer, rather than the industry, and presented a radically different tone aimed at consumers seeking imagery and titillating content—the two elements *AVN* stood staunchly against from its creation. Gone was the policy of “no foul language,” and while the magazine technically offered softcore content, it abounded with the type of pictorials familiar from *AVN*’s early competitors. Industry gossip, interviews, and advertisements filled the pages, but the appeals to producers, distributors, storeowners, and other industry members were absent. For example, an eight-page spread on performer Jenna Jameson (with 15 photographs) makes no effort whatsoever to link the appearance to a video then in release, and offers only minimal accompanying text, a tactic familiar from the pages of adult film magazines since the mid-1970s.<sup>94</sup> A seven-page article on Vivid Video’s *Lethal Affairs* (1996, dir. Toni English) represents a prototypical example of more traditional industry sampling: 20 photographs, most of them from the set during production, show performers Chasey Lain and Janine engaged in sexual activity, some of it blacked out to prevent hard-core images from being shown.<sup>95</sup> *Sexposé* was the inverse of *AVN*, using the industry’s products as the content rather than commenting on or covering it in a traditional journalistic sense. The publication, competing with other magazines doing precisely the same thing, was gone by May 1998. Another spinoff, *Fetish*, also proved a quick failure.<sup>96</sup>

These failed publication ventures prove, somewhat ironically, that the original publication used a successful strategy in bridging the gap between producers, retailers,

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<sup>94</sup> Rod Hopkins, “Industrial-Strength Jenna,” *Sexposé* December 1996: 30-37.

<sup>95</sup> “Going Undercover: Lethal Affairs with Chasey Lain and Janine,” *Sexposé* December 1996: 67-73.

<sup>96</sup> Calvert and Richards 51.

and consumers. Altering the formula, editors realized, distracted from their core platform: an address to retailers. The magazine set a clear course for the future, designed to convey respectability by encouraging quality: part marketing organ, part news, and part film reviews—but all “voice of the industry,” or at least what it hoped the industry could become. However, by then, *AVN* was as much a part of the industry as any company in its pages. By 1991, Fishbein had left Philadelphia behind and moved the company to Chatsworth, California, that suburb of northwest Los Angeles that nearly all of the adult film industry calls home. *AVN* had officially solidified its position as an “insider.”

#### *Vivid Video, Ginger Lynn, and Gonzo*

Just as *AVN* began solidifying its structure, the industry, too, settled in to the industrial transformation initiated by home video. While it may seem tempting to see the long-term move of adult film to video as the inverse of the quality incessantly trumpeted by *AVN*, there can be little doubt that narrative and aesthetic attention to detail maintained its hold on the industry, albeit in new ways and with new approaches that need to be reconsidered. Most of the old guard directors eventually made the move to video, such as Pachard, who signed a contract to direct shot-on-video productions with Essex in late 1984 and went on to a long career shooting directly on the new medium after building his career on such films as *Babylon Pink* (1979). Ted Paramore, the veteran producer and director responsible for the acclaimed (and expensive) *The Ecstasy Girls* (1979), *Amanda By Night* (1981), and *Society Affairs* (1982) under the name Harold Lime, switched to video in 1984 and produced the low-budget *Undressed Rehearsal* with director Jack Remy. The editors of *Erotic X-Film Guide* made note of the impact: “The

fact that former giants of the industry like Harold Lime have slipped off into the video market is an indication that the X-rated market is undergoing a profound change, and that video is slowly driving the theatrical fuck film into second-class status.”<sup>97</sup> Cecil Howard, too, made the switch, most notably with the epic, four-part *The Last X-Rated Movie* (1990), which won multiple awards and was later called “the best multi-part adult series ever shot on video.”<sup>98</sup> Russ Hampshire’s VCA, which had long distributed Golden Age adult films on video, created Wet Video in the mid-1980s, a subsidiary designed solely to market shot-on-video adult films.<sup>99</sup>

Yet, it was a new group of filmmakers that would more fully take advantage of the new technologies to create flashy, heavily edited, and stylized creations suited for video. Standing out among this new generation were the Dark Brothers, comprised of producer Walter Gernert (co-founder of VCA, described in chapter two) and director Gregg Brown, who made a series of critically acclaimed shot-on-video features in 1985, *Let Me Tell Ya ‘Bout White Chicks*, *Black Throat* (which won the 1985 X-Rated Critics Organization’s “Best Video of The Year”), *White Bun Busters*, and *Between the Cheeks*, all of which critics heralded as promising examples of the new technology.<sup>100</sup> If the titles were not necessarily the most creative, the films marked another form of competition in the rising video industry: customers, potentially overwhelmed by myriad choices, needed

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<sup>97</sup> “Undressed Rehearsal,” *Erotic X-Film Guide* June 1985: 39.

<sup>98</sup> “Hotmovies Honors Cecil Howard’s B’day with ‘Last X-Rated Movie.’” *Adult Video News*. 23 February 2012. Web. 23 August 2012.

<sup>99</sup> John Paone, “Interview: Russ Hampshire of VCA Pictures,” *Adult Video News Confidential* February 1987: 14, 24.

<sup>100</sup> For example, the editors of *Adam Film World*, in their 1987 *Directory of Adult Films*, described *Black Throat* as “a speedball—fast, sunny, and filthy in the best Dark Bros. tradition,” and “beautifully shot on video” “Review: *Black Throat*,” *Adam Film World Guide: 1987 Directory of Adult Films* 1987: 45.

to be able to rapidly differentiate tapes on store shelves.<sup>101</sup> Cover art and titles needed to get the point across rapidly and succinctly, something video productions companies seized on in the mid-1980s. Gernert and Brown followed these up with the groundbreaking *New Wave Hookers*, also in 1985.<sup>102</sup>

Despite its production on 35mm (it was later transferred to tape for widespread and extremely successful video release), *New Wave Hookers* perhaps better than any other film of the era signaled the changes ahead for the industry. With its ultra-contemporary soundtrack,<sup>103</sup> tongue-in-cheek narrative, and stylized presentation, *New Wave Hookers* made use of aesthetics familiar to MTV audiences. It also starred Ginger Lynn and Traci Lords, two of the first adult video stars.<sup>104</sup> In Lynn's case, that status was

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<sup>101</sup> In addition to obvious titles, adult video boxes (oversized and laden with graphic imagery) were another key tactic in this differentiation. See: Joseph Slade. "Inventing a Sexual Discourse: A Rhetorical Analysis of Adult Video Box Covers." *Sexual Rhetoric: Media Perspectives on Sexuality, Gender, and Identity*. Eds. Meta G. Carstarphen and Susan C. Zavoina. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. 239-254.

<sup>102</sup> Holliday, *Only the Best* 190-191.

<sup>103</sup> The Plugz, founded in 1978 and among the first wave of L.A. punk bands (as well as one of the first Latino punk bands in the United States), appeared on the soundtrack, and won the Adult Film Association of America award for Best Song for "Electrify Me." The band also featured prominently on the soundtrack for Alex Cox's *Repo Man* (1984).

<sup>104</sup> Lords (whose birth name was Nora Kuzma) appeared in 106 films, was a frequent *AVN* subject, and appeared on the magazine's cover twice, in February and May of 1986. In 1984, at the age of fifteen, Lords used a stolen birth certificate (with the name "Kristie Nussman") to obtain an official California identification card and U.S. passport, and convinced agent Jim South (along with the many producers and magazine publishers she later worked for) that she was of legal age. Indeed, Suze Randall, the renowned photographer who shot Lords' initial *Penthouse* magazine layout, which appeared in the September 1984 issue, obtained a release form from Lords. That form, which Lords signed as "Kristie Nussman," is dated May 3, 1984, lists a California driver's license number, and gives a birth date of 17 November 1962. Lords was actually born on 7 May 1968. "Suze Randall Photography Model Release Form #100131," from the author's collection.

In May 1986, federal authorities were notified (possibly by Lords herself, in a series of events that have been fiercely debated since) that she was under 18 during production of her films and arrested her. Also arrested were South (real name James Souter), of World Modeling, and producers Ronald Kantor and Rupert Macnee, who had made *Those Young Girls* (1984, dir. Miles Kidder) with Lords. Souter eventually pleaded guilty to one count of sexual exploitation of a minor. Kantor and Macnee's indictments were dismissed when they were able to convince the court that her identification documents proved she was of legal age to be working. Lords was not charged, and Los Angeles District Attorney Ira Reiner said, "The thrust of the investigation is directed toward the pornographic film industry that exploited her." See:

marked by her appearance on *AVN*'s February 1985 cover, the first issue in full color. Solidifying, validating, and even helping create Lynn's stardom, *AVN* named her Best New Starlet at the second AVN Awards in 1985, and Best Actress at the third in 1986.<sup>105</sup> In a review, *AVN* called *New Wave Hookers* among the best adult films ever made, saying it "was to the adult industry a blast of fresh—no, make that filthy—air, defying convention, opening up all sorts of new possibilities and spawning numerous imitators."<sup>106</sup> Signaling the importance of box covers to the growing market of consumers seeking product differentiation, *AVN* awarded the film for "Best Packaging" in 1985, recognizing the striking, colorful, and trendy aesthetics designed for the film and echoed on its box.

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Ronald Soble, "Sex Film Star Not Facing Charges, Reiner Says," *Los Angeles Times* 19 July 1986: 1; Kim Murphy, "Porno Case Is Dismissed," *Los Angeles Times* 4 May 1989: 1; "Man Pleads Guilty in Traci Lords Porn Case," *Los Angeles Times* 1 April 1987: 26.

After Lords' arrest, an overnight purging of her (very popular) titles took place around the country. Many of the films were re-edited to remove her scenes (such as *New Wave Hookers*), while others were reshot with other actresses (such as that in *Talk Dirty to Me III*), and the industry quickly disassociated itself from her. Only one film, *Traci I Love you* (1987, dir. Jean Charles), made after her eighteenth birthday, is legally available in the United States. Lords sold the video rights to that film to Caballero shortly after her arrest, and it was released on July 28, 1987—capitalizing on the immense publicity, the arrest had created. The rest of her films are classified as child pornography. While Ginger Lynn is widely recognized as the first "superstar" video performer, that distinction is based in large part on that fact that her primary rival from the era has been legally erased from the history of the medium. See: Dave Palermo, "Sex Films Pulled; Star Allegedly Too Young," *Los Angeles Times* 18 July 1986: 1; Terry Atkinson, "Mixed News in Adult Video Market," *Los Angeles Times* 26 June 1987: 20.

These events caused major turmoil within the adult industry, and many performers, producers, crew, and industry veterans continue to blame Lords for causing the scandal, suggesting that she was working with the authorities to engineer the arrests to create publicity for the mainstream career she was hoping to obtain. Lords has denied those allegations. For more, see: John Paone, "The Traci Lords Saga: Still Not Many Answers," *Adult Video News* September 1986: 18, 20, 51. Lords herself writes briefly on the subject in her autobiography: Traci Lords, *Underneath It All* (New York: Harper, 2004).

<sup>105</sup> The AVN awards, akin to the format of the Academy Awards for mainstream film, were first held in February 1984 in Las Vegas (where they continue to be held each January during the AVN Adult Entertainment Expo trade show). The show has grown considerably, now awarding prizes in more than 100 categories rather than the seventeen at the inaugural event. See: "1st AVN Awards Announced," *Adult Video News* (February/March 1984): 1.

<sup>106</sup> *AVN* ranked the film at number 17 on the list of 101 best adult films of all time. See: "The 101 Greatest Adult Tapes of All Time." *avn.com*. Adult Video News. 29 April 2006. Web. 23 August 2012.

Even more importantly, Lynn signed an exclusive contract with Vivid Video, a company that permanently changed the industry and whose formation aligns squarely with *AVN* in terms of strategy and discourse. While other established filmmakers were making the transition to the new medium, Vivid was the first company to seize video and shape its practices from production to marketing around what it saw as the potential to reach a massive, previously underserved audience. Understanding the success of *AVN* as it progressed from newsletter to “voice of the industry” requires understanding the company that most successfully took its advice and strategies regarding quality and respectability to new heights.

While Steven Hirsch and Dewi “David” James officially created Vivid in 1984, the history of the company began in 1972, when Steven’s father Fred, a former stockbroker, took a job as a salesman with Reuben Sturman’s Sovereign News Corp., with its vast network of adult bookstores (and peep show booths) headquartered in Lyndhurst, Ohio, outside Cleveland. In 1974, federal prosecutors brought obscenity charges against six Sovereign employees, including Fred.<sup>107</sup> Fred moved his family to the Woodland Hills suburb of Los Angeles in 1975 as the obscenity trial was in progress, commuting back and forth on weekends. There, with financing from Sturman, he started Sunrise Films, which produced and distributed 8mm loops under the banner “Limited Edition.” By 1978, Fred and the others in Sovereign News Corp. had been acquitted of all charges; a year later, after moving to a small storefront in Northridge, he changed the company name to Adult Video Corporation (AVC) and joined the home video revolution,

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<sup>107</sup> Allen Salkin, “The XXX Men,” *Details* June 2001: 113-114.

selling his own “Limited Edition” line as well as Golden Age titles licensed from other producers. Eventually, AVC moved into low budget productions.<sup>108</sup>

Born 25 May 1961, Steve Hirsch spent three years taking business classes at Cal State Northridge and UCLA before dropping out to work for his father at AVC in sales, marketing, promotion, and accounting. Deep in the adult video distribution business, he directly observed the lack of established marketing and promotional channels available to the industry, primarily still mired in an underground economy with limited reach and resources.<sup>109</sup> Undoubtedly, he also observed how his father’s company was engaged primarily in marketing films produced elsewhere, thus losing out on that most precious commodity: ownership of the content. Despite operating primarily as a distributor, AVC nevertheless grew highly profitable—tripling its sales between 1983 and 1985, taking in more than \$4 million. The younger Hirsch, however, left the company in 1981, parlaying his knowledge and experience working for his father into a sales position at Cal Vista, a major distributor in the growing industry.<sup>110</sup>

At Cal Vista, two veterans of the industry, Sidney Niekirk and Jack Gallagher, mentored Hirsch, showing him the nuances and finer points of distributing adult film.<sup>111</sup> Traveling the country as part of the national sales team, Hirsch saw firsthand the potential for home video to take over the market, as well as the massive financial potential home video could offer producers willing to provide material to the audiences waiting to view

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<sup>108</sup> Ralph Frammolino and P.J. Huffstutter, “The Actress, the Producer, and Their Porn Revolution,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine* 6 January 2002: 10.

<sup>109</sup> Salkin 113.

<sup>110</sup> Frammolino and Huffstutter 10.

<sup>111</sup> Jared Rutter, “The Man Who Changed Adult,” *Adult Video News* September 2009: 78.

pornography in the privacy of their homes rather than in the public space of the theater. David James, the head of Cal Vista's mail-order department was, like Hirsch, eager to start his own company.<sup>112</sup> Taking \$25,000 from James's saving and a \$20,000 loan from John Tedeschi, Fred Hirsch's video box printer at AVC, Hirsch and James created Vivid Video, with a concept of quality productions, upscale packaging, and a heavy investment in marketing.<sup>113</sup> They also thought that the privacy of adult video offered something that the theatrical model of the earlier era could not: increased access for female viewers and couples not interested in joining the "raincoat crowd" in public. That market represented a massive source of potential profits, but required both an understanding of Zipf's formula and the need to alter it, primarily through marketing and advertising. The *positioning* of the content, in other words, rather than its complete dismissal, was a tactic understood very early on by Hirsch, much as it was (in similar fashion) by Fishbein with *AVN*. Finding ways to increase market share by appealing to previously dismissed audiences was not necessarily a new approach, but Vivid utilized it from the beginning. "That's something we really felt strongly about, and that we went after," Hirsch said later, outlining the strategy that would form the basis of the new company.<sup>114</sup>

The other strategy employed by Hirsch and James was to hire a single, well-known female performer they could build the company around in terms of marketing.

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<sup>112</sup> Born in 1942, and thus 20 years older than Hirsch, the soft-spoken and rarely interviewed James bears a biography worthy of fiction. The son of a coal miner and nurse in Blaengarw, Wales, James quit school at fifteen and followed his father (who would die of black lung disease) in the mines. At seventeen, he joined the British army, where he spent most of the next fourteen years as part of an anti-terrorism unit. In 1979, he landed (as an illegal alien) in Los Angeles, working in the underground economy until eventually finding a job selling tickets at an adult movie theater. He finally achieved resident status in 1986. See: Salkin 114.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Karon, "Vivid Aims Its Appeal at John Q. Public," *Variety* 9 March 1998: 1; Salkin 114.

<sup>114</sup> Frammolino and Huffstutter 10.

Part of that strategy involved the use of an exclusive contract, a strategy borrowed from classic Hollywood business practices, but never really utilized by the adult film industry to that point.<sup>115</sup> The strategy had a practical and financial foundation: Hirsch and James did not want other companies to benefit from the visibility that a performer would attain from Vivid's productions. "If we promoted this girl and made a lot of movies with her," Hirsch argued, "we wanted her not to work for anybody else. It just made sense to me: why should somebody else publicize a movie with her based on my marketing?"<sup>116</sup> In 1984, when Hirsch and James were ready to produce their first film and launch Vivid, there were two obvious star big enough to give them the desired wave of publicity: Lynn and Lords. They decided to pursue Lynn to carry the Vivid brand.<sup>117</sup>

Born Ginger Lynn Allen on 14 December 1962 in Rockford, Illinois, the woman who became the most famous adult performer in the world began her career in September 1983 after answering an advertisement in the *Los Angeles Free Press* for Jim South's World Modeling Agency on Van Nuys Boulevard in Sherman Oaks, the "central casting" office for the adult film industry in the 1980s.<sup>118</sup> After meeting Lynn, South summoned

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<sup>115</sup> Marilyn Chambers signed to an exclusive contract with Jim and Artie Mitchell after their success with *Behind the Green Door*. Despite the success of that film and Chambers, the industry did not return to that model until Vivid made it the cornerstone of their business practices. Following Vivid's success, nearly all of the other major adult film companies made the exclusive contract a standard procedure.

<sup>116</sup> Rutter, "The Man Who Changed Adult," 78.

<sup>117</sup> Given the catastrophic legal problems Lords wreaked on the industry, it is very safe to say that Hirsch and James dodged a major financial bullet by pursuing Lynn rather than Lords. Hirsch would say later, "Fortunately, we chose the right one." See: Rutter, "The Man Who Changed Adult," 78.

<sup>118</sup> For more on Lynn's early life, see: Jill C. Nelson, *Golden Goddesses: 25 Legendary Women of Classic Erotic Cinema, 1968-1985* (Duncan, OK: BearManor Media, 2012) 698-742.

Before Jim South's entry into the business, Reb Sawitz was the primary agent for adult films, first with his Sunset International agency and later with Pretty Girl International. South sold insurance in Dallas, Texas using his real name, James Souter, before moving to Los Angeles in 1968 and opening a fashion modeling talent agency. In 1978, after an adult film director offered him \$200 per day to find female performers for loops, South opened World Modeling Agency. Advertising primarily through daily newspaper

photographer and filmmaker Suze Randall, who hired Lynn on the spot for a photo shoot—which ended up appearing in the March 1985 issue of *Penthouse* in a section titled “Queens of the X-Rated Cinema.”<sup>119</sup> Indeed, between September 1983 and March 1985 Lynn’s career exploded, and she quickly turned from a magazine model into an adult video superstar. She initially rejected offers to appear on film, but then met another female performer in the World Modeling offices, taking her to lunch and barraging her with questions. Lynn gave South her resulting demands: script and cast approval, as well as \$1,000 per scene. David L. Frazier and Svetlana Marsh agreed to the requests, sensing her potential, and offered her a contract.<sup>120</sup> Like most performers, Lynn felt she needed experience on camera, and shot a handful of loops in November 1983.<sup>121</sup> On 14

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advertisements in all the Los Angeles area publications, South subsequently provided the vast majority of performers to the industry. World Modeling continues to operate, much in the same way it always has, as of 2013. See: Michael Konik, “Agent X,” *Los Angeles Magazine* April 1997: 38-45; Dan Kapelovitz and Giddle Partridge, “Agents Pornographeurs: The Men Behind the Muff,” *Hustler* September 2002: 90-95.

<sup>119</sup> Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne and Peter Pavia, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 350-351; Suze Randall, “Queens of the X-Rated Cinema: Ginger,” *Penthouse* March 1985: 125-133.

<sup>120</sup> McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 365-366.

<sup>121</sup> Exactly how many loops Lynn shot, for whom, and under what names in November 1983 has been subject to some discrepancy. Lynn herself varies the number in various interviews, as well as who released them. In *The Other Hollywood*, she notes that she shot two in the same day in an apartment in Santa Monica for director Michael Carpenter’s Golden Girls series, one with performer Ron Jeremy, and the other with Tom Byron. In July 1984, in a brief essay in *For Adults Only* magazine she claimed to have starred in “some Swedish Erotica loops,” referencing the line produced by Noel Bloom’s Caballero Control Corporation. Ralph Frammolino and P.J. Huffstutter, writing for the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* in January 2002 put the number at four, without specifying what titles and for what companies. See: McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 366-367; Ginger Lynn, “Headitorial,” *For Adults Only* July 1984: 3.

None of these estimates or details is accurate, however. Lynn shot at least six loops in November 1983. Five were for director Michael Carpenter: *Hot Box* with Greg Derek (Golden Girls 172), *Peach Pie* with Ron Jeremy (Golden Girls 174, described in *The Other Hollywood*), *She Can’t Help It* with Greg Rome (Golden Girls 179), and *It Isn’t the Money* with Marc Wallace (Golden Girls 192). The first four of these were all shot at roughly the same time and in the same location (presumably the Santa Monica apartment referenced by Lynn). The fifth was clearly produced later, given Lynn’s hair, costumes, and makeup, and in a different location. She also shot one loop for Noel Bloom’s Caballero Control Corporation, *She’s Been a Bad Girl* (Swedish Erotica 0545), rather than the two (or more) she has described. The details of the sixth loop remain a mystery, although both Lynn and Byron have verified its production. Lynn claims it was the second loop for Michael Carpenter, and Byron notes that the scene was for a *Golden Girls* loop. In any

December 1983, her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, Lynn flew to Hawaii for the productions of *Surrender in Paradise* and *A Little Bit of Hanky Panky*, for which she was paid \$5,150.<sup>122</sup>

Always eager for new talent, producers showered Lynn with offers on her return from Hawaii, and she quickly became one of the most sought-after (and busy) performers in the industry. By December 1984, Lynn had appeared in dozens of films for dozens of directors and companies; even by the increasingly rapid production standards of the early 1980s, Lynn's output was prodigious, and she was quickly becoming a star. Most of these productions were highly typical of the transforming industry, which is to say low budget films shot on celluloid, shown in the remaining (but dwindling) theaters, and then released on videotape to great financial success. For Hirsch and James, selecting Lynn to carry the brand was an obvious choice.

Toward the end of 1984, Hirsch and his girlfriend Jennifer Lynn Wren (a former adult performer under the pseudonym Loni Sanders), along with Lisa Trego (who performed as Lisa DeLeeuw) met Lynn and outlined the company's strategy: Hirsch and James would sell the films, and Wren and DeLeeuw would help oversee the productions.<sup>123</sup> They offered Lynn an unprecedented deal: a guaranteed six figure income, royalties, and script, cast, director, and production approval. Those items, however, paled in comparison to what ultimately convinced Lynn to accept the offer: Hirsch promised to create a massive, expensive, and groundbreaking marketing campaign

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case, I have been unable to track down further information or specifics regarding the film, but feel confident in confirming its existence, bringing Lynn's total loop production to six.

<sup>122</sup> Frammolino and Huffstutter 10; Sheila Johnston, "Sleeping Your Way to the Top," *The Independent* 3 December 1993: 27.

<sup>123</sup> Gene Ross. "Ginger: I Resent Being Called a Vivid Girl." *adultfyi.com*. Adult FYI. 20 October 2004. Web. 8 October 2012.

for Vivid built entirely around the “Ginger” persona, an insatiable, fun-loving, and sexually uninhibited superstar. Lynn agreed to the deal, becoming the first “Vivid Girl,” the name later given to Vivid contract performers.<sup>124</sup>

Once the deal was complete, Vivid wasted no time getting a product to stores, releasing *Ginger* (dir. Scotty Fox) on 19 December 1984.<sup>125</sup> Selling an initial 6,500 copies on video, the film went to number one on the sales charts, sending a clear message to the industry that Vivid’s strategy worked.<sup>126</sup> Recut, “softer” versions of the film in twelve languages sold all over Europe and Asia, further illustrating Vivid’s determination to conquer the marketplace. Foreshadowing the company’s future strategies, Hirsch hired

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<sup>124</sup> Frammolino and Huffstutter 10.

<sup>125</sup> Penny Antine (as “Raven Touchstone”) wrote *Ginger* and the twelve other Vivid films featuring Lynn, and played a significant role in creating the “Ginger” persona. Her own story is also worth briefly describing. A Cleveland native, Antine moved to Los Angeles in the mid-1960s to pursue an acting career, eventually appearing in small roles on the television show *The Beverly Hillbillies* in 1966, and the films *Caprice* (1967), *Valley of the Dolls* (1967), and *Planet of the Apes* (1968). By the early 1980s, Antine had stopped acting and was working as a personal assistant to actress Eva Gabor, and began writing a novel. In 1984 she took in a roommate, Mary Westerfield, who introduced Antine to her former neighbor, director Scotty Fox, who was looking for writers. Antine was hired to write *Intimate Couples* in October 1984, and followed that with *Just Another Pretty Face* in 1985, both for Fox. When Vivid hired Fox to direct *Ginger*, he brought Antine along and she became the in-house writer for Lynn. Antine’s signature light-hearted tone and witty plots were a perfect match for Lynn’s persona. Eventually, she also served as ghostwriter for Lynn’s monthly fan letter, as well as her column in *Club* magazine. She also became an experienced photographer, and regularly exhibits her collection of images taken on the set of adult films. All told, Antine wrote more than 500 adult films. See: Nelson 830-861.

Antine had a pragmatic attitude about her work, always acknowledging the real reason for adult film production: the pleasures of the spectator. “A good porno script is a support system for sex without getting in the way of sex,” she would later say. “In other words, the plot holds them together and weaves throughout the sex scenes without overpowering them.” She also made no real efforts to find justification, defense, or excuses for the “mystery of difference” underling most adult films, including her own. “I don’t take most of my films seriously. [...] Most are just light sex stories to get a guy’s dick stiff.” While Lynn’s work with Vivid represent a particular type of feminist recuperation of adult film, it does so without the explicit feminist participation of either Lynn or Antine. Unlike Candida Royale, whose history is examined in chapter four, Antine and Lynn never made any feminist statements, positioned their work in a feminist context, or defended it on those grounds. For both Lynn and Antine, the films were about “getting a guy’s dick stiff.” Nevertheless, *how* they went about that process represents a significant change from earlier eras. Antine did not respond to numerous interview requests. See: “Penny Antine: The Accidental Pornographer.” *alicubi.com*. Alicubi. November 2000. Web. 10 February 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Salkin 114.

a photographer and graphic designer from outside the adult film industry to create the box for *Ginger*, a move that seismically changed the landscape.<sup>127</sup> The result was remarkably simple: a medium shot of Lynn in a bikini, exposing nothing, astride a statue of a lion, her blonde hair sweeping out behind her. Naturally backlit on a beach, the image is in soft, shallow focus, emphasizing Lynn as the star, and offers no sexually explicit imagery of any kind. Even the back cover, with Lynn reclining nude next to a pool, was less revealing than early issues of *Playboy*. The choice was bold and calculated. Much like *AVN*, which had entered the market the previous year, Vivid was deliberately avoiding the sampling strategy in favor of emphasizing an aura of quality and respectability by minimizing the content.

Vivid made twelve more films with Lynn, releasing one per month rather than saturating the market, ensuring that viewers who wanted to see Lynn came back to the company's products.<sup>128</sup> Each centered on the "Ginger" character, a humorous, energetic, and sexually enthusiastic character who anchors a comedic, often ludicrous plot comprised of five to six sex scenes.<sup>129</sup> The third film in the series, *Ginger's Private Party* (dir. Scotty Fox), represents a significant turning point for the company. Hiring an experienced creative director from the advertising industry with no experience in adult film to re-design all of Vivid's promotional material from the ground up with a branded

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<sup>127</sup> Frammolino and Huffstutter 10.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Fishbein, "Interview: Ginger Lynn," *Adult Video News* February 1985: 30, 34.

<sup>129</sup> A complete list of Lynn's Vivid films: *Ginger* (1984, dir. Scotty Fox), *I Dream of Ginger* (1985, dir. Fox), *Ginger's Private Party* (1985, dir. Fox), *Ginger on the Rocks* (1985, dir. Bruce Seven), *The Poonies* (1985, dir. Seven), *The Ginger Effect* (1985, dir. Seven), *Project: Ginger* (1985, dir. Seven), *Ginger's Sex Asylum* (1985, dir. Seven), *Gentlemen Prefer Ginger* (1985, dir. Seven), *Club Ginger* (1986, dir. Seven), *The World According to Ginger* (1986, dir. Seven), *Ginger & Spice* (1986, dir. Henri Pachard), *Blame it on Ginger* (1986, dir. Pachard).

identity at the foreground, Hirsch aggressively pushed for even glossier, more stylized aesthetics and a de-emphasis on the sex at the core of the products. The creative director, never publicly identified because of his ongoing creative work outside the adult film industry, took on responsibility for every aspect of the company's marketing and promotion. This person would later speak of the changes these new techniques brought to the industry:

Because we didn't know any of the rules, we just created a whole new genre of adult packaging. [...] Before Vivid, the packaging was just very seedy and non-mainstream, not conceptual at all. But we made these boxes thematic and beautifully shot, and your wife could pick it up and look at it and not be embarrassed. That never happened before. It was really the beginning of the mainstreaming of adult.<sup>130</sup>

The direct link back to the anxiety surrounding the “embarrassment” of pornography to female viewers recalls the need for respectability through the invocation of quality, which Hirsch clearly understood. *Ginger's Private Party* ushered in a new era at Vivid, and in the industry at large.

For *Ginger on the Rocks* in 1985, Hirsch brought in director Bruce Seven, initiating eight of the most popular and successful adult films of the era.<sup>131</sup> The bulk of the creative labor and financial investment, however, did not go into the technical production of the films, which tend to be stylistically dull and differ little from other

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<sup>130</sup> Rutter, “The Man Who Changed Adult,” 79.

<sup>131</sup> Seven was a former special effects technician in Hollywood for such films as *The Wild Bunch* (1969) who began shooting bondage loops in 1970 as a sideline. In 1984, along with performer John Stagliano, Seven co-founded Lipstik Video, which produced “lesbian” films. See: Nelson 838, 841.

films of the era. Instead, the investment went into marketing the Vivid brand and cultivating Lynn's star persona. The creative director hired professional photographers to shoot Lynn for these covers, while the designs emulated magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and *Cosmopolitan*. By 1985, Vivid was marketing its own brand as much as any other element—and that brand, according to Hirsch, was all about top-quality content, marketing, and packaging—but not necessarily in that order. The goal was respectability, which Hirsch believed would bring increased public acceptability and, in turn, profits. Lynn completed her contract with Vivid in February 1986 with *Blame it On Ginger* (dir. Henri Pachard), and retired from adult film, moving to a moderately successful career in mainstream acting before returning to adult in 1999 with *Torn* (dir. Veronica Hart), after Vivid declined to sign her to a new contract.<sup>132</sup>

On 11 February 1986, Lynn shot her last scene in *Blame it on Ginger* and retired from adult film. She had completed 69 films in 26 months, including the 13 for Vivid. Hirsch, however, quickly signed Jamie Summers to replace her, releasing *The Brat* (1986, dir. Pachard) and keeping the “Vivid Girl” system in place.<sup>133</sup> Eventually, more than 70

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<sup>132</sup> Among other projects, Lynn appeared in Ken Russell's *Whore* (1991) and Daniel B. Appleby's *Bound and Gagged: A Love Story* (1993), both critically acclaimed, but did not garner the mainstream success she had long desired. In 1991, she was charged with tax evasion by the IRS, along with other adult performers such as her frequent co-star Tom Byron. Lynn has long maintained that the IRS investigation was “payback” for her refusal to testify for the government in the Tracy Lords investigation. In May 1991, Lynn was convicted of one count of tax evasion and sentenced to three years probation; in early 1992, she failed a drug test, violating the terms of her probation, and was incarcerated for 17 days on the original charge. The relationship between Vivid and Lynn has not been friendly in the years since she left the company, and Vivid rarely acknowledges the importance of Lynn's films to their success. In 2004, Lynn told fellow performer Kylie Ireland during a radio interview that Vivid had not treated her very well in the years since, and that “there would be no fucking Vivid Video without Ginger Lynn.” As Hirsch has grown into one of the wealthiest members of the industry, and Vivid the largest and most successful company, Lynn sells her memorabilia on various websites, even as she continues to be among the most popular performers of any era. See: Jared Rutter, “A Day with Ginger,” *Adam* September 1986: 26-31; Gene Ross, “Porn History 101: It Cost Ginger Lynn \$400,000 to Battle the Tax Man.” *adultcybermart.com*. Adult Cyber Mart. n.d. Web. 9 January 2013; Ross, “Ginger: I Resent Being Called a Vivid Girl.” Web; Ginger Lynn. “Ginger Lynn Auctions.” *gingerlynnauctions.com*. Ginger Lynn. n.d. Web. 23 March 2013.

<sup>133</sup> Rutter, “The Man Who Changed Adult,” 78.

performers followed Lynn at Vivid, and the company grew into a major producer and distributor of adult material, with annual revenues exceeding \$100 million by 2003; by 2005, Vivid produced a third of all adult videos sold in the United States.<sup>134</sup> Part of that success stems from two more of Hirsch's respectability strategies. The first was to hire Bill Asher, a Playboy television executive with an MBA from the University of Southern California, who joined Vivid in 1998. Asher had an idea for Hirsch that Playboy had rejected: showing hardcore on cable.<sup>135</sup>

Asher assisted Vivid's \$25 million purchase of Spice from Playboy in 1999, a satellite television channel with seven million viewers used by Playboy to broadcast softcore programming. Hirsch and Asher converted the channel into Spice Hot, added Hot Zone and Vivid TV, and began transmitting Vivid's hardcore content on all three—boosting total viewership to more than 36 million subscribers paying more than \$400 million in annual fees for the channels. In 2001, sensing the magnitude of the mistake,

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<sup>134</sup> Paul Keegan. "Prime-Time Porn Borrowing Tactics from the Old Hollywood Studios." *money.cnn.com*. CNN. 1 June 2003. Web. 8 May 2012; Brett Pulley. "The Porn King." *forbes.com*. Forbes. 7 March 2005. Web. 15 April 2012.

While outside the bounds of this dissertation in terms of extended analysis, it is worth noting the racial significance of Vivid's choices in terms of contract performers. The decision to hire Lynn as the "face" of the company, in fact, points to the ways in which whiteness is erased in terms of hegemonic cultural beliefs regarding female sexuality. Jamie Summers, Barbara Dare, Nikki Charm, Christy Canyon, and the others that immediately followed Lynn were all white women, marking Vivid's interest in quality and respectability with a distinctly racial set of characteristics. Future work in the history of the adult film industry's transition to video will require a detailed analysis of how race played a role in creating respectability in the marketplace. This history stretches back much farther than video, however, and into the history of pornography itself, which has long been full of stereotypes and industrial prejudices. A good starting point for this research would be Susie Bright's essay on the topic, which was set to be published in *Adult Video News* in 1987, but was instead revised by the editors to be less critical. Bright subsequently republished it herself. See: Susie Bright. "The History of Inter-Racial and Black Adult Video." *Susie Bright's Erotic Screen: The Golden Hardcore & the Shimmering Dyke-Core*. New York: Bright Stuff, 2011.

<sup>135</sup> Rutter, "The Man Who Changed Adult," 89-90.

Playboy bought all three channels back from Hirsch and Asher for \$92 million. Asher became a co-owner of Vivid, along with Hirsch and James.<sup>136</sup>

The second major decision made by Hirsch, also in 1998, was to hire Resource Media Group, a mainstream firm tasked with taking Vivid into the mainstream. Hirsch noted later: “Up to then, most guys in the adult business were very, very underground, as was the entire industry. We decided to go the opposite route and actually court the media and get them to start writing articles, not only about us, but about the industry: it’s legitimate, it’s mainstream, you see these movies in your local video store, you see them when you go into a hotel room.”<sup>137</sup> The strategy worked: Vivid, Hirsch, and the performers were featured in *Details*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, *Time*, *Variety*, *Bikini*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Vanity Fair*, and other places.<sup>138</sup> In surely the company’s biggest coup, Showtime aired three reality shows featuring Hirsch and Vivid: *Porno Valley* in 2004, *Deeper Throat* 2007, and *Debbie Does Dallas Again* in 2009. In 2012, *AVN* awarded Hirsch with the first Visionary Award, “created to recognize and honor a leader in adult entertainment who has propelled innovation and taken his company—and the business as a whole—to new heights.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Keegan, “Prime-Time Porn Borrowing Tactics from the Old Hollywood Studios.” Web.

<sup>137</sup> Rutter, “The Man Who Changed Adult,” 90.; Colin Rowntree. “Penetrating into the Mainstream.” *xbiz.com*. Xbiz. 21 March 2013. Web. 30 March 2013.

<sup>138</sup> Salkin 110-117; Steve Appleford, “The Money Shot,” *Bikini* April 1999: 86-91; Karon, “Vivid Aims Its Appeal at John Q. Public,” 1; Joel Stein. “Porn Goes Mainstream.” *time.com*. Time. 24 June 2001. Web. 13 March 2012; Pulley, “The Porn King.” Web; “The Actresses,” *Vanity Fair* (April 2003): 394-395; “Branded Flesh,” *The Economist* 14 August 1999; “Vivid Imagination.” *economist.com*. The Economist. 19 November 1998. Web. 13 March 2012; Dave Gardetta, “The Lust Tycoons,” *Los Angeles Magazine* December 1998: 140-145, 184-185.

<sup>139</sup> “Steve Hirsch to Receive First Visionary Award at AVN Awards.” *avn.com*. Adult Video News. 10 November 2011. Web. 9 February 2012.

The links between *AVN* and Vivid go much deeper than the career achievement award, however. Like *AVN*, Vivid de-emphasized the sex at the core of its product, instead foregrounding the narrative, visual, and industrial elements it could market in terms of quality. Hirsch sought respectability for the company, which he knew would lead to greater public awareness, which in turn would open new markets and increase his customer base. Much as the creative director describes, quality was a characteristic that would not “embarrass” customers, particularly female customers, and the gloss and veneer accompanying all the trappings of quality (particularly in the marketing) would associate Vivid’s products with an unmistakable aura of acceptability. Vivid, in effect, took all the characteristics of “erotica,” outlined in chapter one, and overlaid them on the hardcore content produced by Vivid. In doing so, Vivid opened the adult film industry to the greatest public awareness it has ever experienced, taking it “mainstream” as Hirsch intended.<sup>140</sup> Yet, that awareness has come with the usual gendered ramifications: the pleasures associated with Vivid’s products remain squarely in the realm of contained, highly proscriptive, and cerebral pleasures due to their marketing, even as the *content* of the film differ very little from any other adult film. By gaining public acceptance and success, in other words, Hirsch also surrendered much of the ground on which ideological change could be made. In the end, Vivid, despite all its gains, merely reinforced the quality and respectability paradigms that position pornography as a cultural danger—even as Vivid moves it away from the shadows and into the open.

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<sup>140</sup> Such strategies have also kept Vivid out of legal trouble, a remarkable feat considering the company’s size and success. They have faced legal problems only once, in 1991. Hirsch and James were indicted on obscenity charges in Mississippi for shipping four Vivid tapes to that state. Rather than fight the charges, the company quickly and quietly pleaded guilty and paid a \$500,000 fine, served no jail time, and got back to building the largest adult film company in the world. See: P.J. Huffstutter, “U.S. Indicts Porn Sellers, Vowing Extensive Attack,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 August 2003: A1.

While Vivid changed the industry with its successful respectability strategies, another group of filmmakers rejected the established notion of quality and, in doing so, complicated the gendered associations between narratives and an appeal to the “couples market.” While Vivid clung to traditional production practices and narrative structures, preferring to alter the marketing and promotional techniques, by the end of the 1980s others abandoned the narrative entirely, preferring instead to build stories around particularly aesthetics by taking advantage of new technological freedoms. What *AVN* would later call “gonzo” emerged in 1989 when John Stagliano, Jamie Gillis, and Ed Powers released *Buttman*, *On the Prowl*, and *Bus Stop Tales*, respectively, creating a radically new style of adult film.<sup>141</sup>

This groundbreaking new mode of production mixed technique with a bold, new narrative strategy. New, cheaper handheld cameras such as the Sony CCD-V900, allowed filmmakers to move freely in and around the action, shooting themselves as performers rather than relying on cinematographers.<sup>142</sup> Jay Kent Lorenz defines the genre as “an

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<sup>141</sup> The term “gonzo” comes from Hunter S. Thompson’s writing style, most famously displayed in his 1971 novel *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which utilizes a first-person, exaggerated combination of journalism and fiction, in effect a heightened “documentary” style seeking some inner “truth” rather than merely reality. Seeking ways to describe the films by Stagliano, Powers, and Gillis, the editors of *AVN* brainstormed various ideas that would encapsulate the first-person, loose storytelling that simultaneously broke the fourth wall but also presented a quasi-fictional story. Gene Ross, a longtime editor at *AVN*, suggested “gonzo” as a reference to Thompson’s literary style, and the term stuck. It now refers to an entire, very successful, genre in the adult film industry, replete with its own categories at award shows. See: Rich Moreland. “Recognition of the Cameraman.” 3hattergrindhouse. 22 March 2012. Web. 23 August 2012.

<sup>142</sup> While Stagliano, Powers, and Gillis found success with the Gonzo techniques (and paved the way for many others such as Rodney Moore, Adam Glasser, and Bob East), they were not the first to come up with the idea of first-person videography of sexual encounters. George Urban roamed the streets of Manhattan in the 1970s and 1980s with a video camera strapped to his back, wearing a silver jumpsuit, talking women into exposing their breasts and, occasionally, having sex with him on camera. The footage was aired on public access television in New York as part of “The Ugly George Hour of Truth, Sex, and Violence,” which ran from 1976 to 1991 and was the target of numerous censorship efforts. Moore later cited Urban as an influence for his own productions. See: Alex Mindlin, “The Hunt for Beauties: Ugly George Roams Again,” *New York Times* 10 July 2005: CY5; Acme Anderson. “The Genesis of Gonzo.” XBIZ. 8 August 2007. Web. 23 August 2012; D. Keith Mano, “The Cheap Agony of Ugly George,” *Playboy* November

adult video that *appears* documentary in nature, that features a male narrator-cum-host who usually doubles as the videographer and is often involved in the video's sexual activity."<sup>143</sup> These films creatively incorporated the economic and technological characteristics of video production and reception to turn them into an aesthetic practice—illustrating what David James has called the “internalization” of the conditions of production.<sup>144</sup> Often they present “amateur” female performers in “behind-the-scenes” environments, taking viewers into the meta-level of filmmaking and offering no traditional storylines or “fictional” narratives in the recognizable sense—even as they reinvent (and not necessarily very originally) narrative by making it appear to be “real.” While this is itself a fiction (Ed Powers, for example, is a character created by Mark Krinsky, and his “documentary” style was carefully developed and repeated throughout his films), it nevertheless throws traditional conceptions of narrative into question. Female directors, too, have worked in the genre, creating female-centered POV films; Mason, Ashley Blue, Belladonna, Shannon Hewitt, and others have ensured that Gonzo would not become associated (or essentialized) as a male production or narrative mode.

As Peter Lehman describes, the disruptive and radical potential of the genre goes well beyond simple aesthetics: by foregrounding “real” dialogue between the performers, as well featuring average body types (both male and female), and a lack of traditional narratives, these films and their directors “innovated new forms” and displayed creativity

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1982: 146-150, 194-200; D. Keith Mano, “Ugly George Talks About TV,” *National Review* 14 October 1988: 57-59.

<sup>143</sup> Jay Kent Lorenz. "Going Gonzo!: The American Flaneur, the Eastern European on/Scene, and the Pleasures of Implausibility." *Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography, and the First Amendment*. Eds. James Elias, Veronica Diehl Elias, Vern L. Bullough, Gwen Brewer, Jeffrey J. Douglas and Will Jarvis. New York: Prometheus Books, 1999. 352-358.

<sup>144</sup> David James, *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) 12.

on par with any of the “auteurs” of the Golden Age of theatrical adult film.<sup>145</sup> They also illustrate my contention that quality is a shifting, malleable concept, rather than tied to any one period or set of characteristics. The tendency to link traditional narrative to quality in terms that are highly gendered, however, continues. For example, in her criticism of Gonzo, anti-porn feminist Gail Dines insists on including narrative, revealing something deeper about the link: “By far the biggest moneymaker for the industry, this type of pornography makes no attempt at a story line, but is just scene after scene of violent penetration, in which women’s body is literally stretched to its limit.”<sup>146</sup> Presumably, a “story line” would, for Dines and others seeking to find some “value” in Gonzo, provide the familiar justification beyond simple sexual desire and its performance, once again relocating pleasure to the mind rather than the body. Gonzo, while not adhering to the type of quality so strenuously encouraged by *AVN* in its early days, moved the industry in a new direction by finally *removing* traditional narrative from the equation and focusing instead on how the technological capabilities of video production could alter the entire process and, indeed, redefine quality.<sup>147</sup> It also

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<sup>145</sup> Peter Lehman, “*Boogie Nights*: Will the Real Dirk Diggler Please Stand Up?,” *Jump Cut* 42 (December 1998): 38.

<sup>146</sup> Gail Dines, “The White Man’s Burden: Gonzo Pornography and the Construction of Black Masculinity,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 18.1 (2006): 286.

<sup>147</sup> Much like any genre within adult film, Gonzo has also pushed into extreme ends of the spectrum that are often difficult for scholars (or the general public) to defend. Khan Tusion (whose identity is not widely known or publicized) and Paul Little (who produces under the name Max Hardcore) both specialized in the production of Gonzo films that deliberately emphasized the degradation of (consenting) female performers and received intense criticism both inside and outside the industry for pushing the boundaries of acceptability. Little was convicted in 2007 on five counts of obscenity transporting obscene matter by use of an interactive computer service and five counts of mailing obscene matter, relating to five films produced by his company, Max World Entertainment, Inc. Little’s sentence was remanded on appeal, but his conviction was upheld and he served thirty months in prison. See: B. Montgomery, “Pornographer to Serve Nearly 4 Years, Pay Fines,” *St. Petersburg Times* 4 October 2008: B1; E. Silverstrini. “Convictions Upheld in Max Hardcore Case.” McClatchy Tribune Business News. 3 February 2010. Web.

unapologetically put the sex back into the foreground in adult films and made pleasure the primary purpose of adult film. Gonzo, in fact, might even best be described as deliberately employing “disrespectability” strategies.

If the theatrical mode of production and reception encouraged classical Hollywood models, with sophisticated narratives, character development, and very specific aesthetics, the VCR (and, more importantly, the remote control) enabled the home viewer to control the viewing experience, leading to modes of production (and genres) such as Gonzo. As Peter Lehman has pointed out, this means that the traditional conception of narrative might be inadequate for understanding the greater function of home video pornography, and that the fragmented, “loop” system might be the ideal narrative means for the conveyance of mediated sexual pleasure. He argues: “Porn may never have been suited fully to the feature format.”<sup>148</sup> The editors of *AVN* would not have agreed in the early years, but the growth of their empire peaked after the new aesthetics of home video found overwhelming financial and popular success. In the case of Gonzo, traditional notions of quality and respectability might never have been the goal at all.

### *Conclusion*

*AVN*'s strategy of selling adult film without the sex did not last. Sampling, the primary tool of the adult film industry since its roots, did not disappear from the publishing landscape. For example, the June 1993 issue of *Video View* overflows with explicit, hard-core photographs (with penetration, ejaculation, and everything in between on display) from dozens of adult videos. Alongside interviews with performers such as

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<sup>148</sup> Peter Lehman. "Revelations About Pornography." *Pornography: Film and Culture*. Ed. Peter Lehman. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 87-98.

K.C. Williams, Jamie Summers, and Savannah (whose latest titles are all featured in the issue) are reviews of fourteen films and a “feature” article on various titles in the “orgy” genre.<sup>149</sup> The tactics and strategies in *Video View* do not deviate from the standard sampling practices, instead drawing potential viewers to material based on the familiar patterns of minimal copy alongside maximum visuals. Ultimately, the technological advancements in printing, graphic design, and photography, as well as the individual performers and titles, make up the primary differences between *Video View* in 1993 and *Video X* in 1980.

*AVN*, while never succumbing fully to the strategy they had so long avoided (except in its *Sexposé* spinoff), nevertheless pushed their own boundaries as time went on. The September 2009 issue, for example, filled 244 pages—but still carried no sampling. Interviews, reviews, industry news, and performer profiles—all the hallmarks from *AVN*’s early days—define some of the content; hundreds of full-color, professionally designed industry advertisements make up the rest. Filled with graphic images, these ads push as close as possible to sampling within the confines of their space boundaries. For example, Red Light District’s ad for *Hardcore Training 7* (2009, dir. Gil Bendazon) features eight small set photographs surrounding a larger publicity shot of performer Marcellinha Moraes.<sup>150</sup> Six of the eight smaller images contain graphic, hard-core sexual acts, with blurred areas over the genitals of the performers, blocking the images of penetration and allowing the magazine to stay “safe” in the soft-core/hard-core divide. Thus, while *AVN* stayed true to its strategy of not presenting samples as content,

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<sup>149</sup> *Video View* June 1993.

<sup>150</sup> Red Light District. Advertisement. *Adult Video News* September 2009: 226.

advertisers were sure to follow that strategy in their own marketing. Red Light District's advertisement, indicative of the standard pattern found throughout the magazine in the 1990s and 2000s, eliminate narrative, instead stringing together images in the hopes that retailers would see enough of the product to ensure customer satisfaction.

Indeed, this is precisely why the eight set photographs in the Red Light District advertisement all present different characteristics: anal sex, group sex, interracial sex, “lesbian” sex, oral sex, and solo masturbation. Retailers skimming through hundreds of advertisements could quickly ascertain the overall contents. No longer was there any defensive pretense or attempts at justifying the contents. The quality of the content was implied by either its variety (as in this ad) or its singularity (as in the myriad ads throughout for specific genres, such as group scenes, transsexuals, interracial, etc.), which removed narrative entirely—and, more importantly, illustrates the reaction by the industry to concerns about respectability as the privacy of the audience due to home video became more standardized. It also inadvertently calls into question the worrying about sampling in the first place. If respectability was obtained by de-emphasizing sex, the result was a gendered outcome that attempted to build on stereotyped notions of what women defined as quality. By unapologetically sampling its products, the adult industry, by the 1990s, realized that the large numbers of women who were purchasing, renting, and viewing their content were doing so for that just that: the content.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Estimates vary about the percentage of adult video sales and rentals made by women, a fiercely contested topic loaded with its own gendered ramifications. *AVN* (in)famously published a set of statistics in 1986 that women made up a large percentage of the audience: they claimed women alone made up 24% of all transactions, women with men made up 31%, and women with women made up 8%. By contrast, they claimed that men alone made up 27%, and men with men made up 10%. These numbers have been questioned and probed ever since, which illustrates how *any* female consumption of pornography is automatically suspect and cause for some form of concern or question, no matter how small or insignificant. In other words, rather than being celebrated, these types of stories generally provoke minor “moral panics” about the state of sexuality in the United States, more fully examined in chapter five.

In mid-1986, however, *AVN* was still hopeful that the industry would invest in traditional notions of quality production that it modeled with its own respectable publishing approach. “[T]he days of overwhelming garbage are vanishing,” wrote Mark Kernes. “Competition is fierce and quality will win out.”<sup>152</sup> As time went on, that competition enveloped even Fishbein: by the early 2000s, he parlayed his knowledge and expertise regarding adult video into practice, opening the eight-store Excitement Video adult chain in the Philadelphia area, his home territory.<sup>153</sup> While it is relatively easy to see how *AVN* affected Fishbein, it is much more difficult to calculate exactly how much influence the magazine had on the production process, or even how individual retailers perceived or used the magazine.<sup>154</sup> Yet, it is safe to argue that no other publication tracked the growth, provided the expertise, or did more to verbalize the need for discursive legitimacy of adult video during this period. In doing so, however, *AVN* also reified and solidified heavily problematic gendered stereotypes and practices. Indeed, their effort to discourage sampling, which ironically supports notions that women must be “protected” from sexualized imagery and fantasy, stems from their intense labor toward building the adult film industry into something culturally respected and respectful of all sexualities and practices. Additionally, no other magazine so successfully shaped its own importance *within* the new industry. *AVN* eventually fulfilled its own prophecy and

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Despite the statistical debate, a larger point remains: women make up a large portion of the audience for adult material that is advertised primarily based on its content, rather than its narrative, calling into question the very notion—and validity—of respectability being tied to narrative in the first place. See: “Charting the Adult Video Market,” *Adult Video News* August/September 1986: 7.

<sup>152</sup> Kernes, “Shot-on-Video: The Future Is Now,” *Adult Video News* June 1986: 16.

<sup>153</sup> “King Smut.” Web.

<sup>154</sup> Interviewing store owners on their histories with adult video (and their use of *AVN*) is, of course, a top priority for necessary future research in this area.

became, as it wanted, the “voice” of the industry, even if, as some have argued, the very basis of its creation—offering a platform for the industry to market itself—eventually resulted in *AVN* being so reliant on advertising that it could no longer serve objectively as an industry watchdog.<sup>155</sup>

Fishbein and Rosenblatt, looking back at their company’s growth in February 1986, summed up the very need that their publication had attempted to fill when they wrote, “The adult video industry, constantly under fire and always scorned, needed to be legitimized.”<sup>156</sup> That legitimacy project, however, came with a deep irony: the adult film industry, one of the only sites in which sexuality is unabashedly celebrated and supported, fell into a gendered trap in which female consumers became inextricably tied to “femininity,” along with all the accompanying stereotypes and assumptions. Even as *AVN* wholeheartedly championed adult film, it also essentialized gender in a quest for greater cultural standing and acceptability—thus reifying all the damaging cultural ties between gender and sexuality that might have prevented adult film from achieving legitimacy in the first place. While it remains true that the adult film industry was increasingly legitimized in the wake of *AVN*’s efforts, the most visible measure of that success was in the growth and profits of the products themselves rather than cultural awareness and change. *AVN* continues its role as industry “voice,” even though founder Fishbein sold the company in 2010, slowly easing first into a consultant’s role, and then finally leaving entirely March 2012.<sup>157</sup> In the next chapter, I examine Candida Royalle’s

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<sup>155</sup> “King Smut.” Web.

<sup>156</sup> Paul Fishbein and Barry R. Rosenblatt, “Editorial to Our Readers,” *Adult Video News* February 1986: 3.

<sup>157</sup> DeWitt, “Legalese.” Web; “Paul Fishbein Announces Full-Time Departure from AVN.” *XXX Wasteland*. 21 June 2011. Web. 21 November 2012.

Femme Productions, a company that embodied *AVN*'s challenge, further exploding any simplistic reading of adult film history—as well as creating and uncovering all sorts of new and unexpected gendered concerns that would shake up the industry and culture more generally once again.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The “Right” Way to Make Pornography: Candida Royalle and Femme

Sex has historically been key to controlling women.<sup>1</sup>

Candida Royalle, 1997

That it is a woman, Candida Royalle, behind the camera doesn't matter to us. Her films do exactly what other pornographers do, which is reduce women to body parts. Pornography eroticizes women's inequality. It's prostitution on paper or celluloid.<sup>2</sup>

Norma Ramos, General Counsel for Women Against Pornography, 1992

In 2004, Candida Royalle, veteran performer, writer, director, producer, and founder of Femme Productions, noted in her sex advice book, “[P]eople are not going to stop looking at sex, and if women don't take control of the means of production, men will continue to do it for us, continuing to erroneously define female sexuality.”<sup>3</sup> Royalle wrote from experience: twenty years earlier, in 1984, after a relatively short stint as an adult performer, she founded her own company and permanently altered the industry by creating films geared to what she has consistently and continually referred to as a “women's sensibility.” By 1987, *Playboy* magazine called her the “Roger Corman of erotica,” recognizing the ways in which she existed outside the mainstream of the industry, but also for her efforts to help other women “take control of the means of

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Nagle. "First Ladies of Feminist Porn: A Conversation with Candida Royalle and Debi Sundahl." *Whores and Other Feminists*. Ed. Jill Nagle. New York: Routledge, 1997. 156-166.

<sup>2</sup> Jodie Gould, “Debbie Directs Dallas: Video Erotica Made by Women for Women,” *Elle* April 1992: 144.

<sup>3</sup> Candida Royalle, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do: Sex Advice from a Woman Who Knows* (New York: Fireside, 2004) xiii.

production.”<sup>4</sup> Most importantly to the history of adult video, Royalle directly (and somewhat obsessively) challenged Steven Ziplow’s “formula,” outlined in chapter one, from a foundation of practical knowledge, having experienced it throughout her own acting career. Unlike other critics of the “formula,” Royalle eventually did what no other woman to that point was able to accomplish: seize complete control, from production to distribution, of the adult filmmaking process. The result was a dramatic change within the cultural landscape centered on the narrative “meaning” of pornography and a challenge to hegemonic beliefs regarding the industrial practices behind its manufacture.

In this chapter, I examine the path taken by Royalle to the foundation of Femme Productions. Rethinking and reconfiguring the “mystery of difference” was for Royalle and Femme an effort to celebrate, rather than problematize, sexuality. Much like *AVN*, Femme altered the landscape of adult film by implementing new industrial strategies, and did so from a deliberately and provocatively political standpoint. My primary focus here is the pre-history of the company, the years in which Royalle gained a moderate level of fame and success as an adult performer before moving into a variety of roles on the periphery of the industry. It was during these years that Royalle’s philosophy and ideas evolved, providing historians with a view into the formulation of what would become her crucial ideological intervention in the industry.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, my focus on these years

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<sup>4</sup> “Love 'Em & Shoot 'Em,” *Playboy* April 1987: 136.

<sup>5</sup> Royalle has done so many interviews over the years on behalf of Femme that the process of tracking them down is, in itself, a laborious project. Her frequent appearances in both the popular and adult-oriented press have long served as marketing tools for the company, a strategy she clearly cultivated as a means of garnering publicity. Royalle’s ability to navigate the press and public appearances as a marketing apparatus has made Femme into an efficient capitalist machine.

A notable example of this would be her appearance at Princeton University on 7 March 1991. Invited to give a talk entitled “Women’s Pleasure and the Images of Desire,” Royalle spoke to a capacity crowd of 500, and another 200 were turned away for lack of space. Such appearances gave (and continue to give) her

represents a necessary addition to the body of academic material on the subject, as Royalle and Femme's films, history, and impact have frequently been examined and often praised by scholars for creating "feminist" pornography. While Royalle gained much traction from her many public appearances and interviews, it was the inclusion of some of Femme's history and a detailed and insightful analysis by Linda Williams in her groundbreaking book on pornography, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* in 1989 that initially gave Royalle a large measure of academic credibility.<sup>6</sup> That validation has subsequently led to an immense outpouring of positive scholarly support for Royalle's work. Royalle's industrial strategies with Femme led not only to changes in the adult film landscape, but also within academic pornography studies, validating and justifying the study of adult film by giving it a feminist base. Ultimately, my contribution here is, as with much of this dissertation, filling in and complicating many of the historical gaps of the rest of the story of the rise of adult video rather than re-treading familiar ground.

In the conclusion, I move to the early years of Femme's creation and first few films, exploring the ways Royalle fulfilled her long-term goals by putting into the practice the changes she had long been advocating. Alongside this, however, I also examine how the company, somewhat ironically, created and participated in new forms of similar gender regulation in both its narrative and industrial practices. I focus less on

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an aura of expertise, while simultaneously (and ingeniously) serving as marketing; after all, the "solution" to the many problems raised by Royalle can be found in the very films produced by Femme. Thus, Royalle's dual roles—as "expert" and as film producer—feed continually into one another in a seamless capitalist fashion. See: William A. Rusher, "Princeton Moves toward Ugliness," *Indiana Gazette* 28 March 1991: 2.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 246-264.

the films created by Femme and more on the industrial strategies used by Royalle before and after Femme's creation, which have not been systematically examined. Ultimately, these ironic and problematic strategies have brought a great deal of critical respect and success to Royalle, manufacturing a feminist mythology around her that, as will be clear from the development of her ideas prior to Femme, was always her plan. In a nutshell, Royalle broke from the dominant paradigm with a simple plan: rather than presenting the familiar "mystery of difference" journey, Femme foregrounded female autonomy and pleasure, thus crafting a new space for alienated viewers not satisfied with existing products and in the process acknowledged different possible fantasies. Femme also introduced new industrial practices acknowledging female participation in the production and distribution of adult film. Crucially, these practices were foundational aspects of the company, and used as deliberately feminist marketing strategies and markers of product differentiation. This strategy gave Femme a unique position in the marketplace, allowed Royalle to craft a highly visible and successful mythology about herself, and assisted in altering the cultural landscape regarding female viewers and pornography—a complicated, often problematic mixture of historical elements that require more unpacking and analysis than has typically been given the topic by scholars and historians.

Given the new financial security afforded by the introduction of home video, adult film producers felt (slightly) more comfortable with new product lines and perspectives, and, in many cases, the "mystery of difference" and other formulaic elements were opened up to cultural debate, both inside and outside the industry. Royalle deliberately positioned Femme squarely in the center of these debates, both for publicity and with sincere political investment, charging headlong into the discussion and seeking

out opportunities to present her portrayal of sexuality as the “correct” one going forward. This was a familiar tactic for Royale, who throughout her career before Femme frequently opined on the meaning of “the right way” to have sex both on-and-off-screen. The “right way” typically becomes discursively foregrounded in Femme’s practices by the positioning of its strategies and content as “safe” for women and couples, a safety ensured by the very notion of respectability that recurs throughout this dissertation. In this particular case, respectability hinged, once again, on the cultural fabrication of “appropriate” behavior for women. Unlike the inverse, anti-pornography arguments that claimed women’s sexuality was irrevocably tainted and damaged by pornography, Royale built a highly successful company on the simple idea that women’s sexuality could *benefit* from pornography—so long as it was carefully constructed in the “correct” manner, a political strategy that also ensured, in simple economic terms, the survival of her own company given that she was the bearer of that knowledge. Ultimately, I argue, these two opposing points of view, in which pornography becomes the deeply contested ground on which women’s sexualities are defined, reside much closer together than apart, despite Royale’s efforts over the years to distance herself and Femme from such connections.

My exploration in chapter one of the contestation around the terms quality and respectability within the industry, as well as the ways in which it was enacted in the formation and growth of *AVN* in chapter three sets the stage for the discussion here. While, as I illustrated in chapter one, debates around quality within pornography have always gestured to deeper divides around gender, class, and the mind/body split favoring intellectual over physical pursuits, this chapter will explore the manifestations of those

tensions within the industry and its production practices. Always hungry to increase profits, the adult film industry consistently sought two elusive markets: heterosexual couples and women. That pursuit has inevitably led to feminist struggles of various kinds, and battles over the terrain of the meaning and purpose of pornography itself, with consequences potentially drifting far away from adult film and into wider culture. Royale, continually and consistently, nearly from the beginning of her performing career, decried Ziplow's formula on ideological grounds, making it the antithesis of her practices and a veritable template to work *against* rather than in agreement. She also made the somewhat abstract notion of quality a critical element necessary for the changes she envisioned, a strategy which would become foundational to Femme's efforts to achieve respectability, ultimately redefining the term in new ways and with new goals. In the history of adult video, Femme stands out in stark relief for the ways in which it permanently altered the cultural and industrial landscape, particularly by oppositionally defining itself *against* the industry even as it maintained its position firmly within it. This brilliant marketing strategy resulted in the long-term staying power and success of the company.

Here, I re-examine these earlier discourses with the goal of illustrating the tensions and paradoxes embedded within them that would manifest later, an approach that has not been typically taken by scholars and historians, who have mostly preferred instead to praise Royale for changing the landscape in universally positive, pro-feminist ways by taking her philosophies and strategies at face value. Ultimately, I argue that this impulse, however well-intentioned, has resulted in the further shoring up of the quality and respectability stereotypes that haunted the adult film industry during this period—

despite Royalle's strategy of critiquing those very issues and expanding, not limiting, the debate. This history reveals the contentious need within the industry to address female spectators in meaningful dialogues, but also the ways in which possible strategies to do just that often ultimately raised new questions and created new problems, recreating the "journey of discovery" and "mystery of difference" so entrenched in the history of adult film. Royalle overtly and strategically assaulted those paradigms, constructing her industrial strategy around their dismissal. Nevertheless, as I illustrate in this chapter, that dismissal often resulted in the reinscription of some of the very problems it tried to eradicate, albeit in new guises and in different tones and registers. Ultimately, Royalle somewhat ironically created a new set of essentialized "mysteries of difference" containing and limiting female sexuality even as she opened new avenues for exploration and permanently changed the cultural landscape of adult film.

### *Candice to Candida: Before Femme Productions*

Born Candice Vitala on 15 October 1950 in Long Island, New York to an Italian jazz drummer father and Irish singer mother, Royalle and her older sister were raised by their father, as her parents divorced when Royalle was fifteen months old.<sup>7</sup> Attending the

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<sup>7</sup> Marcia Pally, "Getting Down with Candida Royalle," *Forum* April 1986: 44.

Like many adult performers, Royalle did not use her real name during her performance career, raising the question for historians of how to refer to her. As Royalle uses her pseudonym for most of her business ventures, including the many interviews and public appearances she gives, I choose here to refer to her by that name rather than Candice Vitala, even though that remains her legal name.

Adding further confusion to the issue of identity was Royalle's decision to use the name "Candace Vadala Sjostedt" as part of the trademark application to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in May 1984 to get the "Femme" logo trademarked. Listing herself as President of Femme Productions, Royalle uses that particular pseudonym for the first, and only (as far as I have been able to locate), time. It is unclear if, perhaps at the time of her marriage to Sjostedt, Royalle changed her name from "Candice Vitalia" to "Candace Vadala." In any case, this moment is indicative of both the research difficulties in studying the adult film industry as well as the lengths to which its members will go to find semblances of privacy.

New York High School of Arts and Design, Royale trained in art, music, voice, and dance, and briefly attended Parson's School of Design, majoring in fashion illustration. Unable to afford Parson's, she moved in with her older sister in the Bronx in 1969 and took a series of secretarial jobs.<sup>8</sup> At the first, a Manhattan athletic club, the owner sexually assaulted her; at the second, for a junior executive at the Ticketron headquarters, similar incidents occurred from the very beginning. "It was such a learning experience because I was the least qualified of all the women who'd applied," she noted later. "I really learned what sexual harassment was, only we didn't have a name for it back then."<sup>9</sup> In the year that followed, the harassment was continuous: "My boss made me kiss him goodnight every night."<sup>10</sup> Seeking support not only for the assaults, but also for an attempted rape that had occurred when she was thirteen, Royale joined the Bronx Women's Coalition, based at Bronx Community College, and participated in activist

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See: United States Patent and Trademark Office, *Trademark Application: Femme Productions*. 1 March 1988.

The question of names and their meanings is one addressed at various times by Royale, particularly in the context of identity. For example, Royale has said that she has "never dated men who were looking to date Candida Royale," and has spoken at some length about the schizophrenic nature of her work. "Before I enter a social situation, I ask myself: am I Candida or Candice? I make up my mind. If I decide I'm Candice, which is usually private parties and intimate gatherings, don't you dare start asking me about my career! I spend about a quarter of my professional life giving interviews, so I need to protect my private time." See: Candida Royale. "The Early Days... How Did a Nice Girl Like You...?" *candidaroyalle.com*. Candida Royale. Web. 7 September 2012; Nagle 158.

<sup>8</sup> Pally 46; Haley Mlotek. "What Got Us into Feminism." *randomhouse.ca*. Random House of Canada. 5 March 2013. Web. 5 March 2013; Jill C. Nelson, *Golden Goddesses: 25 Legendary Women of Classic Erotic Cinema, 1968-1985* (Duncan, OK: BearManor Media, 2012) 226-263.

<sup>9</sup> Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne and Peter Pavia, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 371.

<sup>10</sup> Nagle 157; Erik Hedegaard, "Sexual Healing," *Details* September 1991: 139.

gatherings and rallies, and assisted in a free clinic where doctors performed pap smears for neighborhood women.<sup>11</sup> She also returned to college, at City University of New York.

An extended trip to Europe, along with her experiences in the Bronx Women's Coalition, raised philosophical questions for Royalle that initiated a long process of self-exploration. "[I] found an identity [in Europe] as a woman that was neither traditional nor the feminism I'd known," she would later say. "I became a 'freak,' fashioning myself after the stars of the 40s and 50s with crazy clothing and purple nail polish. I love to play, and in the women's movement of the early 70s I couldn't—you know the 'politically correct' look: no makeup, no shaving your legs."<sup>12</sup> Upon her return to the United States in 1971, Royalle attended one more term at CUNY and then made a decision that would eventually lead to the creation of Femme Productions: she left New York and moved to San Francisco, where her burgeoning "freak" identity was a perfect fit.

It was in San Francisco that Royalle moved even deeper into artistic pursuits, singing in jazz clubs and classical choirs and appearing in experimental theater productions, using "Candida Royalle" as a stage name.<sup>13</sup> She also performed with the Cockettes, an avant-garde drag queen troupe, their spinoff the Angels of Light, and played drag queen Divine's daughter on stage in *The Heartbreak of Psoriasis*.<sup>14</sup> Royalle later described the period: "I was... living an adventurous life style. It was during the so-

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<sup>11</sup> Nagle 157; Marianna Macy, *Working Sex: An Odyssey into Our Cultural Underworld* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers Inc., 1996) 41.

<sup>12</sup> Pally 46.

<sup>13</sup> Royalle, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do* ix; "Sexy Spreads: Candida Royalle." *Eros Zine*. 6 August 2003. Web. 1 September 2008; "3nl: Plan B with Candida Royalle." *The Dirty Girl Diaries*. 9 December 2009. Web. 3 September 2012; "Cumming of Age," *High Society* May 1980: 35.

<sup>14</sup> Hedegaard 140.

called sexual revolution, pre-AIDS, anything goes. I was performing in avant-garde theater, singing in jazz clubs, making art. Those were the days when you did things more for love and passion than for money.”<sup>15</sup> While some elements in Royalle’s early biography point to her impending career as an adult performer, particularly her residence in San Francisco, where the politically progressive community formed a base for the adult film industry, very little from these years foreshadows her future as the groundbreaking founder of Femme.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> J.D. “20 Questions with Candida Royalle.” *hotmoviesforher.com*. Hot Movies For Her. 10 August 2009. Web. 3 September 2012.

The Cockettes (an obvious play on Radio City Music Hall’s famed Rockettes), founded by George Harris Jr. (who performed under the name Hibiscus), were a psychedelic drag queen troupe created on New Year’s Eve 1970, in San Francisco. Dressing in elaborate costumes, taking LSD, and performing avant-garde stage shows as part of a path to spiritual liberation, the group gained national prominence with their free shows at San Francisco’s Palace Theater and on a tour of New York. After the group started charging admission, Hibiscus left and formed the Angels of Light, with similar goals as the Cockettes. The fashion styles of the groups, and Hibiscus’s theatrical approaches, became a major source of inspiration for queer culture beginning in the 1970s, and he befriended figures such as Alan Ginsberg and John Lennon. Hibiscus was an early casualty of the AIDS virus, dying on 6 May 1982.

See: *The Cockettes*. Dir. Bill Weber. Grandelusion, 2002. DVD; Horacio Silva, “Karma Chameleon,” *New York Times* 17 August 2003: 106.

<sup>16</sup> San Francisco’s importance to the history of adult film predates the medium; stretching back to the days of the gold rush in the 1850s, the city maintained a relaxed attitude toward vice in general, and the Barbary Coast neighborhood was lined with bars, brothels and gambling dens. This attitude became part-and-parcel of the city’s culture, making it an ideal place for the development of the “free love” atmosphere of the 1960s and the exploding hippie population. The sex trade thrived in such an atmosphere, constantly pushing boundaries and drawing increasingly larger crowds; on 16 June 1964, for example, Carol Doda, at the Condor Night Club in the North Beach section of the city, performed topless—the first time that act had occurred in a public venue in the United States. Within months, dozens of other bars and clubs in the neighborhood followed along; public nudity, in San Francisco, was big business. In 1967, the Roxie Cinema played the first “beaver films,” short, silent films featuring women showing their genitals to the camera, a trend that eventually radiated throughout the rest of the country, and frequently advertised as “Frisco Beavers.” The presence of so many “free love” hippies and working dancers meant a large talent pool for the aspiring filmmakers living in the area—who, in the late 1960s, took the live performances in front of the camera for such filmmakers as Jim and Artie Mitchell, Alex DeRenzy, and Lowell Pickett, who also operated theaters in the city. Royalle fit squarely into this mold.

See: Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933); Arthur Berger, “Varieties of Topless Experience,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 4.2 (Fall 1970): 419-424; Andrew Blake, *Topless* (New York: Belmont, 1969); Alan Levy, “A Morality Play in Three Acts,” *Life* 11 March 1966: 79-87; Bob Ellison, “Topless Craze in S.F.—It’s a Jungle of Sweaty Gyration,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 September 1965: C11; Daryl E. Lembke, “Nudity, Noise Pay Off in Bay Area Night Clubs,” *Los Angeles Times* 14 February 1965: G5; Eric Schaefer and

Something shifted, though, after Royalle's move to San Francisco and her exposure to the intertwining of political and sexual activities there. She later recalled this transition:

I stopped being a member of [the National Organization for Women] a long time ago because I felt they were outdated, they were old-fashioned. You know, I had been a young feminist in college. In those days, the feminist movement really embraced the whole sexual liberation of women. What I saw happening in the early 70s was a shift to "men as enemy" and sex as something you shouldn't share with a man, we should only turn to our sisters now for sex; sleeping with a man was like sleeping with the enemy. And I just didn't like where this was all going. I thought this was very repressive to my sexuality and kind of going back to a very puritanical way of thinking. I didn't think that we were helping anyone by becoming enemies with men; we have to try to work together. I saw NOW as more following, not so much the radical lesbianism or even radical feminism, but just this very conservative place. It smelled to me like the way a sorority is run, like "you'd better think like us or you can't be in our club." I resented this. For me... I just couldn't really relate to them.<sup>17</sup>

These distinctions carry importance for understanding Royalle's transition from artist to adult performer, and later to producer and director.

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Eithne Johnson. "Open Your Golden Gates: Sexually Oriented Film and Video." *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000*. Eds. Steven Anker, Kathy Geritz and Steve Seid. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. 191-193; John Bryan, "Gold in the Hills, Sex in the Streets: A 125 Year Romp through San Francisco's Bawdy Past," *Berkeley Barb* 4-18 February 1977: 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Olivia de Court. "Candida Royalle." *Girlphoria*. n.d. Web. 1 August 2012.

Needing financial support for her artistic pursuits, Royalle answered an advertisement for nude modeling in 1974. Having worked previously as an artists' model in New York, and given her experimentation of various kinds in San Francisco, the decision was an easy one. Upon meeting the agent, however, Royalle was disturbed at his suggestion that she consider performing in adult films—a genre she had never even seen.<sup>18</sup> Two subsequent events changed her mind. Royalle's roommate, Laurie Ann Detgen, entered the business (using the name Laurien Dominique), and Royalle's boyfriend, Danny Isley, a member of the Cockettes and an aspiring adult film actor, landed a leading role in Anthony Spinelli's *Cry For Cindy* (1976).<sup>19</sup> Spinelli, one of the critically acclaimed Golden Age directors, had a large budget for the film, used established performers, and was known for maintaining a professional atmosphere during production. Royalle described her reaction while visiting the set: “[W]hat I discovered was a clean and professional environment, a legitimate industry filled with Hollywood types moonlighting on porn crews for extra cash, and intimidatingly gorgeous young women and men competing for roles.”<sup>20</sup> Recognizing the stability and professionalism of the industry, and given her own sexual experimentation at the time, she decided to become an adult performer herself.

Within Royalle's decision to become an adult film performer reside the seeds of much of what would later define her industrial approach to producing her own films.

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<sup>18</sup> Royalle, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do* x.

<sup>19</sup> J.D., “20 Questions with Candida Royalle.” Web.

Isley, who performed under a variety of pseudonyms including Danny Spats, Fred James, Spender Travis, and Spencer Davis, appeared with Royalle in *Hot & Saucy Pizza Girls* (1977, dir. Bob Chinn). Macy, *Working Sex: An Odyssey into Our Cultural Underworld* 51; Nelson 236, 254.

<sup>20</sup> Royalle, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do* x.

Professionalism, legitimacy, conventionally attractive and experienced performers—these are all, in part, the hallmarks of Femme’s productions. There was also the matter of her evolving politics. She later described them:

I was an active feminist and reasoned that it was my body to do with what I wanted. After all, the women’s movement was about choice: Some women may choose to cast off their aprons and don a suit and join the corporate world. Others may keep their aprons and work at home. I chose to cast off everything and use my looks, my body, my open attitude toward sex, and my healthy sexual appetite to make a living.<sup>21</sup>

In 1974, Royalle, following the tradition of nearly all performers of the era, appeared in a few low budget loops for producer Jerry Abrams to see if she could “handle making it in front of a camera.” Foreshadowing her future financial acumen, she also noted: “I figured if people wanted ‘proof,’ then I could at least get paid for my ‘test.’”<sup>22</sup> Following these

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<sup>21</sup> Royalle, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do* xi.

<sup>22</sup> Candida Royalle, “Vertical Smiles and Cum-Soaked Aisles: Confessions of a Porn Queen,” *High Times* July 1982: 40-41.

I have identified eleven loops featuring Royalle; she may have made more, but my research shows this number is probably comprehensive. Notoriously difficult to locate and date, such films were also repackaged numerous times, often under different titles, making the process of identification both painstaking and complicated.

Some of Royalle’s loops were clearly produced early in her career, such as *School’s Out* (Showgirl 205) and *Game of Lust* (Debauchery Films 2), based on her appearance and the production aesthetics. Others, such as *Through the Looking Glass* (Swedish Erotica 182) and *The Handyman* (Swedish Erotica 184) have been dated to 1978-1979 by various amateur historians, which matches both her appearance and the overall quality of production. In any case, Royalle’s essay in *High Times* describes two of these loops (neither named) as occurring before her roles in feature-length productions.

She also appeared in *Bikini Ball* (Pleasure Productions 2077), *Bathroom Strip* (Pleasure Productions 2072), *Lesbian Party* (Pleasure Productions 2079), *Cock Teasing Anal* (Showgirl Superstars S-101), *The Royal Treatment* (Limited Edition 24), *Pajama Party* (Limited Edition 29), and a different *Lesbian Party* (Cover Girl 21).

single-scene, one-day productions, she landed the lead role in Abrams's *The Analyst* (1975, dir. Gerald Graystone, an Abrams pseudonym) and her career as an adult performer was in motion.<sup>23</sup>

Given Royalle's historical importance as a feminist agent of change within the adult film industry, her appearance in *The Analyst*, her first full-length film performance, offers much to understand the foundation of her evolving beliefs and ideas about pornography. Playing Anita Gartley, the sexually frustrated wife of Preston (Paul Scharf), Royalle navigates narrative terrain familiar to adult films of the mid-1970s. In the opening scene, Preston, having just returned from a business trip, eagerly seeks sex from his wife, but she asks him if they could have a drink and talk about his trip. Instead, he pushes her down on the bed and pulls her clothes off. "Take it easy," she tells him, "slow down a little." Frustrated, he angrily responds, "Honey, your old man has a big strong need going. Now just get into it." Anita's response foreshadows Royalle's mission statement with Femme regarding women's sexuality: "It's hard to just get into it. I want to, but you gotta be more gentle." From its opening moments, *The Analyst* captures

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Royalle has mistakenly been credited with some films during this period that were all directed by Abrams. *Sweet Sister* (1974, dir. Graystone), *Masterpiece* (probably mid-1970s, dir. Youngblood), and *Hot Teenage Assets* (probably mid-1970s, dir. Youngblood) all credit a performer named "Cyntnia Pleschette," a pseudonym often associated with Royalle in online forums and among collectors. However, on viewing the films, she does not appear, and it is unclear why she has been associated with them.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to producing and directing adult films, Abrams was also the founder of Jerry Abrams Head Lights, a performance art group that provided groundbreaking light shows for 1960s psychedelic rock groups in San Francisco such as the Grateful Dead, and an avant-garde filmmaker. *Eyetoan* (1968) illustrates Abrams's competing interests, combining a collage of images, lights, and sounds with softcore sex scenes, and *Sub Rosa Rising* was a feature-length documentary on the San Francisco sex culture. He was an early beaver film producer, and his hard-core loops of the 1970s (and his later adult features) further cement the link between the San Francisco youth culture scene and the adult film industry. Abrams would go on to direct adult features under a variety of pseudonyms such as Gerald Greystone, Gerald Graystone, Susan Martin, Zachary Youngblood, and Zachary Strong. See: Schaefer and Johnson, "Open Your Golden Gates: Sexually Oriented Film and Video," 192.

familiar cultural tensions around particular stereotypes: men just want to “get going,” while women want to “slow down” and “be more gentle.”

As the scene progresses, Preston tries to have anal intercourse with Anita, but she stops him. “It really doesn’t feel right,” she tells him, “I won’t do it like that. I’m not some kind of dog, you’re hurting me, now stop it.” He again reacts angrily, roughly pushing his penis into her mouth and informing her, “All your hang-ups about sex make me sick. I’m your husband, remember that? Love, honor, and obey, dammit! You got some pure and holy idea about how disgusting you think good fucking is. I don’t want to hear any more of your moral crap.” The rest of the troubling short scene presents, in close-up, rough oral sex until Preston ejaculates on Anita’s face. Her angry response (and, indeed, the entire sequence) seems to fly deliberately in the face of Ziplow’s formula, interrogating the myth of women’s pleasure being a side effect of men’s: she spits his semen in his face, telling him, “You are an animal. You are an insensitive son of a bitch. You don’t care about what I want. You don’t care if you hurt me. You just care about your own pleasure. You’re the one with the sick hang-ups.” This opening scene acts as a strong prelude to Royalle’s creation of *Femme* nine years later. In fact, it nearly perfectly captures exactly why Royalle felt the need for something industrially and narratively different, something focusing more on women’s pleasure and less on women being subjected to “mystery of difference” plotlines in which they serve as conduits for male pleasure while their own sexual needs are either ignored or magically fulfilled as side effects.

Yet, there is a strange thesis-like quality to the sequence somewhat disruptive of traditional plotlines and narrative structures from the era. If, for example, the viewer were

to stop watching the film at this point, it might serve as anti-pornography feminist propaganda. After all, Anita receives no pleasure from the activities, contradicting the “mystery of difference” construction that magically grants women enjoyment simply from servicing men. Furthermore, she explicitly calls out Preston for his behavior, interrogating the very mythology underlying traditional pornography. Thus, the sequence serves as an industrial template for all the reasons Royalle, nine years later, would bring alternative strategies into the marketplace.<sup>24</sup> But, as the film progresses, this opening sequence acts as a prelude to a much larger and more complex strategy both reifying men’s pleasures and “training” women to dismiss any questioning impulse, staunchly reminding viewers that women’s pleasure, as outlined in the “mystery of difference” formula, stems from men’s pleasure. Ultimately, submitting to that framework becomes the “journey of pleasure” for Anita, making *The Analyst* remarkably powerful as an ideological tool for understanding how this type of pornography “works.”

The rest of the film makes a mockery of efforts to disrupt, question, or alter the male-centric fantasies typically embedded within adult film narratives. Instead, disturbingly, it attempts to justify the stereotypical “journey of pleasure” at the core of Ziplow’s formula by invoking an aura of clinical “expertise.” Anita, on the advice of her friend Pamela (Jocelyn Martene), visits sex therapist Doctor Morley (Tyler Reynolds), who shows her a series of stag films before demonstrating sex techniques with his colleague, Doctor Michaelson (Angele Tufts). In the film’s conclusion, Anita brings her husband to the clinic to watch a series of stag films (filled mostly with “meat” and

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<sup>24</sup> While I exchanged multiple emails with Royalle regarding an interview, which she was very amenable to doing, it has not been completed at the time of this writing due to a variety of circumstances with her health and schedule. When the interview does happen, a primary focus of it will be on this very question, which no one has previously asked.

“money” shots) on how to have “correct” oral and anal intercourse. While Morley makes a minor effort to encourage Preston to think about mutual pleasure, there is no doubt in the scene that Anita is the one with the problem, nor is there any question that “mutual” pleasure really just means pleasure for Preston and an attitude change for Anita. When the stag films conclude, Morley demonstrates anal sex with Anita while Preston watches. Finally, Preston replaces Morley and has “mutually satisfying” anal sex with Anita. Having successfully completed her “training,” Anita claims to love the experience, and the film’s final moments feature her telling Preston, “I knew I could do it eventually.”<sup>25</sup>

Whereas one of Royalle’s guiding missions with *Femme* was to foster a cultural atmosphere in which couples could safely enjoy adult films together as an aid to mutually pleasurable sex, *The Analyst* presents a repressive and regressive atmosphere. In the film’s version of therapeutic mediation, the viewing of such material reifies male fantasies and fosters women’s submission to male pleasure as the epicenter of sexual experience, all bolstered by the presence of the medical “experts.” Indeed, Royalle’s films with *Femme* would eventually become standard recommendations by medical experts for couples seeking adult material, turning the tables on *The Analyst* in ways that could hardly be predicted when that film was released. Ironically, however, that shift cast her in the position of Morley, instructing viewers on the “right way” to have sex by using

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<sup>25</sup> Royalle, asked years later about *The Analyst*, spoke plainly when it came to her distaste for the film. “Yuck! That was a terrible movie,” she said in one interview. In another, she elaborated even further, shattering the very mythology presented in the film’s narrative: “I really don’t like to talk about my first film, because, in some ways, the memory is painful. While I’m not an anti-porn zealot, I feel that I was exploited in some ways. The director and producer of my first film—he was a sleazeball, not one of the big names—was very unkind. During an anal scene—which I had never done—I was in pain, and the director didn’t ask the cameras to stop until the actor saw how I felt and asked.” Recently, she confirmed these opinions, saying: “I don’t really like to talk about it because it was not a good experience for me and I don’t like to give the movie any promotion.” See: Ariel Hart, “Candidly Candida,” *Hustler Erotic Video Guide* May 1992: 72; “Interview: Candida Royalle,” *Fox* March 1986: 20; Nelson 236.

the identical pedagogical tactic of moving image pornography, only with a much different understanding of the concepts and goals. Eventually, Royalle became a member of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, completing a transition from the “patient” in *The Analyst* to “expert” with her own films.

While *The Analyst* plays on much of the *narrative* terrain Royalle labored to change with *Femme*, another of her early films illustrates why she believed so strongly in the need for *visual* change. *Love Secrets* (1976, dir. Susan Martin, another Abrams pseudonym) follows Alan and Lil Weinman (John Seeman and Tracy O’Neil), an average, middle-class married couple sinking into sexual boredom. Each turns to daydreams to satisfy their fantasies: Alan with his secretary (played by Royalle), and Lil with a former boyfriend and another woman. In the film’s conclusion, the couple confesses the fantasizing, thus renewing their sexual desire for each other. From a narrative perspective, the film seems to match many of the goals set forth by Royalle with *Femme*: entertaining while informing the viewer, visualizing female pleasure along with male, foregrounding the benefit and safety of sexual fantasizing, and the educative potential of pornography.<sup>26</sup> Even the title implies that the potential benefits from the fantasies portrayed by (and in) pornography are the “secrets” to a healthy, loving relationship.

Yet, the visual presentation of these narrative goals reveals, in precise aesthetic terms, Royalle’s quarrel with the adult film industry’s obsession with particular modes of representation. The short sequence in which she appears recalls the sexual harassment she suffered in her early jobs as a secretary. It might also unspool as a veritable template for

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<sup>26</sup> Netta Gilboa. “Heart to Heart with Candida Royalle.” *Gray Areas*. Spring 1993. Web. 21 June 2007.

Ziplow's formula. While she never directly references Ziplow in interviews, Royale's frequent usage of the term "formula" carries the same essential meanings. For example, years later, as part of a roundtable for *AVN* in a group interview of "the directors of the decade" for the 1990s, Royale made her thoughts clear:

[M]y motivation was to create movies that have a woman's voice, that were more tender, that women could be comfortable watching, and that broke all the formula rules. I really wanted to break that formulaic approach to filming sex. I really feel that everyone—you know, until then—was sticking to the formula: these are the sex acts you should show, and this is how the camera output should be; this is what the camerawork should look like.<sup>27</sup>

Royale's opinion on the subject was not that of an outsider; as the sequence in *Love Secrets* illustrates, her experiences as a performer gave her a unique viewpoint from which to disagree with the formula.

The scene begins with a tilt shot up a tall, nondescript office building in New York over myriad identical windows, clearly designating Weinman's life as one of middling and mechanical repetition. Cutting to Royale as the secretary, swaying her hips down a hallway, the two shots present a jarring disjunction: with her tight, revealing shirt, mischievous grin, and exposed midriff, she is immediately coded as an escape from the otherwise dreary office environment. After focusing on the secretary pouring coffee, the camera pulls back to reveal Weinman at his desk, hunched over a clipboard, wearing a bland gray suit and thick glasses. The secretary walks to his desk, bends down

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<sup>27</sup> Jim Holliday, "Directors of the Decade," *Adult Video News* April 1999: 25.

provocatively, and gives him the coffee before bending over again to pull papers from a filing cabinet. At that point, a shot/reverse shot pattern emerges, foregrounding Weinman's point-of-view of the secretary and her "come hither" expressions before cutting back to close ups of his surprised and excited face.

As the narrative progresses, the secretary, initially coded as the escape, is increasingly and quickly re-positioned as a temptress ready to give sexual attention. The spectatorial pleasures stem from his actions, rather than hers, given the point-of-view framing in the shot/reverse-shot pattern. The secretary's sexual presence, conveyed by her costume and behavior, contrasts sharply with the dreary *mise-en-scène* of the office, and thus creates a palpable sexual energy and tension. This prelude, lasting just over a minute, renders the scene as an obvious and paradigmatic moment in an adult film, which is another way of saying that sex is inevitable.

This early portion of the scene plays out as if it is Weinman's reality, offering no break moment in which the events shift into his fantasy. Indeed, following these opening moments, he pulls up the secretary's skirt, revealing her lack of underwear, and rubs her legs as she expresses mock surprise, complimenting him on his "nice hands." Rather than being alarmed at the blatant sexual harassment and assault, the secretary continues to act as a willing—and welcoming—participant. Aggressively sweeping everything off his desk, he bends her over it and continues to fondle her. Only then is there a cut to Weinman in medium close-up sitting at his desk staring off into space, firmly revealing the fantasy to be only in his imagination. The shot lasts only a few seconds before returning to the previous action, just long enough to confirm that Weinman, the bored and boring office worker, can only achieve this sort of sexual adventure in his mind.

From this point forward, the film alternates between Weinman in reality and his daydream. In his fantasy, he after pulling a jar of Vaseline from his desk, he applies it to the secretary's anus, stimulating her in extreme close-up, an exemplar of the "meat shot" advocated by Ziplow and later decried by Royalle. The secretary, moaning in pleasure the entire time, asks Weinman: "Is this what you meant by fringe benefits?" This moment, crucial to the fantasy, plays further off the power dynamics in the scene: Weinman's work and sexual lives, both equally mundane, become intertwined here on the body of the secretary, which serves as a conduit for him to find some form of mastery and pleasure. Weinman and the secretary then have anal intercourse on the desk, with him asking her if she "loves it," to which she repeatedly responds affirmatively. Extreme "meat shot" close-ups from above and below make up this portion of the scene.

This framing serves as a template for much of the criticism Royalle would later level at the industry. "I hated the way [scenes like this] were made," she said in a 2007 interview. "The crudeness of them, the fact that you know they would stick these cameras way up your legs and I just couldn't understand why they had to be made so crudely and amateurly."<sup>28</sup> Contrasting her initial experience at the set visit on *Cry for Cindy*, with director Spinelli, whose techniques she praised as professional, scenes such as the one in *Love Secrets* did not necessarily have that same level of technical artistry. The scene concludes with Weinman ejaculating on the secretary's back in close-up, followed by an abrupt cut back to reality, in which the secretary seductively asks if she can go home early. By positioning her this way in Weinman's reality, the film justifies his fantasy behavior; after all, she clearly "wants" him, but his weakness prevents him from acting,

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<sup>28</sup> Gilboa, "Heart to Heart with Candida Royalle." Web.

reinforcing her status as a willing and available sexual object for him if only he had the necessary confidence. After letting her go, Weinman stands up, revealing that he has ejaculated in his pants, emphasizing and confirming his pathos.

Ideologically crucial to the scene, that pathos positions the viewer in a state of sympathy for Weinman's plight, while also using humor to deflect potential criticism. There is an almost complete focus on male pleasure, which reduces women's agency to a minimal level, presents female pleasure only as a result of male satisfaction, and utterly disregards foreplay, afterplay, or women's orgasm. Royalle would say later: "There was no real social consciousness or sense of responsibility that went into making the films, and it did indeed exploit women because here we were instrumental to the production of these movies and yet, our sexuality wasn't at all taken into consideration. Instead, we were really presented as little bimbos there to serve the most bottom line male fantasies."<sup>29</sup> The presentation of anal sex (particularly as the only sexual activity in the scene) solidifies the notion that women's bodies serve as conduits for male fantasy and pleasure, reifying the long-standing industry belief that their core audience (heterosexual male consumers) wanted to see what, apparently, they could not get within their real-life relationships: oral and anal sex.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gilboa, "Heart to Heart with Candida Royalle." Web.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Margold, legendary producer/director/actor and agent, went so far as to say that "oral sex... is the backbone of our business," while Jim Holliday, the self-proclaimed industry historian, repeatedly claimed that the blow job was the foundation of the industry. He once suggested that if he wrote a book it would be titled *What is Porn All About: Blow-Jobs and Losers*. See: Robert J. Stoller and I.S. Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* (New Haven Yale University Press, 2003) 29; Robert J. Stoller, *Porn: Myths for the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991) 167.

Royalle, too, has acknowledged the power of these mythologies. "The idea when we were making these older films was that wives wouldn't do oral sex, so you have all these blow job scenes. [W]hen I started [Femme] the theory was that now the wives wouldn't do anal sex." Macy 48.

Films such as *The Analyst* and *Love Secrets* offer a snapshot into the typical adult offerings of the era, which is to say relatively simple plotlines based on the familiar formula. These films also centered on the “mystery of difference” narrative featuring women’s pleasure as something either in the service of men, under their direct guidance, or occupying (often to the point of obsession) their curiosity. As with *Love Secrets*, these films also typically emphasized the “meat” and “money” shots described by Ziplow. Sex was definitely something pleasurable—but the focus of that pleasure was often restricted and limited, contained within particular boundaries emphasizing women in the service of men’s experiences and journey, all the while portraying women’s pleasure as a side-effect and result of that process. Royalle filed these narrative and aesthetic practices away for future resistance and disruption, making them the basis of her own oppositional approach to making adult films.

Royalle ultimately appeared in at least 51 adult films, covering a wide range of narrative territory and with directors of all skill and experience levels.<sup>31</sup> She was one of

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Later, with *Femme*, Royalle encountered similar obstacles when trying to find an established company willing to distribute her films. Even VCA, who eventually did agree to serve as *Femme*’s distributor, initially resisted because of Royalle’s refusal to include anal sex in the early *Femme* films. “I know who watches these films,” a VCA representative told Royalle, “It’s the husbands who buy these movies, to show their wives what they want them to do.” The comment evokes the scenes in *The Analyst* where Anita is “taught” to appreciate anal sex for Preston’s pleasure. See: Candida Royalle, “Porn in the USA,” *Social Text* 37 (Winter 1993): 30.

<sup>31</sup> As with any adult performer, particularly those from the Golden Age, it is difficult to ascertain Royalle’s complete filmography. Scenes were often recycled into multiple films, released under numerous titles, and in compilations. For example, *The Analyst*, Royalle’s first film, was also released as *The Analyst* and *Backdoor Therapy*, and scenes from it were recycled into various loops and compilations. Tracking down her complete performance history, then, remains complicated and complex, particularly because many of the films themselves are difficult to locate to check. Nonetheless, I have found 51 unique films featuring Royalle’s performances. Ten of these were in non-sex roles, and eleven were in the loops described in note 15, leaving 30 unique appearances with sexual performances in feature-length adult films. These 30 appearances, for which she is most often credited and remembered, seem to match her own estimations: she typically suggests in interviews that she appeared in anywhere between 25 and 30 films as a performer.

There is also the matter of names. Adult film producers and performers frequently used pseudonyms, often making it even more difficult to compile complete filmographies. Royalle used twelve different names in

the many “ensemble” players during the Golden Age from 1976 to 1981, never completely breaking through to stardom, but appearing frequently as part of the supporting cast. She booked roles in high profile features, such as *Femmes de Sade* (1976, dir. Alex DeRenzy), produced by Jim and Artie Mitchell after their phenomenal success with *Behind The Green Door*.<sup>32</sup> She also appeared in the comedies *Hard Soap*, *Hard Soap* (a takeoff on the television show *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*), for which she received an Erotic Film Awards nomination for Best Supporting Actress and *Hot & Saucy Pizza Girls*, both in 1977 for director Bob Chinn.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, comic performances made up the bulk of Royalle’s output: films such as *Olympic Fever* (1979, dir. Philip Marshak), *Hot Rackets* (1979, dir. Robert McCallum), and *Pro-Ball Cheerleaders* (1979, dir. Jack Mathew) showcased her dramatic capability by including humor alongside her sexual performances.

It was *Ballgame* (1980, dir. Ann Perry), one of her standard comic turns, this time as an imprisoned prostitute who seduces a guard, that provided Royalle with a glimpse into how her own filmmaking process might take shape. Working with one of the few female directors in the industry, the sequence illustrates the sort of “sensibility” that

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her 51 films: Candida Royalle, Candida Royale, Candice Ball, Mary Pearson, Candice Chambers, Bettina Mia, Candice Royalle, Sharon Lucas, Candice, Candida Royal, Candita Royalle, and Jeanne Toller. As I describe in note 15, “Cyntnia Pleschette” is a pseudonym that has been falsely credited to her.

Finally, Royalle is credited with the vocals on the title song in *One Way at a Time* (1979, dir. Alan Colberg).

<sup>32</sup> The experience of working on *Femmes de Sade* for de Renzy was not a positive one. In one of the film’s key scenes, a group of female characters urinate on a character played by actor Ken Turner. Before shooting, Royalle refused, claiming she had not agreed to do the scene, and convinced several of the other performers to refuse as well. An angry de Renzy informed Royalle that she would never work for him again—which turned out to be correct. See: Nelson 238.

<sup>33</sup> Royalle later described *Hard Soap*, *Hard Soap* as a turning point in her performance career, saying it was “the first film I enjoyed doing, and I was paid fairly for my time on that one.” See: “Interview: Candida Royalle,” 20.

appealed to Royalle, an abstract concept difficult to quantify but relatively easy to identify. Marriane Macy's description of the sequence is worth describing in detail:

The music is relaxing, and the scene has soft lighting. The cop puts a matt on the floor, and she puts her arms around him and they embrace. The pace is slow and sensual as she lifts her arms above her head to have him gently take off her dress. The camera is behind them, and while they can be seen just as clearly as in other films, it looks flattering. He lowers her to the floor, and slowly kisses his way down her body. The scene conveys a feeling of enjoyment, and watching it is sexy. The camera takes its time moving up and down bodies, stopping calmly to observe. There's a sense of pleasure rather than choppy, goal-oriented graphic couplings. Although this offers just as much detail, the sensibility and style is far different.<sup>34</sup>

Royalle wholeheartedly agreed with a progressive reading of the sequence, linked its success to Perry's status as a woman, and added that Perry allowed her to "perform the scene the way I wanted to," foreshadowing the ideas, strategies, and, most importantly, the control Royalle wished to exert over the production process with a specific narrative and visual style in mind.<sup>35</sup> It was clear by this point in Royalle's career her idea of a "women's sensibility" was specific, carried certain narrative and visual characteristics, and could be ascribed, in an essentialized fashion, to female directors, producers, and performers. These characteristics, which would come to the fore with *Femme's* productions, revolved around issues of quality, justifying the sexual pleasure within the

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<sup>34</sup> Macy 53-54.

<sup>35</sup> Macy 53.

scene through a particular aesthetic approach rather than in a physical, material pleasure. The presentation, in other words, was as much the pleasure as the content—an approach that would highlight the practices would Royalle would implement with *Femme*.

As her career progressed in the late 1970s, Royalle's feminist background began to influence her perceptions of the industry and its practices. Those perceptions came to the surface in a pair of interviews in 1980. The first, in the May issue of *High Society*, hints at her growing acknowledgment that industrial change was going to require more than performance: "I think there's a future in female-oriented pornography. It's going to take women like myself to get it rolling. It's going to require women actually sitting down and writing scripts themselves."<sup>36</sup> The second, the September issue of *Adam Film World*, offers a rare opportunity in which an adult film actress went beyond the usual public relations spin on a new release and into much deeper ideological territory. The wide-ranging interview also foreshadows (and essentially delineates) the blueprint for *Femme*. The interview starkly put forth Royalle's idea that adult films could be improved with a three-part approach: 1) more attention to quality; 2) a consideration of women's pleasure; and, 3) a foregrounding of pedagogical potential. Those principles would be the core guidelines four years later with *Femme*. "Films are still centered around men," she noted, "men's needs, men's attitudes—and we need more than that. We need to educate our audience. We have a responsibility for what we're showing people."<sup>37</sup> Several of Royalle's core principles come through with remarkable clarity in these interviews: the urgent need to address women's sexual attitudes and pleasures, the educative potential of

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<sup>36</sup> "Cumming of Age," 95.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell Lawrence, "Candida Goes Candid," *Adam Film World* September 1980: 17.

adult film, and, most critically, the realization that women would need to gain control of the means of production to ensure real changes to Ziplow's formula.

By the late 1970s, Royalle sensed her acting career was ending. Giving herself one more year as a performer in films she could be "proud of," she moved back to New York and appeared in *Sizzle* (1979, dir. Larry Revene), *Fascination* (1980, dir. Revene), *October Silk* (1980, dir. Henri Pachard), and *Delicious* (1981, dir. Philip Drexler, Jr.).<sup>38</sup> Finally, in 1981, Royalle made a much larger move, coming up with a story and writing the screenplay for what would be her final film as a performer, *Blue Magic* (dir. Revene), the film that would set the stage for what would follow with *Femme*. She was, at last, "sitting down and writing the script." The film carries the imprint of the Golden Age while nevertheless looking forward to the narrative and visual changes Royalle would bring with *Femme*. However, the film's production history contradicts some of the tempting mythology it would be easy in hindsight to bestow upon Royalle, particularly given the film's progressive content.

### *Blue Magic and the Beginning of a Mythology*

The story behind *Blue Magic* begins in Sweden, with one of that country's preeminent sexploitation and adult film producers, distributors, and adult theater owners, Nils Sture Sjöstedt. Hoping to escape the high Swedish tax rates, Sjöstedt sent his eldest son Per to the United States to learn the adult filmmaking trade and, in the process, invest

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<sup>38</sup> Royalle, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do* xii.

the family fortune in American adult films as a tax shelter.<sup>39</sup> Sjöstedt had served as producer and investor for director Joe Sarno on such Swedish films as the “Girl Meets Girl” trilogy starring Marie Forså, all in 1974, and *Fäbodjántan (Come Blow the Horn!)* in 1978, perhaps the most famous adult film in Sweden’s history.<sup>40</sup> Through Sarno, Sjöstedt maintained connections to the adult filmmaking network in New York, and particularly with Sam Lake at Mature Pictures, where Sarno had made many of his early exploitation films. Per took on a position as assistant producer and production manager for Lake alongside producer Robert Sumner. Lake’s connections in the industry were deep, with links to Howard Farber and Arthur Morowitz’s Distribpix, among the earliest exploitation film producers in the United States. As explored in chapter two, Sumner also founded Quality-X Video, while Morowitz founded both Quality-X-Pix Video and the Video Shack chain of rental video stores—making their connection to Sjöstedt, which eventually leads to the formation of Femme, part of a much larger trajectory in adult film history.

With Sjöstedt’s financing, Lake arranged for Sumner to produce a pair of films in the late 1970s utilizing European locations (including Sjöstedt’s homes in Germany and Italy) and travelogue narratives in the spirit of mainstream films such as *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954). Per worked on the productions as an assistant producer, translator, and guide to the European locations. Brought onboard to helm the projects was

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<sup>39</sup> Much of the background in this section comes from *Blue Magic* director, Chuck Vincent protégé, and Per Sjöstedt colleague Larry Revene, who graciously answered my questions on multiple occasions and provided relevant sections from an unpublished forthcoming manuscript.

<sup>40</sup> Commonly referred to as the “Girl Meets Girl” trilogy, the three films (*Vampire Ecstasy*, *Girl Meets Girl*, and *Butterflies*) actually had no narrative connection. However, all three did share Swedish teen actress Marie Forså (AKA Maria Lynn) and were shot in Germany with spoken, rather than dubbed, English as the films were intended for the American softcore market.

producer/director Chuck Vincent (real name Charles Dingley), well known for his light-hearted, well-written, and humorous adult films (typically involving male anxiety around sex roles), as well as his low budget mainstream comedies and horror films. Vincent released the resulting films, *That Lucky Stiff* and *Bon Appétit* to theaters in 1979 and 1980, respectively.

Among the many Vincent protégés and frequent collaborators brought along on the trip was Larry Revene, who was among the most technically skilled cinematographers in the adult industry. Revene's long career began as an assistant to notorious loop producer Bob Wolfe before morphing into work as a cinematographer for Cecil Howard (for whom he shot *Heat Wave* in 1977), Gerard Damiano (*Joint Venture* in 1978), and Radley Metzger (*Barbara Broadcast* in 1977 and *Maraschino Cherry* in 1978).<sup>41</sup> It was his partnership with Vincent, however, that cemented Revene's position in adult film history. Revene shot all of Vincent's films (adult and mainstream) beginning with the landmark *Jack 'n' Jill* in 1978. Revene went on to his own directorial career, which eventually included *Wanda Whips Wall Street* (1982) featuring his trademark flattering lighting, careful narrative construction, and seamless editing. Revene specialized in building eroticism through staging, tone, and pacing, and was a firm believer in attention

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<sup>41</sup> Revene was the assistant camera operator for director Wolfe in 1971 on *D-1* (also commonly known as *D-2*, *Dogarama*, and *Dog Fucker*), perhaps the most notorious loop film ever produced. Starring Linda Boreman, who would later go on to international fame as Linda Lovelace in *Deep Throat* and Eric Edwards, the film features Boreman having sex with a German shepherd dog. Boreman later initially denied the film's existence, and when confronted with indisputable evidence, claimed she was coerced into making it through violent threats—a claim that the other people on the set that day (including Revene) have strenuously denied, instead arguing that Boreman was a completely willing participant.

Revene later described his feelings toward the film's production, noting that he was not told in advance about the subject matter: "On one hand I can justify not passing judgment or intervening and just doing my job. On the other hand I feel guilty for just being there. I was left with contriteness for being part of such an event. This and helping get a Republican elected with TV ads, are my two career regrets." See: Larry Revene, *Wham Bam \$\$ Ba Da Boom!: Mob Wars, Porn Battles and a View from the Trenches*, Kindle Edition ed. (New York: Hudson Delta Books, 2012) 2057-2059.

to detail in the filmmaking process, refusing to cut corners or pass up opportunities to make even the smallest details stand out. These elements later defined Royalle's approach with *Femme*.

It was during production in Europe on the pair of films that Per met Royalle, who was cast in *That Lucky Stiff* for a memorable sequence in which she and Samantha Fox, playing clever, jaded massage parlor attendants, cajole a patron (Ron Hudd) into every conceivable service, accompanied by steep and escalating fees. The productions were a major success, and Sjöstedt, happy with the arrangement, looked for more investment opportunities with the New York group. The frequently overbooked Vincent passed two Sjöstedt-financed projects along to Revene to direct, *Sizzle* (1979) and *Fascination* (1980), for which Per served as production manager. It was during the production of *Sizzle* that Royalle and Per began dating, and they married shortly before the conclusion of principal photography on *Fascination*, cementing what became a financial partnership between Royalle and the Sjöstedt family.

During the same period, Revene and Per set up a separate corporation, Lunarex, in which to deposit their earnings from the Vincent productions. While Revene was editing *Fascination*, Per and Royalle came to him with a proposal: Royalle wanted to make a film, using Sjöstedt's money, and was hoping Per could produce and Revene direct the project under the new Lunarex banner. Revene agreed, and suggested that Royalle adapt the plot of the classic Agatha Christie story *Ten Little Indians* as a starting point. Royalle returned with a two-page treatment following a group of people invited to an estate for a weekend that results in various sexual pairings. Revene pointed out that the story lacked conflict, and suggested using the classic Tin Pan Alley song "Hard Hearted Hanna" (then

widely known in a popular version by the Ray Charles Singers) as a central image for the rewrite. The song, which follows a *femme fatale* who enjoys seeing men suffer, when combined with the *Ten Little Indians* conceit, proved a good narrative fit (although it does not appear in the final film). Royalle returned several months later with the script for *Blue Magic*. Revene and Per brought in their usual Vincent colleagues to round out the crew, and production got underway at a Connecticut location they had used previously on such Vincent productions as *C.O.D.* (1981), a sprawling country estate complete with gardens and multiple interiors perfect for an adult film production.

The clever screenplay, detailed production design, and Revene's technical skills as a director and cinematographer highlight the resulting film. Set in the late Victorian/early Edwardian era in the countryside, the film acts as a feminist meta-text on both the adult film industry and the larger concern of women's historical silencing. The mysterious Natalie Woodhurst (Royalle), who lives in the palatial Woodhurst Castle with her butler and chambermaid, invites a group of well-heeled locals for a weekend party. Among the guests is Matthew Getty (Jack Wrangler), a private detective determined to uncover the truth about the events at the castle. Woodhurst, a 200-year-old benevolent witch, magically steals an item from each guest (including a cufflink from Getty), using them to cast spells that drive the guests wild with sexual passion. In the film's conclusion, Woodhurst orchestrates an elaborate orgy, revealing that the pleasures she obtains from such events keep her immortal. Getty, by turns aroused and horrified by the revelation, finally has his answer, but Woodhurst, with another spell, erases his and all of the guests' memories. In the final scene, blissfully unaware of what has occurred, Getty looks down to see his cufflink is missing—just as the film fades to black.

The film's sex scenes serve the plot, rather than the plot merely being a vehicle to ensure Ziplitow's formula. Indeed, the first sex scene occurs twelve minutes into the film—an eternity by adult film standards. The second does not appear for another fifteen minutes, and another twenty minutes pass between the final two. Shot completely on location in and around the Connecticut estate, using period automobiles, props, and costumes, *Blue Magic* displays accomplished art design by industry veteran Eddie Heath, another long-time Vincent collaborator, who also handled the costume design.<sup>42</sup> Revene carefully constructed the lighting in the film, subtle and deep in its pools of light and shadow. "Lighting was the most important element to me, and I had become aware of some of the important aspects of a period 'look,'" he confirmed when asked about the sophisticated visuals in the film. "Single source illumination [was] one of the key factors. All of the lighting in that film was 'soft' and with the addition of low contrast filter on the camera it had the... Vermeer look."<sup>43</sup> Revene's cinematography and Heath's art design won awards from the Adult Film Critic's Association.<sup>44</sup>

Given its narrative elements, the film lends itself to a progressively feminist reading. The choice to make Getty a detective represents an ideal vehicle for the embodiment of the quest of controlling the "mystery of difference," as well as mobilizing

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<sup>42</sup> Revene says that one reason he chose to place the film in a period setting was to utilize Heath's accomplished skills as costume and set designer—as well as Heath's wardrobe collection from the mainstream film *Hester Street* (1975), a period piece set in New York for which Heath served as wardrobe master. See: Larry Revene. Email with the author. 26 December 2012.

Revene's perfectionism and attention to detail extended to the editing as well. Initially assigned to Vincent regular James Macreading, Revene redid much of the cutting after Macreading completed one of the film's extensive dinner sequences with multiple mistakes involving eyeline matches. Revene noted: "I felt he was giving the work the bum's rush and not taking the time to really give it the attention it needed." See: Larry Revene. *Sweet Wine from Sour Grapes*.

<sup>43</sup> Revene. Email with the author. 26 December 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Royalle, "Vertical Smiles and Cum-Soaked Aisles" 87.

the very tropes of the familiar formula in order to critique its mechanisms. Probing continually for Woodhurst's identity and why she has summoned her guests, Getty verbally spars and flirts with her, matching her pun-for-pun, increasingly determined to get to the bottom of her mysterious plans. Yet, the script cleverly undermines these very obsessions: Getty ultimately remains completely ignorant of Woodhurst's machinations, fumbles throughout the castle all weekend, eventually acting as the final piece (and sexual partner) in her elaborate sex ritual. The climactic scene, in which Getty recalls nothing about the events he so desperately tried to manipulate, acts as the conclusion of a feminist puzzle in which the paradigm of gendered sexual control and containment familiar to Golden Age films has been upended, torn apart, and categorically dismissed. Woodhurst, not only a woman, but a witch engaged in sex magic, pulls the strings, promoting her own pleasure at the expense of all else. The "mystery of difference" goes wildly absent, replaced instead by Woodhurst's overt sexuality and power over pleasure. Given this reversal of the typical narrative logic, the film ultimately comments on the notion that men's desires and pleasures control women's sexuality. Getty's failure even to understand what has happened to him, let alone control it, reveals a focus on escaping and dismantling typical paradigms.

The film also comments on the adult industry, and particularly its tendency to limit female creativity behind the camera. Royalle's presence here as initiator, writer, and star punctures that paradigm, and the narrative, in which Woodhurst acts as "director" of all the guests, positions a woman at the center of the sexual action. While *The Analyst* and *Love Secrets* position male characters as the bearers of power over the "mystery of difference," *Blue Magic* offers a contrapuntal approach subverting and ultimately

dismissing those same elements. Most importantly, that subversion does not come at the expense of the visualization of sexual pleasure: *Blue Magic*, despite its implicit political strategies, is also, most importantly, a hardcore sex film in which men and women give and receive pleasure.<sup>45</sup> This kind of textual and industrial reading of the film provides a clear path backward from Royalle's future marketing discourses with *Femme*. Indeed, this sort of analysis could lead one to conclude that *Blue Magic* represents most clearly the political, industrial, narrative, and visual directions in which Royalle was headed at the close of her performance career, marking the film as a crucial piece in the history of Royalle's groundbreaking feminist approach to adult filmmaking.

Tempting as that sort of auteur-inspired textual analysis may be, particularly given the feminist goals Royalle explicitly aspired to with *Femme* that overwhelmingly populate *Blue Magic*, it contradicts much of the historical evidence surrounding the film's production, and shifts credit away from others who may have had similar feminist goals but have failed to receive recognition. For example, Royalle may have had a hand in the process of developing the story, but it was Revene who linked her idea of a weekend gathering to a female protagonist bent on controlling those around her. Furthermore, Royalle, immediately before shooting, gave Revene only a fifteen-page draft of the final script, with thirty considered standard. Revene extended the action by asking Wrangler to improvise much of Getty's dialogue. Revene also added the film's bookends in the detective's office, adding the final touch at the end of the film that

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<sup>45</sup> Royalle was not entirely happy with the finished product (though she would consistently praise it in interviews), claiming that the editing process shortened her screen presence and made the film's climactic sequence (Royalle's only sex scene in the film) shorter than necessary. See: "Porn Star of the Month: Candida Royalle," *High Society* October 1982: 60. She would also say that the film "was beautiful, but, as often happens, they rewrote it with scissors in the editing room." See: "Fame Fatale: The Many Faces of Candida Royalle," *Cheri* May 1985: 96.

cements Woodhurst's ability to erase the memories of her guests. Indeed, making Getty a detective was Revene's idea, which interrogates the notion that Royalle's feminist politics can be observed in the subtext of the detective struggling, unsuccessfully, to control the "mystery of difference" around him. Similarly, it was Revene's decision to place the film in a historical setting. First, he had a desire to shoot a period film; second, he wanted to utilize Heath's costumes and expertise; and, finally, he thought the period setting might appeal to female viewers. This last reason adds a historical wrinkle to Royalle's frequent arguments during the time that the industry was blindly adhering to the "formula," had no respect for female cast or crew, and simply ignored female audiences in blind pursuit of those male viewers that could guarantee ticket sales. Yet, here was Revene, a director known for his softer, more "erotic" sensibility, changing a script to appeal directly to those female viewers for whom Royalle had long expressed concern.

An additional layer of importance can be added when considering Revene's stance on the "money shot," and its particular subset known as the "facial," in which the ejaculation occurs on the female performer's face. Revene was not a proponent of the technique, making him an outlier at the time and in clear industrial disagreement with those producers and directors who called for its ubiquitous presence. In his 2012 autobiography, Revene described his dislike:

The custom of a guy withdrawing and ejaculating on a woman's face did not fit any of my own fantasies or probably too many women's. In fact it made me a little uncomfortable. I did not then and still do not understand this phenomenon. Objectification is an attitude that regards a person as a

commodity, an object for use without regard for the individual. I have always tried to be respectful of women and find the practice demeaning.<sup>46</sup>

Following up on that comment with me directly, Revene added: “Because of my gender... I was expected to subscribe to the normal male approach to making sex films. Cumming on a woman's face, then as now, does not seem in the realm of eroticism to me but more in the arena of humiliation.”<sup>47</sup> Given the lack of “facial” shots in *Blue Magic*, it would be easy to ascribe the progressive decision to Royalle; however, on review, it appears that Revene’s contribution has been overlooked, and that, in the process of creating the feminist mythology around Femme, Revene’s own considerable feminist production strategies have been rendered invisible.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, this complex and layered production history behind *Blue Magic* both reifies and complicates the many complaints Royalle would have regarding the domination of the industry by men and male-oriented fantasies. It was Sjöstedt’s financing, Vincent’s inner circle, and the creative resources of Revene and Lunarex that ultimately brought the film to fruition, a group of men whose contributions have been somewhat erased in favor of the feminist mythologizing surrounding Royalle. Ultimately, the radically progressive reading of the film still holds: *Blue Magic* does serve as a feminist meta-text on all the challenges and problems circulating within the industry, as well as within the typical archetypal narratives of the “mystery of difference” so common to adult films of the era. The credit, however, should go in no small part to Revene. The

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<sup>46</sup> Revene, *Wham Bam \$\$ Ba Da Boom!* 766.

<sup>47</sup> Revene. Email with the author. 26 December 2012.

<sup>48</sup> *Blue Magic* does contain instances of other “money shots,” in which males visibly ejaculate on women’s bodies, but does not present the “facial” subset. Revene confirmed that these were included at the insistence of the producers as a compromise given his reluctance to include the “facial” variety. See: Revene. Email with the author. 26 December 2012.

result, unfortunately, has been the bolstering of Royale's mythology rather than the recognition of Revene's contribution. As Royale's last film as a performer, *Blue Magic* and its production history reveal, perhaps, more about the mythologizing of Royale's politics, a trend that would continue as she stepped away from the front of the camera.

### *On the Periphery: From Club 90 to Femme Productions*

Following the production of *Blue Magic* in 1980, Royale retired from performing in hardcore films, but the resulting road to creating Femme was not seamless or immediate. She began the process by seeking out ways to understand her career choices. Haunted by her Catholic upbringing, Royale entered counseling in 1981 with a former prostitute-turned-therapist. "I just wanted to come to terms with the career I had in the sex industry so I that I could understand it and live with it," she would later say.<sup>49</sup> Therapy, which allowed Royale to come to terms with her past, also paved the way for the future: rather than dismiss the adult film industry out of shame, she resolved to make the changes she had long advocated. "I came to the conclusion that I felt that the concept of adult movies was perfectly valid in some instances," she said in a description of her introspection, "and that there was nothing really wrong with consenting adults performing for other consenting adults to view."<sup>50</sup> She also connected these feelings with

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<sup>49</sup> Gilboa, "Heart to Heart with Candida Royale." Web; Royale, *How to Tell a Naked Man What to Do* xii.

<sup>50</sup> Gilboa, "Heart to Heart with Candida Royale." Web.

Royale's willingness to speak so publicly about her personal struggle with her past has not always resulted in positive responses within the industry. Ron Sullivan, who directed Royale in *October Silk* in 1980, has been a notable detractor regarding Femme Productions. "Candida wants to make something she can live with," he has said. "She'll cut edges to make it more palatable for herself—to give justification to her past behavior as a performer." See: Luke Ford. "Fem Porn." *lukeisback.com*. Luke Is Back. 23 November 2008. Web. 1 October 2012.

her political critiques of pornography: “I saw that there was nothing wrong with I had done, or with the notion of pornography inherently, but rather the underlying societal attitudes toward sex that were revealed in pornography.”<sup>51</sup> That combination would be critical for the formation of Femme.

Continuing to make public appearances drawing on her fame as an adult performer, Royale returned to the stage with a touring show, a live striptease act modeled on classic burlesque routines.<sup>52</sup> Displaying her trademark political enthusiasm (and ambition), she noted: “I’ve come to appreciate strippers as artists. This is a valid profession that deserves more respect than it gets. I think burlesque, with all its fanfare and eroticism, is long overdue for a big comeback, and I hope I’ll help lead the way!”<sup>53</sup> She also stayed on the periphery of the adult film industry, using her connections to obtain a position as an assistant editor at Drake Publishing in New York.<sup>54</sup> She worked on the company’s various adult magazines answering fan mail, reviewing films, giving interviews, writing essays on the industry, and appearing in magazine pictorials (almost always with the same set of photos taken earlier in her career by Per Sjöstedt). Drake published *High Society*, *Celebrity Skin* (later *Expose!*), *Hawk*, *Chéri*, *X-Rated Cinema*,

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<sup>51</sup> Nagle 165.

<sup>52</sup> Royale described the show in two autobiographical essays from the era, outlining the tour stops, the shabby backstage conditions, and the catcalling audiences. See: Candida Royale, “Off Camera,” *High Society* February 1982: 21; Candida Royale, “The Royale Treatment,” *Cinema-X* April 1981: 20-21, 55.

<sup>53</sup> Royale, “Off Camera,” 21.

<sup>54</sup> As noted in chapter one, there is a particular historical irony present in Royale’s employment with Drake, as that was the same publisher who had released Ziplow’s *Handbook* in 1977.

In a notable example of the way in which Royale combined her performing and writing careers, Royale organized a group of adult performers for a makeshift parade in New York’s financial district in 1981 to publicize a burlesque review the following day at the famed (and notorious) Show World Theater, and then wrote about it in one of her magazine pieces. Candida Royale, “High Society Gets the Stock Market Up!,” *High Society* September 1981.

and *Playgirl*, along with dozens of other magazines.<sup>55</sup> Many of these (as I detail in chapter three) employed adult film performers as writers and editors, typically for gossip and fan columns as a ploy to increase circulation. Royalle also worked for Drake in their groundbreaking phone-sex division, calculating the length of the pre-recorded messages, as well as writing and recording early offerings. A highly profitable industry, phone sex brought a great deal of money to Drake and its employees—much of which Royalle saved and later invested in *Femme*.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Rosen, who worked for a variety of the company's magazines, provides an invaluable history of Drake Publishing (later renamed, first, Crescent Publishing Group, Inc., and then Blue Horizon Media Group), in the company's Swank Publications division. Most important in this little-known history is the direct connection between Marvel Comics and pornography.

Rosen details how Martin Goodman, in 1932, founded Goodman Publications, with a group of "pulp" magazines, then jumped on the trend started by *Superman* and began publishing a wide variety of comic books under various subsidiaries—including one called Marvel Comics. Jack Kirby, Joe Simon, and Stanley Lieber (who would later go by Stan Lee) worked for Goodman, for whom they created the immensely popular Captain America, The Avengers, and The Fantastic Four. Eventually, Goodman turned to "men's adventure" magazines, which were the precursors to *Playboy* and the other early adult magazines. Eventually, after various twists and turns, acquisitions and deacquisitions (all detailed by Rosen), Martin's son Chip and grandson Jason took over the family business and turned to adult magazines (along with mainstream publications) and created an empire. The Goodmans sold the Swank empire in 1992 to Lou Perretta, a New Jersey-based printer, who now controls virtually the entire adult magazine industry outside of major publications such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*. See: Robert Rosen, *Beaver Street: A History of Modern Pornography* (London: Headpress, 2010) 67-84, 177-178; Bruce Jay Friedman. "Even the Rhinos Were Nymphos." *Even the Rhinos Were Nymphos*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 15-26.

<sup>56</sup> Robin Perez. "Behind the Scenes with Candida Royalle." *sexherald.com*. Sex Herald. n.d. Web. 10 August 2012.

The importance of phone sex to the adult industry in the early 1980s is difficult to overstate given the new technology, exposure for the industry, and massive cash flows, and needs to be the subject of its own detailed research.

Robert Rosen provides an overview of its beginnings. In brief: in mid-1982, Jeff Goodman, editor at *High Society* magazine, proposed the idea of a telephone number on the centerfold in each issue that readers could call to hear a recorded message from the model. On the first day after the first number was printed, *High Society* received more than 100,000 calls to hear the 30-second recording on a system designed for 1,000 calls per day.

In 1983, when the Justice Department broke up the AT&T monopoly, they required the new "Baby Bells" to release their 976 telephone numbers, which, in exchange for a small charge, allowed callers to access (on lines designed to handle hundreds of thousands of calls a day) various services such as time, weather, horoscopes, sports scores, and Dial-A-Prayers. New York Telephone gave away 23 of the lines in a lottery on January 3, three of which went to *High Society* employees. The new 976 service (falsely advertised as

Indicative of this period of professional writing is *The Royale Treatment*, a regular feature beginning in *Cinema-X* in November 1980, offering a further glimpse into the changes she intended for the industry. All accompanied by the ubiquitous nude photo set taken by Per of Royale on a beach, the essays follow a similar theme: first-person narratives in which Royale travels somewhere and has romantic, passionate, and no-strings-attached sexual encounters. Well-crafted erotic stories hovering somewhere between fact and fiction, the pieces demonstrate Royale's flair for narrative, and hint at the kinds of storylines she would later develop with *Femme*. The first essay describes a night out with other adult performers and Per at a movie premiere and, later, at a strip club. It also outlines the goals for the recurring feature: "I'll take you along with me on all the wildest adventures I can manage to find myself in, and give you only the spiciest details."<sup>57</sup> The column, designed to be part industry gossip and part erotic fiction, came from the mind of an established (and now retired) adult star, a standard formula in adult magazines of the period. Subsequent essays followed her to Stockholm and on a flight from California to New York; in both, she describes various erotic encounters with strangers.<sup>58</sup> In all cases, Royale places the emphasis on context, narrative, and an exploration of her own pleasure, constructing sexually explicit details without succumbing to the "mystery of difference" or foregrounding male pleasure as the priority

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"Free Phone Sex" in the magazine) was activated on February 1, and immediately averaged more than 500,000 calls per day, at two cents profit for the magazine and seven cents profit for the phone company. *High Society* made \$70,000 per week from the service (while the phone company quietly made \$245,00 per week), and by April the magazine was essentially repackaged as a promotional tool for the phone numbers. Royale was one of the Drake employees who wrote and performed these recordings.

Rosen 11-16.

<sup>57</sup> Candida Royale, "The Royale Treatment," *Cinema-X* September 1980: 18.

<sup>58</sup> Candida Royale, "The Royale Treatment," *Cinema-X* January 1981: 64-65, 82; Candida Royale, "The Royale Treatment," *Cinema-X* February 1981: 21-23.

in the pursuit of pleasure. Once again, Royalle had seized the means of production to craft material from a “woman’s point of view,” but had to rely upon men to bring that material to audiences, in this case Chip Goodman, publisher at Drake.

After three months of working in-house, Royalle realized she was overqualified for the position and could make more money as a freelancer writer for Drake and other publishers.<sup>59</sup> Her essay in the July 1982 *High Times*, a typical mixture of titillating prose and historical background commissioned by then-editor Larry “Ratso” Sloman, captures the freelance era of Royalle’s writing and also provides a lengthy overview of her past. Detailing her personal background, adult film career, and a handful of her standard feminist critiques, the lengthy piece also mixes in anecdotes about her sexual escapades (on-and-off camera) with well-known performers such as John Holmes and Jamie Gillis.<sup>60</sup> The piece represents the height of her post-performance writing career, capturing the delicate balance she typically struck between critique, history, and sensationalism, keeping one foot planted in sex as entertainment with the other on the ground of political commentary.

Writing these pieces, however, was clearly a temporary measure for Royalle, who was still debating the best ways to make the changes in the adult film industry she had

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<sup>59</sup> Despite her reinvention with *Femme* in 1984, Royalle continued to work for various adult publications as a gossip columnist, freelance writer, and critic, often under pseudonyms or uncredited. For example, she was still listed as a “contributing writer” for *Cheri* magazine in July 1987, and a February 1988 profile in the *San Francisco Chronicle* notes that she was still working for that publication as a “sex columnist,” a description that further emphasizes the mythologizing around Royalle’s career increasingly positioning her as an expert on the “right way” to have sex. Her work for *Cheri* during this period was the same sort of writing she had always done, rather than “sex advice.” See: “Masthead,” *Cheri* July 1987: 2; John Stanley, “Film Maker Gives Erotica a Woman's Point of View,” *San Francisco Chronicle* 21 February 1988: 55.

<sup>60</sup> Royalle, “Vertical Smiles and Cum-Soaked Aisles” 38-41, 67, 85-87.

long been advocating. In an interview in *High Society* in October 1982, she demonstrated an increasingly proscriptive tone in her usual critique:

I don't like it when it's exploitive, when the producers choose the easy way out and fail to show the people what they should really see. I guess I'd like to say that I'm going to be around for a while, but I'm going to do it my way and I think they'll have a lot to learn if they hear what I have to say. I'm all for men and women having sex, but let's just do it the right way and have fun!<sup>61</sup>

The bold suggestion that there was a “right way” to have sex would be a Royalle hallmark later with *Femme*; here, in its nascency, the comment stands out for its direct attack on the adult film producers who were, apparently, “doing it wrong.” Royalle hinted most strongly at her future in September 1983, when, in an essay for *Expose!*, she made clear what would bring her back to adult film: “A common question is whether I'd consider a major role in another erotic film. As I always answer... the movie would have to be something different, something really new under the erotic sun. Perhaps a feature film aimed at women, with erotic fantasies tailored just for us.”<sup>62</sup> Within only a few months of those comments appearing on the page, that effort to break the “mystery of difference” and explore an alternate journey of sexual discovery would be precisely what Royalle put into motion.

It was a baby shower in the spring of 1983 for performer Veronica Hart, however, that brought all the elements into focus for Royalle. That night, Hart, Royalle, and the

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<sup>61</sup> “Porn Star of the Month: Candida Royalle,” 61.

<sup>62</sup> Candida Royalle, “Untitled,” *Blue Movie Expose!* September 1983: 11.

other veteran performers at the party (who had all worked together on numerous film sets) shared their experiences, commiserated over the challenges of appearing in adult films, and offered each other encouragement. Monthly meetings ensued the following summer for the burgeoning support group, called “Club 90” after member Annie Sprinkle’s address in New York. The original members were Veronica Vera, Gloria Leonard, Sharon Mitchell, Sue Nero, Kelly Nichols, Sprinkle, Hart, and Royalle—though Mitchell, Nero, and Nichols would leave the group at various points shortly after its creation.<sup>63</sup> Their shared political stance on the industry and its need for female

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<sup>63</sup> Laura Fraser, “Nasty Girls,” *Mother Jones* March 1990: 50; McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 371-376.

The critical importance of these women is too lengthy to include fully in this dissertation, although some of their stories are told in small parts throughout these pages.

Gloria Leonard (born Gail Klinetsky in 1940) worked in public relations and on Wall Street as a registered broker before beginning a career as an adult film performer at age 35. Her first major appearance was in Radley Metzger’s *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* in 1976. After some 40 films, she served as editor (if mostly in name only in order to sell copies, an arrangement made by publisher Carl Ruderman) for *High Society* for fourteen years, during the magazine’s most successful period, in which it regularly published nude photos of celebrities and pioneered the phone sex industry. Leonard also acted as an industry advocate, serving as administrative director of the Adult Film and Video Association of America from 1989 to 1992, until that organization merged with the Free Speech Coalition. In 1998, she was elected president of the FSC. She was also married for a time to Bobby Hollander (born Allan Sachs), veteran film director and founder and publisher of *Adult Cinema Review* magazine. See: Rosen, *Beaver Street: A History of Modern Pornography*; Nelson 264-292.

Sharon Mitchell, whose long and winding career could (and should) be the focus of an entire dissertation, started as a Broadway dancer with the Martha Graham company in the mid-1970s before turning to adult movies at the end of that decade. She worked steadily, appearing in well over 200 films (including frequent supporting roles for the Vivid Video productions starring Ginger Lynn), before being nearly murdered by an admirer after a striptease show in 1996. Overcoming that incident, as well as a long-term heroin addiction, Mitchell radically redefined herself as an industry advocate, taking courses in public health counseling and sexology before founding the groundbreaking Adult Industry Medical Health Care Foundation (AIM), which she established in 1998. AIM was the primary location for adult performers to obtain mandatory testing for sexually transmitted diseases, testing more than 1,200 performers every month, until it closed its doors in May 2011 and declared bankruptcy after various problems including political pressure on the industry to require condom use, as well as a massive data breach which resulted in the real names of more than 12,000 performers being released on the internet. Mitchell obtained a PhD from Ted McIlvenna’s Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in 2003. She is the subject of the nearly forgotten documentary *Kamikaze Hearts* (1986, dir. Juliet Bashore), which follows Mitchell’s romance with girlfriend and adult film performer Tigr Mennet on the set of various adult films and around San Francisco. The film also features producer Jerry Abrams, veteran loop filmmaker. See: R. Allen Leider, “Sharon Mitchell: The Super Sex Star That’s Done It All!,” *Video-X* July 1983: 31-37, 81-84; Nelson 426-463.

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Veronica Vera was a Wall Street trader before turning to adult films in 1982. Vera opened a “Finishing School” in 1992 in New York, a business initially devoted to helping men interested in cross dressing but eventually anyone desiring “femininity” lessons. Among many other moments of feminist activism, Vera was among the handful of adult performers that testified as part of the Meese Commission, outlined in chapter six. In 1989, along with Annie Sprinkle (a frequent colleague in various endeavors), she helped to reorganize Prostitutes of New York (P.O.N.Y.), the sex workers' rights organization which advocates the decriminalization of prostitution. In 1992, Vera released a “manifesto” which, in many ways, echoed much of what Royalle had been similarly proposing for many years. It read, in part: “It is in taking the responsibility for their own sexuality and contributing to pornography... that women can make pornography an instrument of liberation and power.” See: Fraser, “Nasty Girls,” 50; Veronica Vera, *Miss Vera's Finishing School for Boys Who Want to Be Girls* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

Sue Nero was primarily known as a performer in loop films for Diamond Collection, Pleasure Productions, and other companies beginning in the late 1970s and, while she worked (much like Royalle) steadily in supporting parts, she did not achieve stardom, probably because of her plus-size figure. Appearing regularly for many years in adult magazines, Nero left the film industry in 1988 to focus on her striptease career (which continued through the 1990s) before returning sporadically a handful of times for softcore performances. Nero never seemed quite comfortable with the politics of Club 90. From the beginning, in fact, the group's purpose may not have been clear to her. Said Leonard later: “Sue Nero... thought it was a social thing. We explained to her that it wasn't about the business so much, but about ourselves and us trying to help ourselves.”

During the Club 90 stage performance, *Deep Inside Porn Stars*, Nero preferred to perform a striptease instead of explaining her feminism. Fellow Club 90 member Kelly Nichols recalls Nero's performance: “She just got up, turned to the audience, and goes, ‘I don't have a lot to say. All I know is that someday I'm going to marry an Italian and have a lot of babies. And what I do is dance, and I'm going to show you.’” This moment seems particularly striking to me, given that Nero, instead of reaching for political justifications for her actions or philosophical explanations for her pleasures or feminist ideas (whatever they were, since she did not explain them), instead simply performed, which, in hindsight, might make hers the most radical moment of all. It is telling that this inconspicuous moment of brutal honesty is ignored in nearly all historical analyses of *Deep Inside Porn Stars* while the others (particularly Sprinkle's) are celebrated. See: McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 376; Annette Fuentes and Margaret Schrage, “Deep Inside Porn Stars,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*.32 (April 1987): 42; “Interview: Sue Nero.” *classicadultvideo.com*. Classic Adult Video. n.d. Web. 10 January 2013; “Susan Nero.” *fooks.com*. Porn Stars Center. n.d. Web. 15 January 2013.

Kelly Nichols (born Marianne Walter) appeared in mainstream horror films such as *The Toolbox Murders* (1978), and performed as Jessica Lange's stunt double on *King Kong* (1975), as well as working as a nude model for adult magazines. She also performed in live stage shows at Show World in New York, where she met director Chuck Vincent, who cast her in *Bon Appetit* (1980), leading to appearances in more than 50 more films before ending her performance career in the mid-1980s. She resumed working as a makeup artist for adult films, which she had long done on the side even during her time as a performer. See: Nelson 564-599.

Veronica Hart (born Jane Hamilton in 1956), worked as a mainstream stage actress and live performer at Show World in New York before beginning an adult film career in the late 1970s, appearing in such films as *A Scent of Heather* (1980, dir. Bill Milling), *Amanda By Night* (1981, dir. Robert McCallum), and *Roommates* (1981, dir. Chuck Vincent). She later moved behind the camera, embarking on a long career as producer, director, and editor, on such films as *Right Connection* (1996), *Still Insatiable* (1999), and *Torn* (1998). She also appeared in Paul Thomas Anderson's mainstream films *Boogie Nights* (1997) and *Magnolia* (1999). Unlike Royalle, however, Hamilton never courted a great deal of publicity or attention, nor did she form her own company. See: Nelson 600-641.

perspectives and voices had a profound impact on Royalle's thinking, giving her a sense of shared female community and support for her ideas. In an industrial world controlled nearly entirely by men, the support from other women experienced in adult filmmaking was invaluable as Royalle edged closer to making the move into production.

During this same period, feminist artists from the New York-based collective Carnival Knowledge, organized in 1981 in response to the Moral Majority to explore issues related to women's sexuality, met Royalle, Vera, and Sprinkle at a porn trade show.<sup>64</sup> Intrigued by their feminist rhetoric, the group began a long series of meetings with the Club 90 women to transform the informal gatherings into a stage performance as part of a proposal for what would eventually become the art show *The Second Coming*.<sup>65</sup> Opening in January 1984 at Martha Wilson's performance art space, Franklin Furnace in New York, the groundbreaking show was based on the following questions, which were painted in red on the space's walls: "Could there be a feminist pornography? A porn that

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Adequately describing Annie Sprinkle's contributions to adult film history, feminist theory, and political legacy for sex workers is an immense undertaking. Her career spans everything from prostitution to performance artist and nearly everything in between in the adult entertainment industry. She has been the subject of perhaps a disproportionate deal of academic interest from both feminist and pornography studies scholars. Disproportionate because of the tendency within academia to focus on those within the sex industries that do "more" than merely have sex, or connect their work (as Sprinkle has done) to something outside of sex that feels more comfortable from particular intellectual perspectives. In other words, someone such as Ginger Lynn, examined in chapter three, has been all but ignored by historians and academics, despite her immense importance to adult film history, an absence undoubtedly due to her unwillingness and/or disinterest in connecting her sex work to anything more politically progressive, radical, or "highbrow." While I don't discount Sprinkle's similar importance, and certainly not her longevity, I do dispute the unmistakable trend within academia that she is somehow more "important" simply because she associated herself with *avant-garde* and experimental artists and positioned her sex work in an intellectual context, moves which undoubtedly proved both enticing and comfortable to nervous academics seeking justifications for the topic. In addition to the vast collection of academic work on Sprinkle, she has authored several books about her own history and ideas. For the most notable among these, see: Annie Sprinkle, *Post-Porn Modernist* (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 1998). Also see: Nelson 364-403.

<sup>64</sup> Arlene Raven, "Looking beneath the Surface: Deep Inside Porn Stars," *High Performance* 7.28 (1984): 26.

<sup>65</sup> C. Carr, "The Fiery Furnace: Performance in the '80s, War in the '90s," *TDR* 49.1 (Spring 2005): 22.

doesn't denigrate women or children?" Given her long-term move in precisely these directions, it is not surprising Royalle welcomed the invitation, telling the other members: "This is our opportunity. No one can take this away from us now. Let's tell the world who we really are and what we're really about."<sup>66</sup> The result, a collection of books, videos, artwork, live mud wrestling, monologues, "domestic" pieces on topics ranging from masturbation to eating, was a startling array of material thinking through the connections between feminists and pornography.<sup>67</sup> The even culminated on January 26 with the one-night-only performance of *Deep Inside Porn Stars*, the stage show recreating one of Club 90's meetings, complete with a set of Sprinkle's living room.<sup>68</sup> Intended to remind the audience that these women were individuals, mothers, sisters, and daughters, the show began with the members in evening gowns, moved to personal performance narratives from each, and concluded with them all having removed the "sexy" clothes to wear sweatpants, sweatshirts, and flannel nightgowns—thus revealing the "true" women underneath.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 374-375.; Fuentes and Schrage, "Deep Inside Porn Stars."

<sup>67</sup> Carr 22.

<sup>68</sup> The title of the show was a play on the *Inside* series of adult films from Evart Films, and particularly *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle* (1981, dir. Sprinkle with help from Joe Sarno), which was a watershed moment in feminist pornography history. The previous *Inside* films (*Inside Jennifer Welles* in 1977, *Inside Gloria Leonard* in 1978, and *Inside Seka* in 1981) purported to show the "real life" of the performer, but were in actuality merely more of the same typical adult film tropes and fantasies. *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle* expanded and explored these notions, offering an examination of Sprinkle's struggles over the constructed nature of identity, (and making plain the simultaneous difficulties of being both Ellen Steinberg—her real name—and Annie Sprinkle the porn star) as well as presenting her trademark "anything goes" sexual appetites and desires, including orgies, "golden shower" sequences, and other boundary pushing moments. The film, in addition to being a groundbreaking work of feminist pornography, was also a smash hit and remains popular with fans and critics. See: Linda Williams, "A Provoking Agent: The Pornography and Performance Art of Annie Sprinkle," *Social Text* 37 (Winter 1993): 117-133.

<sup>69</sup> McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 375; Williams, *Hard Core* 330; Toni Sant, *Franklin Furnace and the Spirit of the Avant-Garde: A History of the Future* (New York: Intellect Ltd., 2011) 52-53; Sally Everett, ed., *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist, and Post Modernist Thought* (New York: McFarland and Co., 1995) 206.

During Royalle's moment in the spotlight, she pulled a sweatshirt dress over her gown and offered her real name to the audience. She presented an autobiographical slideshow with pictures from her childhood, from various stage shows, and in the San Francisco jazz clubs where she had performed.<sup>70</sup> She ended the monologue with what amounted to a sneak preview: "I see myself as a revolutionary of sorts, maybe one day making women's films to replace the tired old men's films that still exploit women and promote archaic sexuality. After all, I'm still young and I have a lot of dreams."<sup>71</sup> It was the most public pronouncement yet of her ideas and goals.

In the performance's liner notes, Leonard and Sprinkle wrote that the event was "a unique opportunity to be aligned with other feminist artists, usually considered arch-adversaries of the adult entertainment movement," while the organizers added, "We welcome this moment when women, regardless of calling, can respectfully stand together."<sup>72</sup> The performance was a success—even inspiring Broadway producer Joe Cates to offer the group a deal to make the show bigger and better, and, of course, profitable. The group declined, citing the desire to keep creative control of the ideas.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, *Deep Inside Porn Stars* represents an important historical moment in that it

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<sup>70</sup> Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994) 146.

<sup>71</sup> Macy 63.

<sup>72</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 13.

<sup>73</sup> McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 376.

The Franklin Furnace was reprimanded by the NEA and dropped by several corporate sponsors for sponsoring the event, further illustrating the tensions surrounding feminist pornography in the mid-1980s. See: Timothy J. Haskell. "The Legendary Franklin Furnace Presents a Retrospective: The History of the Future: A Franklin Furnace View of Performance Art, One Night Only - April 27th, 2007." The Franklin Furnace. 9 March 2007. Web. 3 October 2012.

was the female voices of performers at the forefront, exploding the mythology that women were merely silent and subservient vessels in the male fantasies typically presented on screen, and gesturing toward the potential for a female-driven pornography.<sup>74</sup> It was also an important historical moment for the connection between adult film performers and feminists; as I detail in chapter five, the mid-1980s continually boiled over with feminist tensions over pornography. Thus, the invitation of the Club 90 members by a feminist group represents a moment of (somewhat) rare public unity. Perhaps most importantly, the event explicitly acknowledged that adult film performers could claim feminism; as Club 90 member Veronica Hart would later say of the event, “[I]t’s the first time we’ve ever been invited to work with feminists—which I think most of us consider ourselves to be—in a thing about pornography. All of the contact I’ve had with feminists was always anti-porn. They wouldn’t even discuss porn.”<sup>75</sup> For Royale, it furthered and validated her evolving and re-emerging feminist identity.<sup>76</sup>

By late January 1984 Royale was connecting the peace she had made with her own past to the potential for change within adult film, all the while maintaining her

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<sup>74</sup> While mostly a public success, conservative groups (predictably) decried the show. The Morality Action committee picketed, and religious groups across the country, upon hearing about the show, sent angry letters to Congress and the many corporate funders of Franklin Furnace, resulting in Exxon and Woolworth’s pulling their support alongside some blocks of federal funding. See: Carr 22.

<sup>75</sup> Fuentes and Schrage 42.

Not all feminists, however, supported or appreciated the project. Anti-pornography activist Susan Griffin, for example, upon viewing the performance, argued that the Club 90 members were only pretending to be honest—a common critique in the anti-porn movement, which made no distinction between adult films made with feminist intentions and those made without them, arguing that pornography was harmful to women no matter its contexts. See: Raven 27.

<sup>76</sup> Five of the Club 90 members (Royale, Hart, Leonard, Vera, and Sprinkle) publicly reunited on 12 June 2012, at the Museum of Sex in New York, reminiscing about the group and *Deep Inside Porn Stars*. All five remain deeply involved in the feminist politics that defined the group early on. See: “Mosex Hosts Reunion of World’s 1st Porn Star Support Group.” *AVN Online*. Adult Video News. 31 May 2012. Web. 22 October 2102.

presence on its periphery, accompanied by the addition of a support group and the very public validation of feminists who shared her goals. The stage was set for a move back into production—but this time behind the camera. There was also, as there always was with Royalle, an economic interest: the explosion of Golden Age films on video meant that new audiences were seeing her performance for the first time. “[A]ll of a sudden my name was becoming sort of reborn and I was not reaping any of the rewards,” she would later say. “I decided if they are going to exploit my name and make money, I’m going to exploit my name and make money off of it too but I’m going to do it with something I believe in, that I feel has integrity.”<sup>77</sup> Her background in adult films, ideas for change, and increasingly widespread support for something new was all about to culminate in something that would dramatically alter the adult film industry: Femme Productions.

Much as *AVN* altered the landscape, Royalle was also poised to make significant industrial changes a cornerstone of her industrial approach. The market was ready as well. For example, in a 1982 *American Film* essay, Jean Callahan outlines the growing audience of women seeking out sexually explicit material—but bemoans the lack of attention being paid to their pleasures and points of view. Noting the handful of female directors in the industry (Gail Palmer, Stephanie Rothman, Svetlana Marsh, and Suze Randall), Callahan points out that their content nevertheless remained somewhat mired in the standard approach “hostile to women’s sexuality.”<sup>78</sup> She concludes with a question:

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<sup>77</sup> Gilboa, “Heart to Heart with Candida Royalle.” Web.

<sup>78</sup> Such arguments are often even further complicated by the fact that female directors were often A) mere “fronts” for the men behind the scenes; B) simply pseudonyms for male directors (as was the case in a handful of Royalle’s films as a performer); or C) given such positions simply to sell the public on an apparently essentialized “female sensibility” that would erotically be embedded within the resulting film. Royalle battled all three stereotypes.

“[W]hen women watch more sexually oriented [material], why shouldn’t they find ways to direct the form to their needs as well as find ways to register their disgust with the more misogynistic genres?”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, also in 1982, veteran adult film producer and

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The most obvious example of this was the career of Gail Palmer. The mythology around Palmer was that of an auteur with a deep desire to make adult films. While a student at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Palmer befriended an adult theater manager, who offered her a managerial position at the Cinema X Theater and bookstore in East Lansing, Michigan. Palmer took the position and transferred to Michigan State University. While there, she borrowed film equipment from the school, assembled her friends, and made an adult film: *Hot Summer in the City* (1976), about the abduction and rape of a young woman by four men just before the 1967 Detroit riots. The story made national news, and Palmer appeared in *Playboy* magazine as part of their “Girls of the Big 10” feature in 1977. Afterward, she moved to California and made three increasingly high profile adult productions with all-star casts: *The Erotic Adventures of Candy* (1978), *Candy Goes to Hollywood* (1979), both of which starred Palmer’s high school classmate Carol Connors (who also appeared in *Deep Throat*), and *Prisoner of Paradise* (1980). She also formed an early video distribution company, Gail Palmer’s Pleasure Products, in 1979, to sell her own and other Golden Age adult films. Palmer was frequently included in lists of “women behind the camera,” and was often cited as a feminist success in the adult film industry, a powerhouse who had created her own career. She appeared frequently in television and magazine interviews to discuss her burgeoning career.

The problem with this story was its accuracy. Palmer, while a college student, worked as a dancer for notorious Michigan strip club owner, adult theater operator, and loop kingpin Harry Mohny, and began a relationship with him. Mohny, quick to see an opportunity, used Palmer as a “front” for his Caribbean Films production house, sensing (correctly) that the public would be curious to see adult films directed by a (young and attractive) woman. After her relationship with Mohny ended in 1984, Palmer made only one more film, *Shape Up For Sensational Sex* in 1985, a workout video with sex scenes added later. Some of the non-sex performers in that film sued Palmer, claiming they were unaware they were appearing in an adult film. Essex Video, who distributed the film, dubbed someone else’s voice over Palmer’s, and eventually she sold the sex scenes for use in loops. The four films Palmer made with Mohny have been the subject of suspicion, with many critics and historians speculating that either Bob Chinn and Bud Lee, who also worked with Mohny and went on to make similar films later, were the actual directors. Chinn hints at as much in a brief interview in Jill C. Nelson’s *Golden Goddesses* (2012), where he suggests he will describe the details more fully in his forthcoming autobiography.

Later, Palmer was the star witness in government’s tax evasion case against Mohny, during which she outlined for the court all the ways in which he had hidden his vast fortune. She also sued him for what she believed was her portion of the profits from their enterprise together. She also admitted during the trial that she had not actually directed any of the films. Palmer’s story reveals the ways in which the adult film industry, frequently seeking to garner larger and more diverse audiences, will market women’s roles in ways not matching the lived realities. It also further obscures the key roles many women did play during this time, some of which are further outlined in this chapter.

See: “Girls of the Big 10,” *Playboy* September 1977: 146-147; “Gail Palmer,” *Playboy* November 1978: 46; Peter Sagal, *The Book of Vice* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007) 185-246; Gail Palmer’s Pleasure Products. Advertisement. *Penthouse* September 1979: 275; “Porn Producer Projects a Girl-Next-Door Image,” *The Miami News* 14 December 1976: 1; “X-Rated Director Gail Palmer Shows Us Her Cinema X,” *Cheri* January 1979: 8-9; Gail Palmer, “Gail Palmer: X-Rated Film Director,” *Cheri* January 1979: 30, 98; Nelson 925-927.

<sup>79</sup> Jean Callahan, “Women and Pornography: Combat in the Video Zone,” *American Film* 7.5 (March 1982): 63.

director Roberta Findlay noted that “women and also couples would rather see movies that aren’t so relentless, that are a little more expressive, that aren’t all ‘pump’ shots.”<sup>80</sup> Following *Deep Inside Porn Stars* at the end of January 1984, Royalle, who had been contemplating precisely such strategies for years, made her move.

“*Finally... There’s Femme.*”

In the early 1980s, as Royalle began solidifying her ideas for her own production company, R. Lauren Niemi, a Midwestern photographer, moved to New York with a quest of her own: creating erotic music videos for women.<sup>81</sup> While Royalle was preparing for the *Deep Inside Porn Stars* performance with her Club 90 colleagues, a friend arranged for her to meet Niemi, through a series of events Royalle called “mind boggling,” and the two shared their very similar ideas, concluding that they could form a partnership with Niemi directing and Royalle writing and producing.<sup>82</sup> The two agreed that the growing market for adult video lacked a “woman’s perspective,” and that it would take women behind the camera to change that problem. While the idea of “couple’s films” was not unknown to industry, Royalle and Niemi took that concept a step further and made the feminist politics underlying their strategy the core of the new

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<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Wells, “Sex in the Home (Where It Belongs),” *The Film Journal* 85.15 (28 June 1982): 22.

<sup>81</sup> Niemi, unlike Royalle, was clearly disinterested in publicity. I have found no evidence of a single interview involving Niemi in the early years of *Femme*’s history. After leaving *Femme* in 1984 following the production of the company’s third film, *Christine’s Secret*, Niemi disappeared from public view, and I have been unable to locate her for possible interviews. Thus, her part in this story remains minimal and reconstructed from other, related elements. Royalle has noted recently that Niemi, after leaving *Femme*, “did a little bit of video work after that, but later, became a stay-at-home mom home schooling her two sons.” Royalle adds: “I credit her with equal responsibility for the initial launch of *Femme Productions*.” See: Nelson 248.

<sup>82</sup> Gilboa, “Heart to Heart with Candida Royalle.” Web.

company. “We had an agenda,” Royalle described later. “I thought that there was a real opportunity to explore and see whether I could create adult material that was sex-positive, and gave people some information, that gave them something back when they watched. [...] I think that most pornography out there has absolutely no agenda, other than to make money.”<sup>83</sup> While Niemi and Royalle agreed on the political goals of the company, and that Niemi’s “music video” concept would work well with Royalle’s desires to alter Ziplow’s formula, the two nevertheless were stuck in the same place where Royalle had long been mired: all ideas with no capital.

Throughout her career, Royalle has gone to great lengths to describe the necessity of women taking control of the means of production in order to create lasting change. Years after *Femme*’s success was solidified, for example, Royalle argued that “until women grow up and claim our power and realize that success comes only with strength, courage, and hard work, they will sit and wait forever for that knight in shining armor or Prince Charming, whether they call a distributor, a husband, or...”<sup>84</sup> She trailed off in that interview before getting to the role that had enabled her own career: father-in-law. Ironically, for all her passion against such a strategy, it was a familiar man firmly entrenched in a paternal role that initially solved the problem of *Femme*’s capital. Royalle’s father-in-law Sjöstedt was in the next room, paying careful attention to the discussion when Niemi and Royalle were sharing their ideas, and upon his return to Sweden agreed to finance *Femme Productions* if Royalle and Niemi could find distribution, surely another of his attempts to find offshore homes for his Swedish profits

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<sup>83</sup> Court, “Candida Royalle.” Web.

<sup>84</sup> Nagle 165.

as a way to avoid taxes, much as he had done earlier with *Blue Magic*.<sup>85</sup> While Royalle would go on to tremendous success with *Femme* on her own, it was this seed investment made from the profits of the very sorts of films that she had railed against for so many years that provided the startup costs for the company.

By February 1984, with Sjöstedt's financing contingent on distribution, *Femme* was in business with Royalle as president and Per as vice-president. Royalle arranged meetings with various distributors but found herself consistently rejected. "When I approached the big distributors," Candida later recalled, "they said, 'Oh, Candida, that's a nice idea, but women aren't interested, and there's no such thing as a 'couples' market.'"<sup>86</sup> While not entirely true, as the industry had been obsessed for years with expanding their base by drawing in female viewers and couples, particularly with video, this moment speaks volumes, perhaps, about the "good old boy" network of the adult film industry reacting to a woman starting her own production company without their guidance. Royalle finally met with Russ Hampshire, founder of VCA. Initially skeptical,

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<sup>85</sup> Gilboa, "Heart to Heart with Candida Royalle." Web.

Depending on the context, these details in Royalle's biography are often left out, glossed over quickly, or carefully managed. For example, Marianne Macy, in her overview of *Femme*'s history, describes Sture Sjöstedt as being "involved with Scandinavia's largest video production and distribution company," without acknowledging his connection to adult film history. See: Macy 64.

Royalle typically describes the elder Sjöstedt as a benevolent, mostly silent, long distance benefactor to the company's creation. Most recently, she described him as "a successful producer and distributor in Europe who had invested in several big-budget American erotic features," and that he "had mentioned a few times that he thought I would make a good director, so upon hearing our concept he offered to finance it." She has also recently acknowledged that he invested in *Roommates* (1981), *Games Women Play* (1981), and *Blue Magic* (1982). See: Candida Royalle. "What's a Nice Girl Like You..." *The Feminist Porn Book*. Eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas Shimizu, Constance Penley and Mireille Miller-Young. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2012. 58-70; Nelson 248.

However, she has also noted that, early on, "even though he was involved in the X-rated business, Per's father still saw me as a ruined woman." See: "Interview: Candida Royalle," 22.

<sup>86</sup> Nagle 163.

Hampshire eventually agreed to distribute Femme's videos under a royalty system whereby Royalle would continue to own the films—a structure that paid off handsomely later.

The first film to go into production put into practice all of the many ideas and strategies Royalle had been pondering for so long. Essential to the first creation, and an ingenious solution to the ongoing problem of adult films often lacking experienced actors, was Niemi's music video concept as a guiding framework. Simply titled *Femme*, and released in 1984, the film contains six vignettes that play out a series of fantasies, in some cases literal, with lines blurred between the "reality" of the participants and their erotic daydreams. Endless long takes, slow zooms, soft lighting, more foreplay than intercourse—*Femme* featured everything Royalle had discussed for years, right down to no "money" or "meat" shots, those most detested elements from mainstream adult films. As far as a realization of everything Royalle had hoped for, it was a smashing success, enacting visually and narratively all the ideological elements she had long claimed were the "right way" to have sex onscreen.

Royalle and Niemi quickly followed *Femme* with *Urban Heat* (1984), another series of music video vignettes and then *Christine's Secret* (1986), which follows the title character as she checks into a country inn and fantasizes about the staff. The latter was Femme's first foray away from the vignettes and into more traditional dramatic fare. In a typical review of these early offerings, *Video-X* critic Lenny Wide suggested *Urban Heat* was about as exciting as watching a "bowl of fish," and even boldly (and rudely) claimed it was not even necessary to finish watching the film before writing the review.<sup>87</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>87</sup> Lenny Wide, "Review: *Urban Heat*," *Video-X* 6.10 (1984): 32.

the critics were not necessarily kind to *Femme*, but that was probably to be expected; after all, Royalle's criticisms of the industry over the years, combined with her groundbreaking narrative and visual strategies, were like a shot across the bow of the juggernaut that was the "formula." In any case, Royalle was not necessarily interested in pleasing the critics *within* the industry. She was after a much larger, more mainstream audience that could appreciate the quality she was trying to achieve. Royalle, like so many others before (and after) her, sought respectability.

The primary block between Royalle and respectability was the ongoing problem of successfully selling *Femme*'s approach to wholesalers and retailers (and convincing them of its potential economic value) to get the products to the customers she most desired: middle-class women who probably had no experience or interest in going in adult bookstores or video store backrooms to browse through the typical offerings.<sup>88</sup> It was in 1985 that Royalle set into motion what she had always done as a performer: talk to the media. Royalle had been giving interviews for years for adult magazines, but she now took her considerable self-promotion skills out into a much larger media landscape. In effect, what Royalle set out to do was create a market by selling her standard feminist rhetoric to the people she believed were waiting for a different kind of pornography, who would then demand her products from retailers. That strategy took shape in 1985 when a friend sent Royalle a notice from *Glamour* magazine seeking women who might want to talk about their curiosity with erotic movies. For Royalle, it was precisely the opportunity she had been waiting for, and it set the stage for nearly every interview that would follow.

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<sup>88</sup> Sean Greaney, "Selling Sex," *Marketing* June 2010: 23.

Putting together a media kit that included samples, a detailed cover letter, and other material, Royale not only wanted to be part of the *Glamour* article, she needed to be included if *Femme* was going to escape the marketing ghetto of adult magazines. While those magazines were friendly to *Femme* (as they had always been to Royale), the company was having trouble convincing mainstream publications even to carry mail-order advertisements.<sup>89</sup> *Glamour* made *Femme* the centerpiece of the ensuing article, titled “How Women are Changing Porn Films,” and even led off with the copy from the voice-over of the promotional trailer for *Femme*: “Finally, there’s *Femme*... the fantasies that women have been dreaming about all these years. *Femme*, conceived and produced by women, explores human desires from the exhilarating perspective of a woman who knows...”<sup>90</sup> The rest of the piece was just as complimentary, drawing heavily on Royale’s marketing, particularly in its definition of the burgeoning field of material: “The new films... go for more plot (meaning more motivation for sex); more happily married couples (providing an emotional context for sex); better-looking men for women to look at; older women in sex scenes; more kissing, more foreplay and more attention paid to the woman’s sexual pleasure and climax; more humor; and more women on top—literally and figuratively.”<sup>91</sup> The article could not have been a bigger success. Employing virtually all of Royale’s rhetoric, positioning *Femme* as the vanguard in the growing field, and highlighting the three *Femme* films then available to the public, *Glamour*

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<sup>89</sup> Pally 45.

<sup>90</sup> Susan Squire, “How Women Are Changing Porn Films,” *Glamour* November 1985: 282.

<sup>91</sup> Squire 322.

finally opened the door to potential mainstream female viewers, the elusive market so coveted by Royale.

The *Glamour* article was just the beginning for Royale, ushering in a new era of marketing that has never slowed since. Virtually every major news outlet picked up the article, and Royale appeared on *The Phil Donahue Show*, a popular daytime talk show, and debated anti-pornography feminist Catherine MacKinnon (whose history is detailed in chapter five).<sup>92</sup> Impressed by the media coverage, Hampshire and VCA even began aggressively marketing the Femme line.<sup>93</sup> *Time* magazine was the next major coup for Femme, in early 1987. “Romantic Porn in the Boudoir” was the article’s title, and, alongside a photograph of Royale, it noted: “Royale’s four films [which now included *Three Daughters*] are considered the best examples of porn in the feminist style. The sex scenes flow from female passion and needs, not male lechery, and women tend to initiate the sex.”<sup>94</sup> Royale’s public appearances never slowed after that, leading to a constant stream of magazine profiles, newspaper articles, television show appearances, and public speaking engagements. Femme was no longer seeking out the mainstream; it was firmly ensconced in it.

Despite the marketing success, however, new problems arose—problems that Royale would soon turn into advantages. After *Christine’s Secret*, Niemi left the company, perhaps unhappy with the Royale’s direction with the narrative films; after all, the third film they made together eliminated the music video style that Niemi had

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<sup>92</sup> Greaney 24.

<sup>93</sup> Pally 45.

<sup>94</sup> John Leo, “Romantic Porn in the Boudoir,” *Time* 30 March 1987: 64.

originally proposed.<sup>95</sup> By 1986, Hampshire and VCA had grown tired of paying royalties to Femme and ended that arrangement, offering instead to buy out the three existing films for \$35,000 each, which Royalle rejected, choosing instead to strike out on her own with husband Per and form Femme Distribution.<sup>96</sup> It was, at last, truly a “room of her own,” where she controlled every aspect of production and distribution.

Over the coming years, Femme released another fourteen films, including a “star directors” series for which Royalle brought in her Club 90 colleagues Gloria Leonard, Veronica Vera, Annie Sprinkle, and Veronica Hart to direct short vignettes. The most ambitious Femme project, *Revelations*, directed by Royalle and shot on 35mm film, was released in 1992, and offered a science fiction plotline in which a future totalitarian state forbids sexual activity for anything other than procreation. The solution in the film, of course, was an emphasis on the “right way” to have sex, with all the same elements that Royalle had long advocated. By 2005, Royalle had returned to producing, bringing in other directors for new Femme projects, which included efforts to branch out to more diverse groups such as Latina and African American women and couples with offerings such as *Caribbean Heat* (2005, dir. Manuela Sabrosa) and *Afrodite Superstar* (2007, dir. Venus Hottentot).

Eventually, Royalle tired of the stress involved with distributing her own films, and in 1995 crafted a 40-page proposal and entered into a yearlong negotiation with Phil Harvey of Adam & Eve, among the largest distributors of adult-related products. Their

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<sup>95</sup> Royalle has also noted that Niemi was getting married at the time, and that Niemi’s fiancée may have pressured her to stop making adult films. There may have also been conflicts with Per, who was the assistant director on the early Femme films and, according to Royalle, kept “an eye on his father’s investment.” See: Nelson 250.

<sup>96</sup> Nagle 163.

eventual deal resulted in a long-term (and ongoing) partnership in which Femme's films, owned by Royalle, are distributed by Adam & Eve, which also finances new Femme productions.<sup>97</sup> It was a return for Royalle to a partnership with a male industry member, but this time she held much of the power. In 1996, she branched out again, this time teaming with Dutch designer Jandirk Groet, who had previously worked on projects ranging from home appliances for Panasonic to the Fokker airplane cockpit, to create Natural Contours, a line of "intimate personal massagers." The company marketed the sex toys with the same discourses familiar from Femme: "Tasteful," "elegant," "discreet," and "classy" populate descriptions of the company's products.<sup>98</sup>

By the 2000s, Royalle firmly cemented her status as a visionary, entrepreneur, director, producer, feminist, activist, author, and expert—everything she had clearly been hoping for during her early years as a performer. The mythology around her created by her marketing positioned her as "a woman who knows," and that powerful knowledge was based around the "right way" to have sex, as well as the secrets to what women really wanted in terms of pornography. Hailed by sex educators, academics, and journalists as exemplars of a "positive" approach to mediated sexualities, Royalle's films became elevated beyond the crass commercialism of mainstream pornography, which had the added effect of protecting them from legal suspicion.

Indeed, one problem that Royalle never faced, strikingly, is the threat of prosecution or other legal entanglements. Over the years, Royalle argued that Femme's approach might represent a larger threat to anti-porn opponents than more "traditional"

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<sup>97</sup> Natalie Martin. "Candida Royalle, Ceo, Femme Productions." *avn.com*. Adult Video News. 1 June 2007. Web. 7 January 2013.

<sup>98</sup> See: *natural-contours.com*. Natural Contours. Web. 24 March 2013.

male-centric adult films, an argument she based in her notion that she was “freeing” woman from sexual guilt and shame, and thereby opening up space for women to find pleasure. “If porn movies are banned, the people who are going to be shut down first are people like me,” she said in 1986, adding, “Porn will be pushed underground and the sleazeballs will control it.”<sup>99</sup> Ten years later, she added to her argument: “The last thing the government wants are pornographers who are proud of their work and willing to go to court over it.”<sup>100</sup> In a sense, this argument matches my own throughout this dissertation, that the rigid cultural controls over women’s sexualities stems from an effort to contain female desire as part of a patriarchal system in which the “mystery of difference” and foregrounding of male pleasure are the logical outcome. However, Royalle could not be farther from the historical truth when she claims *Femme* has represented a threat. Unlike many of her contemporaries, who fell like dominos in the 1980s in a long series of prosecutions (described in chapter five), *Femme* has received remarkably little legal attention and cultural criticism. Only once, following the release of *Urban Heat* in 1984, did the government consider prosecuting Royalle after the tape was confiscated by the customs office in New York and declared obscene. The case, however, never made it past that stage, as Royalle’s future partner, distributor Adam & Eve, and company head Phil Harvey, decided to fight the case to establish precedent, which prompted the government to abandon the effort.<sup>101</sup> This startling absence, in the face of a concentrated, rigorous, and destructive assault by federal and local authorities on the adult film industry in the

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<sup>99</sup> “Interview: Candida Royalle,” 22.

<sup>100</sup> Macy 89.

<sup>101</sup> Macy 89.

1980s, illustrates clearly just how “safe” Royalle’s approach is, how much it might act as a safeguard against unleashed sexual fantasies. If culture does ban porn movies, in other words, Royalle’s might be the only ones left.

### *Conclusion*

Femme’s industrial impact was swift. Royalle had long suggested that there was significant hesitation by the major distributors and producers even to acknowledge the existence of a female market, but that was all about to change. In August/September 1986, *AVN*, based on a survey of 500 retailers, released a set of statistics that must have dropped the jaws of those same men who had scoffed at Royalle. While men alone rented 27% of all adult titles, women accounted for fully 63% of transactions—31% with men, 24% alone, and 8% with other women.<sup>102</sup> These numbers validated Royalle’s belief that women were not only interested in adult videos, they were already out there renting them. As is the case with the discovery of any new market, the market began to change, and others joined Royalle in the race to capture the “women and couples” markets.

Based on the survey results in *AVN*, that mythical “holy grail” of female viewers must have finally seemed within reach for those in the industry who were seeing Royalle achieve a moderate level of mainstream celebrity. Myriad companies began releasing tapes intended for couples, and publications such as *AVN* added that classification in their sales charts. While Royalle did not invent the idea, her success with Femme led to an industrial shift resulting in more attention, acknowledgement, and money targeted to the idea that female viewers (and many male viewers, too) might want something different.

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<sup>102</sup> “Charting the Adult Video Market,” *Adult Video News* August/September 1986: 7.

Seeking that market was one thing, but finding the nuanced tone that Royalle had mastered was an entirely different matter. As Royalle had long criticized, mostly the industry began just repackaging what it had always done within new “for women” marketing practices. Regardless of motive, however, women in the industry behind the cameras garnered more attention.

Two particularly important examples stand out. The first, from May 1986, appeared in *AVN*. Offering an overview of the handful of women then working behind the scenes (including Royalle), the piece stands out historically for recognizing important, and, in some cases, little known contributions. Author Lee Irving thus linked Royalle to the historical legacy of the women that had come before her and those she was working alongside: Marga Aulbach, Suze Randall, Gail Palmer, Anne Randall, Drea, Joyce Snyder, Joanna Williams, Svetlana, Veronika Rocket, Summer Brown, Helene Terrie, Ann Perry, and Roberta Findlay.<sup>103</sup> Yet, there was also a tone to the piece that

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<sup>103</sup> Marga Aulbach worked for many years as a producer and assistant in the industry for her brother-in-law Sidney Niekirk (founder of Cal Vista, examined in chapter two). She went on to direct three films with a “feminine” sensibility: *L’Amour* (1984), *Between the Sheets* (1985), and *How Do You Like It?* (1985). Aulbach was certainly interested in a different style of adult film, despite her connection to longtime industry insiders stuck in a “mystery of difference” mold. In a 1983 interview, for example, she would echo Royalle’s philosophies in relation to her own production style: “Today’s sex films have good stories, we deal with feelings and relationships, not just sex scenes.” It is unclear, however, how much of Aulbach’s thoughts were connected to avoiding obscenity prosecutions (a fate that befell brother-in-law Niekirk, outlined in chapter six), based in marketing strategies, or were genuinely motivated by feminist interests. See: Dick Kleiner, “Porn Mogul Clings to X-Rated Boom,” *Pulaski Southwest Times* 30 January 1983: 9.

Suze Randall, born 1946, has been one of the premier erotic photographers for more than than 35 years, and was the first female staff photographer for both *Playboy* (1975-1977) and *Hustler* (1977-1979). Her photographs (including the first appearance of Ginger Lynn, in *Penthouse*, described in chapter three) also appear in dozens of other adult magazines. She also directed the *Suze’s Centerfolds* loop series for Caballero in the late 1970s, among the first titles released to video (under the Newave banner, described in chapter two) and began directing adult films beginning with *Kiss and Tell* in 1980. Her many contributions loom large in adult industry history. See: Nelson 723-724.

Anne Randall (born Barbara Burrus in 1944) was *Playboy*’s “Miss April” in 1967, and went on to a long career in film and television, appearing frequently as an independent, free-spirited woman. Her television credits include *The Monkees*, *Days of Our Lives*, *Hee Haw*, *Barnaby Jones*, *The Rockford Files*, and *The Mod Squad*, and she appeared in the films *The Split* (1968), *A Time for Dying* (1969), and, most notably,

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*Westworld* (1973). See: Tom Lisanti, *Glamour Girls of Sixties Hollywood: Seventy-Five Profiles* (New York: McFarland: 2007) 161-163.

Drea was hardly a feminist filmmaker, and was known primarily as a performer in the 1970s before marrying Bill Margold in 1981, with whom she made “quickie” adult videos that even Valentine characterizes as being populated by “slim storylines with hard-edged, down-and-dirty sex.” Valentine added, “Some viewers have said her videos look like as though they were made by a man.” Margold, however, confirmed to me that Drea did, in fact, direct the films even though he co-wrote them with her. See: Desiree Valentine, “Does It Take a Woman to Make a Good Couples Film?,” *Adam Film World and Adult Video Guide* November 1986: 60; Bill Margold. Personal interview. 30 March 2013.

Joyce Snyder wrote and produced the *Raw Talent* trilogy, starring Jerry Butler (1984, dir. Larry Revene, 1987, dir. Jay Paul, and 1988, dir. Jay Paul), as well as *Public Affairs* (1983, dir. Henri Pachard). She also wrote and produced the mainstream horror film *Pledge Night* (1990, dir. Paul Ziller). She worked for more than 30 years for Swank publications, first as a staff writer, then later as an editor. She created *X-Rated Cinema* magazine for Swank in the early 1980s, which she edited under the name “P. Katt.” In August 2011, Swank owner Louis Perretta fired Snyder, who promptly filed an age discrimination lawsuit, which is ongoing at the time of this writing. Robert Rosen extensively describes his relationship with Snyder at Swank in his autobiography, referring to her throughout as “Pam Katz.” See: Rosen 189; Gene Ross. “A Good Story Is Worth Repeating: Long Time Employee, Editor Joyce Snyder Sues Swank Magazine for Age, Sex Discrimination.” *adultfyi.com*. Adult FYI. 9 September 2011. Web. 17 May 2013.

Joanna Williams (born Maria Lease) started her career an actress in the late 1960s in such exploitation films as *The Scavengers* (1969, dir. Lee Frost) and *Love Camp 7* (1969, dir. Frost) before directing such adult films as *Little Girls Blue* (1977), *Expensive Tastes* (1978), *Chopstix* (1979), and *Little Girls Blue 2* (1983). Historian Jim Holliday said “she may well be the most erotic actual femal filmmaker.” She also directed the mainstream horror film *Dolly Dearest* (1991) and episodes of the television show *Silk Stalkings* in the early 1990s. She has worked primarily since the early 1970s as a script supervisor for mainstream film and television productions. See: Jim Holliday, *Only the Best* (Van Nuys, CA: Cal Vista Direct, Ltd., 1986) 69.

Svetlana Marsh (born Sventlana Mishoff) was a prodigious writer, director, and producer of adult film in the late 1970s and 1980s, frequently working with partner David L. Frazier. She wrote *Little Orphan Dusty* for director Bob Chinn in 1978, and went on to direct, among many other films, *800 Fantasy Lane* (1979), *Ultra Flesh* (1980), and *Surrender in Paradise* (1984). The latter film, as outlined in chapter three, was the feature debut of performer Ginger Lynn.

Veronika Rocket directed the neo-noir bondage films *Smoker* (1983) and *I Know What Girls Like* (1986), the former of which critic Howard Hampton described as “metaporn in precisely the way Godard’s *Made in the USA* (1966) is metacinema.” Susie Bright verified that “Veronika Rocket” was actually a pen name for New York University filmmakers Michael Constant and Ruben Master, who had done the art direction for director Stephen Sayadian’s *Café Flesh* (under the name Rinse Dream), another groundbreaking neo-noir adult film. Bright noted that Constant and Master had “broken so many rules, their genderfuck was so effortless, with such beauty, that I used their film as a benchmark for the rest of my erotic criticism career,” and visited them in Philadelphia after seeing the film to meet them. See: Howard Hampton, *Born in Flames: Termite Dreams, Dialectical Fairy Tales, and Pop Apocalypses* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) 400; Susie Bright. “The Birth of the Unlikely Blue Movie Critic.” *susiebright.blogs.com*. Susie Bright. 12 September 2011. Web. 17 May 2013.

Summer Brown directed *China Lust* (1976) under the name “Sam Lee,” and, under the name Sandra Winters, wrote and produced a variety of films in the 1980s, including *Irresistable* (1983) and *Every Woman Has a Fantasy* (1984).

further essentialized female spectators even as it acknowledged their growing interest in the marketplace. “More than 60% of adult rental transactions in video stores involve women, whether they are by themselves or with their husband, boyfriend, or girlfriend,” Lee Irving noted. “Couples that have never watched XXX-rated entertainment are now popping them into their VCRs. This shift in demographics of watching adult films—from primarily men to, now, couples—has dictated a need for films with more sensitive stories that appeal to both sexes.”<sup>104</sup> The notion of “sensitive stories,” as I describe in chapter

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Helene Terrie co-wrote and produced nearly all her husband Kirdy Stevens’ films beginning in the late 1970s, including the popular *Taboo* series, which started in 1980. They are further described in chapter two.

Ann Perry (born Virginia Ann Lindsay) started her career in the 1960s as a Go-Go dancer and pinup model, appearing in a *Playboy* layout in 1961. She moved on to early “nudie cutie” films such as *The House on Bare Mountain* (1962) and *The Golden Box* (1970), working under the name “Ann Meyers.” She took over the reigns of Evolution Enterprises in the early 1970s and began directing and producing adult films such as *Count the Ways* (1976) and *Sweet Savage* (1978), among many others. She was the first female member of the Adult Film Association of America and later became President of the organization. She was also married to Joe Rhine, a noted civil rights attorney who had represented Angela Davis, Timothy Leary, and the Black Panther coalition, as well as working on many adult film-related cases. See: Nelson 22-53.

Roberta Findlay, born in 1948, began her career acting under the name “Anna Riva” in husband Michael’s exploitation films before joining him behind the camera, becoming a skilled cinematographer. She began directing her own softcore films in 1971 with *The Altar of Lust*. Findlay was a key participant in one of the more notorious episodes in film history. In 1970, the Findlays made *The Slaughter* in Argentina, which was subsequently acquired by Alan Shackleton of Monarch Releasing Company in 1975. Shackleton took the film, which featured a Charlson Mason-esque guru leading a group of young women on murdering sprees, and tacked on a new ending in which an actress appears to be murdered by the crew while they are shooting the film. The scene was, of course, staged, but looked to be real. Shackleton re-titled the film *Snuff* and released it to theaters in 1976. As Eric Schaefer and Eithne Johnson point out, the film was released during a period of cultural anxiety over the existence of “snuff” films, and as such it led to feminist protests and, in some ways, the galvanization of the anti-pornography feminist movement described in chapter five. Findlay later married Walter Sear, and the two went on to produce (with Roberta directing) hardcore films including *Fantasex* (1976), *Honeysuckle Rose* (1979), and *The Tiffany Minx* (1981), among many others. She also went on to direct mainstream horror films including *Tenement* (1985), *Blood Sisters* (1987), and *Prime Evil* (1989). After Sear’s death in 2010, Findlay took over the management of Sear Sound, the renowned recording studio that Sear had founded in the 1960s where The Beatles, Lou Reed, Tom Waits, and many others have recorded albums. See: Nelson 168-197; Eithne Johnson and Eric Schaefer, “Soft Core/Hard Gore: *Snuff* as a Crisis in Meaning,” *Journal of Film and Video* 45.2/3 (Summer-Fall 1993): 40-59.

<sup>104</sup> Lee Irving, “The Women Behind the Scenes,” *Adult Video News* May 1986: 46.

one, differentiates male and female pleasures, limiting the possibilities for women and once again requiring “justifications” for the sex.

In the second example, from November 1986, the publishers of *Adam Film World* put out a special “Porn Films For Couples” issue. In the introduction, editor Carl Esser spelled out the mission, but also reveals how such discourses remained aimed at men, and just how rigidly and stereotypically the industry still saw female audiences:

As the VCR boom brings in more women to porn, the ‘Couples Movie’ is fast becoming a staple of the industry. Within that category there is still a variety of choice, as a couple movie need not be all sugar and spice. The DRAMA section of this issue reviews pictures strong on plot and intrigue; ROMANCE is for sweethearts who look for affection and foreplay in porn; try a COMEDY—you might be able to ‘laugh her into it’; or how about CLASSICS, not new, but unforgettable; FOR WOMEN deals with movies made about women or with a female audience in mind; women who like porn can handle a WALL-TO-WALL movie, if the ladies in the picture are not mistreated; and occasionally women have a taste for EXOTICA, so we’ve included a few pictures for special interest audiences.<sup>105</sup>

These comments reveal the ongoing tendency to foreground male audiences even when marketing to women; the (somewhat disturbing) “laugh her into it” suggestion, by using the pronoun “you,” gives away the game. Industry practices, even as they moved toward new, more inclusive paradigms, still held tightly to long-established patterns.

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<sup>105</sup> Carl Esser, “Intro,” *Adam Film World and Adult Video Guide* November 1986: 5.

The contents of the issue remain almost entirely the familiar catalog of titles long available for rental or purchase, simply re-categorized as “for women.” Stocked with reviews of films with titles such as *I Know What Girls Like* (1986, dir. Veronika Rocket), *In Search of the Wild Beaver* (1986, dir. Scotty Fox), *Make Me Want It* (1986, dir. Michael Carpenter), *She’s a Boy Toy* (1985, dir. Ned Morehead), and *Virgin Cheeks* (1986, dir. C.B. Uranus), the issue hardly strays from the “mystery of difference” paradigm in which women’s sexuality is something to be obsessed over, controlled, and fetishized in the pursuit of male pleasure—all the elements Royalle had been striving to overcome. Taken as a whole, the issue, aside from a few gestures, could be any other entry in the run, right down to the advertisements and “samples” sprinkled throughout. The problem may have been the lack of available content; aside from *Femme*, there was very little adult material produced from alternate perspectives.

The issue’s effort to pin down what a “porn for women” actually meant most clearly highlighted that lack. In an essay titled, “Does it Take a Woman to Make a Good Couples Film?,” Desiree Valentine briefly examines that question before cataloguing the women then working behind the camera. On the question of what defines “porn for women,” Valentine answered: “What that means, stated simply, is pictures that won’t send women fleeing from the room. So the female characters in many of the new pornos are treated better and have more depth than the bimbos of the old stag movies, and often it is they who choose their sex partners and determine the nature and style of the engagement.”<sup>106</sup> A low bar, to be sure, when “porn for women” mostly comes down to a degree of sexual autonomy and intelligence, further highlighting the difficulty within the

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<sup>106</sup> Valentine 59.

industry about what a “porn for women” actually meant in pragmatic terms. Others have tried further to clarify the definition, with similar confusion.

In the piece’s final section, virtually a carbon copy of the piece in *AVN* five months earlier, Valentine briefly examines Royale and Femme alongside the other handful of women working in the industry as writers, producers, and directors, adding Patti Rhodes to Irving’s earlier list.<sup>107</sup> Valentine’s description of Femme follows the standard template: “There are very few external come shots... [and the] sex is more sensuous than raunchy, accented by better music than one usually hears in a video. Candida allows her actors to pick their own partners, and usually lets the cast perform the sex in their own way.”<sup>108</sup> Once again, that most vague of adjectives—“sensuous”—gets employed to stand in for a host of narrative and visual elements separating Royale’s work from “raunchy” mainstream pornography. Such vague efforts, much like the issue as a whole, point to the difficulty within the industry to pin down precisely what “porn for women” would, could, and should look like.

While industry publications increasingly covered the female market and began acknowledging the women behind the camera, not all the efforts by other producers to copy Royale’s achievements with Femme found economic success—or even made it to market. In May 1986, to describe just one such example, Dreamland Home Video announced plans to produce a line of tapes called “Danielle Romances,” aimed at women and couples “similar to paperback romance novels.” Brent Pope, sales manager for

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<sup>107</sup> Patti Rhodes was a prolific director beginning in the late 1980s, with such films as *The Return of Johnny Wadd* (1986, with John Holmes), and the *Rainwoman* series beginning in 1989. She was married to industry veteran Fred Lincoln before his death in early 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Valentine 60.

Dreamland, echoed Royale in the company's press release: "There will be a lot of build up to the sex scenes with more tenderness and foreplay. And there'll be only two or three sex scenes in each feature." President John Arnone was in just as much of a hurry to distance the tapes from "conventional" pornography, adding: "And no gynecological shots." The final, most essential ingredient was the addition of ex-Club 90 member Sharon Mitchell as series director, giving the line, as Arnone described, a "distinctly woman's point of view."<sup>109</sup> Despite the grand plans, however, and obvious effort to capture some of Royale's market share, Dreamland's plan never came to fruition, and they never produced the tapes.

Others, however, did find success. Royale's future distribution partner, Adam & Eve, produced two films in 1984 featuring veteran performer Nina Hartley that echoed Royale's desire for a pedagogical aspect to adult film. *Nina Hartley's Guide to Better Cunnilingus* and *Nina Hartley's Guide to Better Fellatio* were the first entries in what would become a groundbreaking series of instructional videos.<sup>110</sup> Hartley, a popular

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<sup>109</sup> "Dreamland Gets Romantic," *Adult Video News Confidential* May 1986: 4.

<sup>110</sup> These educational videos, as Kevin Heffernan describes, were heavily stylized and mixed entertainment with pedagogy: "[The tapes] were originally distributed on videotape, and were the approximate length of a pornographic feature film, suitable for viewing in a single sitting, and like the feature, they contain non-diegetic music that often underscores heavily edited, stylized arias of transcendent sexual bliss that reach a climax in a final production number where the tips and techniques offered by Nina in the first sections have reached an unselfconscious virtuosity." See: Kevin Heffernan. "From "It Could Happen to Someone You Love" to "Do You Speak Ass?": Women and Discourses of Sex Education in Erotic Film and Video." *The Feminist Porn Book*. Eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas Shimizu, Constance Penley and Mireille Miller-Young. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2012. 237-254.

Robert Eberwein trace the long history of "sex education" films, including the rise of such material on video. The genre goes back, as Eberwein traces, to at least *Damaged Goods* (1914) and its emphasis on venereal disease as a social problem. As Linda Williams notes, a clear turning point occurred after the Supreme Court ruled in 1966 in *Memoirs v. Massachusetts* that a work was not obscene if it had "redeeming social importance," leading to films such as *Pornography in Denmark: A New Approach* and *A History of the Blue Movie* (both 1970, dir. Alex de Renzy), both of which purported to be "educational" documentaries and histories while nevertheless providing viewers with depictions of sexual pleasure. After the adult film industry transitioned to video, educational material (such as Hartley's tapes) became standard practice, and continue to represent a prominent segment of the market. See: Robert Eberwein, *Sex Ed*:

performer, successfully mixed feminist politics with sexual performance in a way that few others have been able to accomplish.<sup>111</sup> In a 1993 essay, Hartley scathingly criticized anti-pornography feminist activists, defended her career choice, and echoed much of Royalle's politics. "I reject the notion that there is some secret feminist orthodoxy, some single standard of measuring who is a 'real' feminist," she wrote, claiming, much like the Club 90 performers, a feminism that did not preclude an autonomous and pleasure-seeking sexuality.<sup>112</sup> The line of videos, while never massively successful economically, speak volumes about the changes in the industry in the mid-1980s in terms of recognizing the expanding marketplace, the potential for sex education within adult film, and the desire for alternative perspectives and content that came *from* women rather than from the "mystery of difference" so obsessed with controlling them in the name of male pleasure or gendered containment.

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*Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999) 181-213; Williams, *Hard Core* 97.

<sup>111</sup> Like so many others, the implications of Hartley's lengthy career are far outside the bounds of this dissertation, requiring detailed work by other historians. Raised by socialists in Berkeley, Hartley (born Marie Louise Hartman in 1959) worked as dancer for the Mitchell Brothers at the O'Farrell Theater in San Francisco beginning in 1982 while a nursing student at San Francisco State University. After her husband met veteran performer Juliet "Aunt Peg" Anderson, Hartley was cast in Anderson's directorial debut, *Educating Nina* (1984), which proved to be a major success. Hartley graduated *magna cum laude* in 1985, became a registered nurse, and went on to a long career as an adult film performer and dancer—a career that continues, remarkably, as of 2013. An outspoken feminist, Hartley frequently appears (much like Royalle) at academic conferences, workshops, and in the media with a sex positive message. She has appeared in nearly 1,000 adult films, including two for Royalle with *Femme: Rites of Passage* (1987) and *Bridal Shower* (1997). She authored a sex advice book in 2006, has been the subject of scores of interviews and academic analyses, and writes feminist essays on the topic of adult films and sex work. She also appeared in Paul Thomas Anderson's mainstream film *Boogie Nights* (1997). See: Nina Hartley, *Nina Hartley's Guide to Total Sex* (New York: Avery, 2006); Sheldon Ranz, "Interview: Nina Hartley," *Shmate: A Magazine of Progressive Jewish Thought*.<sup>22</sup> (Spring 1989): 15-29; Nina Hartley, "Reflections of a Feminist Porn Star," *Gauntlet* 5 (1993): 62-68; Nina Hartley, "Porn: An Effective Vehicle for Sexual Role Modeling and Education." *The Feminist Porn Book*. Eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas Shimizu, Constance Penley and Mireille Miller-Young. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2012. 228-236; Nelson 862-907.

<sup>112</sup> Hartley, "Reflections of a Feminist Porn Star," 62.

Royalle's approach with *Femme* and willingness to seize control of the means of production has also influenced a new generation of adult filmmakers. Tristan Taormino, Anna Span, Petra Joy, Maria Beatty, Shine Louise Houston, Anna Brownfield, Erika Lust, and Courtney Trouble are among the many women who have followed Royalle's lead, and they frequently cite her as a guiding force and pioneer for their own work, which is overtly political and explicitly feminist.<sup>113</sup> Similarly to Royalle, they often invoke quality based around particular narrative justifications and visual approaches to give a deeper meaning to the sex they portray, recreating Royalle's politics that there are "right ways" for sex to be performed. Anne G. Sabo, in her book examining the rise of "porn for women," cites Royalle's influence, creating a checklist directly from *Femme's* films that argues for "design and content" as being the items responsible for this "right way" to have sex, items based firmly on justifying the potential pleasures embedded within pornography through a variety of narrative and visual elements. The lengthy list, a veritable template for those who would follow *Femme's* lead, is worthy quoting in its entirety for the ways in which it isolates Royalle's philosophy perhaps better than any other source:

1. High cinematic production value.

- The acting is strong and convincing.

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<sup>113</sup> Taormino and Lust, in particular, have inherited Royalle's mantle. Taormino has written multiple books on the "right way" to have sex, edited dozens of anthologies, appears regularly in the media and in university syllabi, speaks at conferences, and directs a line of videos for Vivid Video. Lust, a Swedish filmmaker, has also written extensively on feminist issues related to sexuality and pornography, and is similarly concerned with the "right way" to present mediated sexualities. See: Erika Lust, *Good Porn: A Woman's Guide* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2010); Tristan Taormino, *Down and Dirty Sex Secrets: The New and Naughty Guide to Being Great in Bed* (New York: William Morrow, 2003); Tristan Taormino. "Calling the Shots: Feminist Porn in Theory and Practice." *The Feminist Porn Book*. Eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas Shimizu, Constance Penley and Mireille Miller-Young. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2012. 255-264.

- The manuscript builds the sex into a realistic context.
- The settings and costumes are realistic.
- The musical soundtrack complements and even adds to what we see; the sighing is truthful and balanced as opposed to the exaggerated moaning we hear in mainstream porn.
- The lighting supplements the atmosphere.
- The picture quality presents what we see esthetically.
- The cinematography and directing is done by someone with a good eye for the right shots, settings, and frames.
- The editing is done by someone with an eye for good cuts and transitions, splicing the right shots for best effect.

## 2. Progressive sexual-political commitment.

- The camera shots, angles, and movements capture and frame the bodies and their sexual encounters democratically, presenting a new language for gender democratic heterosexuality.
- The films presents us with a gender democratic gaze of devoted mutuality as opposed to the objectifying gaze of the woman in traditional mainstream porn.
- The film legitimizes consensual voyeurism and affirms the satisfaction of being seen, as well as the pleasure in seeing (scopophilia).
- The film illustrates the use of a subversive role-play, critically appropriating, revising, and playing with erotic fantasies.

- The film suggests an alternative symbolic to portray sexual agency, desire, and pleasure than the mainstream porn's focus on erection and money shot.
- The film confronts political censorship and the historical baggage of guilt and shame around sex.
- In line with social and political trends, the film portrays a society with increased gender equality, including a growing specter of diverse forms of intimacy, where women and men have a larger play-field to practice their sexuality, but where sexual taboos linger and narrow gender categories to continue to confine the experience of gender and sexuality for many.<sup>114</sup>

The list, a tall order to be sure for any adult film, ironically, as many of the discourses surrounding “porn for women” frequently do, encourages more freedom by limiting and containing the narrative and visual approaches to pornography to a very specific set of highly egalitarian fantasies.

While these guidelines directly confront the very similar rigid set of guidelines offered by Ziplow's formula, they also merely inscribe a new set in its place. Left out, by both sets of guidelines, are those viewers who desire something else entirely, or find pleasure in transgression or subversion. Furthermore, by linking “good” porn to all manner of intellectual tactics both visual and narrative, Sabo, Royalle, and others fail to see the reinscription of the deeply regressive “upper/lower” divide I explore in chapter one that pushes women into explaining and justifying sexual behavior beyond simple

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<sup>114</sup> Anne G. Sabo, *After Pornified: How Women Are Transforming Pornography & Why It Really Matters* (New York: John Hunt Publishing, 2012) 53-54.

pleasure. There must be “meaning,” in the end, for pleasure to exist beyond itself as an end, and to be the “right” way. In perhaps Royalle’s most telling moment, in which she accused some female directors of falsely claiming feminism simply by means of being women in an interview in 2012, she damned the “wrong way” to have sex, linking it again to the “money shot,” that element she had long railed against, denying any possibility of pleasure to female viewers. She argued that a truly feminist adult film “should be something women really relate to, that speaks to them. It’s not enough to say, ‘Well, hey, you know what? I’m a girl, and I like having cum in my face.’”<sup>115</sup> In her most recent essay, in a passage on contemporary female directors, these concerns clearly remain at the forefront of her thinking:

It’s as if it took an entire generation before women felt brave enough to step behind the blue camera, whether for commercial sale or to post on the Internet. But is it ‘feminist’ simply because it’s made by a woman? When I watch porn directed by a woman I’m hoping to see something different, innovative, something that speaks to me as a woman. All too often I find myself disappointed by what turns out to be the same lineup of sex scenes containing the usual sex acts, sometimes more extreme, following the same old formula and ending in the almighty money shot. Rather than creating a new vision, it seems many of today’s young female directors, often working under the tutelage of the big porn distributors, seek only to prove that they can be even nastier than their male predecessors. And it’s not so much the type of sex that offends me, it’s the crude in-your-face

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<sup>115</sup> Jesse Sposato. “Hot and Saucy: Candida Royalle’s Top That.” *sadiemagazine.com*. Sadie Magazine. Summer 2012. Web. 3 January 2013.

depiction that seems more interested in shock value than anything female viewers might enjoy.<sup>116</sup>

These statements encapsulates Royalle's entire approach, in which the "right way" to have sex cannot possibly intersect with the possibility of genuine pleasure overlapping with the tropes and characteristics of formulaic adult filmmaking, leading, apparently, to a sort of pornographic false consciousness, as well as a rigid feminist belief system alongside an ongoing concern with the connections between visual presentation and "appropriate" gender behavior.

Ultimately, Royalle's "for women, by a woman" approach, while representing a critical and historically important break from the formulaic industrial obsession with male pleasure, also represents an ironic moment in which an effort to *avoid* essentialism seemingly led directly back to that very mode. "True" feminism, in other words, has no room for a genuinely diverse range of pleasures. Perhaps this is an inescapable problem for adult film producers: the moment any type of sexuality or gendered approach is privileged, after all, it defines all others as wrong or misguided. In a 1994 interview, well after *Femme* had turned into a successful corporate machine, Royalle described her products as "tastefully explicit," and tried to encapsulate her philosophy: "A lot of it is about permission-giving to women to have full sexual lives. Hiding certain elements only perpetuates shame."<sup>117</sup> But, of course, "hiding certain elements" was precisely the strategy Royalle had been advocating and implementing for years, and, in the process, created a particular type of shame around certain sexual fantasies, behaviors, narrative

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<sup>116</sup> Royalle, "What's a Nice Girl Like You...", 68.

<sup>117</sup> Susan Walker, "Men's Porn Is Not Women's Erotica," *Toronto Star* 27 August 1994: H1.

approaches, and visual styles. Femme created a paradox for viewers by avoiding “money” and “meat” shots, emphasizing narrative, and foreground a vague (and narrowly defined) “sensuality,” which begs the question: does that make those fantasies that do not adhere to such paradigms wrong, harmful, or shameful? Such logic leads, of course, down the path that anti-pornography feminists have paved, an unintended alliance with conservative anti-feminists linked by the rigid defining of “appropriate” sexual and gendered behaviors.

Among Royalle’s most important historical legacies remains her masterful ability to market herself and Femme’s products as the “solution” to a “problem” endlessly circulated as part of the cultural obsessions with both pornography and women’s sexuality. Indeed, every few years a new cycle of mediated discourses appears, mixing cultural anxiety over women’s interest in porn with the availability of “porn for women,” ultimately suggesting that such products offer positive potential—but also implying a “safe” area for women to explore pleasure. Royalle’s presence in such reports is a constant, as it has always been since her appearance in the 1985 *Glamour* article. Adjectives like “tasteful,” “sensual,” “erotic,” “subtle,” “romantic,” “narratives,” and “motivation” populate these discourses, as if taken straight from Royalle’s marketing strategy, and further shoring up the long-standing mythology of the necessity of a very particular “sensitivity” in regards to women’s sexuality.<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, this cycle

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<sup>118</sup> The frequency and similarity with which these discourses arise is quite remarkable. Since Femme’s inception, the debate over the validity and availability of “porn for women” has never ceased, and every new newspaper article, magazine essay, television talk show, or blog post asks and answers the question as if it were the first time. The trend shows no signs of stopping or changing anytime soon. Some notable examples over the years: W.M., “Visualizing Erotica,” *The Washington Post* 21 July 1992: B12 ; Dennis Hunt, “Feminine’ Porn Finds a Nice in the Marketplace,” *Los Angeles Times* 18 May 1990: 17.; Gerald Nachman, “Women Get a Turn at Erotica,” *Washington Post* 25 January 1993: D1; Mireya Navarro, “Women Tailor Sex Industry to Their Eyes,” *New York Times* 20 February 2004: A1, A22; Susan Abram, “Porn, for Women, by Women,” *Daily News* 8 June 2007: N12.

represents a lucrative machine for Femme, creating a cultural climate taking “porn for women” at face value rather than engaging in interrogation. Underneath the discourse, however, the old anxieties circulate endlessly, questioning and worrying over whether unbridled, unjustified female sexuality represents something dark and dangerous in society. Such discourses also permanently place female viewers (and female industry members) in a box, never able to escape the paradigm in which their difference is marked and marginalized, not unlike the “mystery of difference” paradigm such products’ design aimed to counter. This has been the true genius of Femme’s creation, that it has created an acceptable solution to those worries, a safe zone in which women’s pleasures can exist without straying too far from the intellectual justifications carefully containing it—and, all the while, succeeding as a capitalist enterprise.

In the end, all the ramifications of the “quality leads to respectability” discourse that I outlined in chapter one come roaring into full force with Femme’s products. Royale may have ultimately achieved the respectability she had long associated with particular modes of quality filmmaking and sexual activities, but the cost was the very openness and freedom for women’s sexuality she had also long desired. The difficulty, of course, is in recognizing the climate that female viewers lived in prior to Royale’s formation of Femme, and acknowledging just how unwelcome in so many ways Ziplow’s “formula” was to women’s sexuality by figuring it as the map on which male pleasure was traced. At the same time, Royale’s solution was not necessarily to expand the map or to reconfigure it; rather, Royale’s effort with Femme was to create a different map, discard the original, and condemn those who suggested it might actually offer pleasure.

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Thus, Royalle's legacy is more complicated than some have been inclined to suggest. In some ways, she ended up where she started: trapped in a binary in which one kind of sexuality and gendered behavior is foregrounded at the expense of all others—albeit from a politically progressive, rather than deeply regressive, stance. Royalle's history illustrates the difficulty for a “progressive” pornography at all, as well as bluntly calling attention to the complexity of women truly having control from both industrial and filmic positions. If, as Linda Williams argues, Royalle reconfigured what “the sex is all about” in pornography, she also, perhaps, rigidly defined what “good” porn *cannot* be about.<sup>119</sup> It could be argued that Royalle's legacy with Femme is one of positive, progressive essentialism, arguing forcefully against shame and guilt even as the company's films reproduced those very elements in new, subtle, and quiet contexts—albeit ones that had high production values and narrative justifications. In 1992, Sandra S. Cole, professor and director of the Sexuality Training Center at the University of Michigan, described Royalle's films with Femme as being “not made for prurient exploitation but for self-satisfaction.”<sup>120</sup> While acknowledging Royalle's important historical contribution and groundbreaking changes in the industry, this quote (indicative of the opinions of Royalle's supporters) begs the question: what about those viewers that might find pleasure in prurience? Gayle Rubin, who notes that “sexual panics” (which form a key basis for the following chapter) labor to regulate sexual categories, argues: “One of the most tenacious ideas about sex is there is one best way to do it, and that

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<sup>119</sup> Williams, *Hard Core* 246.

<sup>120</sup> W.M. 13.

everyone should do it that way.”<sup>121</sup> As the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter from Royalle herself claims, sex has, indeed, historically been key to controlling women.

In the following, and final, chapter, I explore the contours and depths of the cultural backlash against many of Royalle’s predecessors and competitors in the burgeoning field of adult video. As Royalle’s “porn for women” made some pornographic material safe by internally regulating its fantasies and constructs, other producers, directors, performers, distributors, retail storeowners, and viewers who chose other types were not so lucky. The story of the external regulation of adult video, and the resulting ramifications on the cultural notion of “appropriate” gendered behavior, might be the most important story of all.

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<sup>121</sup> Gayle Rubin. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole S. Vance. London: Routledge, 1984. 267-319.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Solidifying Shame: Community Standards, Regulation, and Adult Video

To deny the need for control is literally to deny one's senses, unless such denial is based upon a conclusion that there is nothing evil or dangerous about pornographic material.<sup>1</sup>

Charles H. Keating, 1970

If pornography incites to anything, it is the solitary act of masturbation.<sup>2</sup>

Gore Vidal, 1970s

In 1981, the citizens of Maricopa County, Arizona elected Tom Collins, Vietnam veteran and former police officer, as County Attorney.<sup>3</sup> Maricopa County, among the nation's largest by population, had its seat in Phoenix, and served other cities such as Tempe and Scottsdale, with 1.5 million total residents within its boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Collins, with the vigorous encouragement of Citizens for Decency Through Law (CDL), a Phoenix-based grassroots group determined to eradicate pornography, dedicated himself to prosecuting adult video and bookstores throughout the county on obscenity charges.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Keating. "Statement of Charles H. Keating, Jr." *The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*. Ed. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. New York: Random House, 1970. 511-549.

<sup>2</sup> Vidal originally said this on *The David Susskind Show*. Quoted in: Robert J. Stoller and I.S. Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) 10.

<sup>3</sup> Maricopa County Attorney's Office. "About Us." *maricopacountyattorney.org*. n.d. Web. 4 April 2013.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Intercensal Estimates of the Resident Population of States and Counties 1980-1989." *census.gov*. March 1992. Web. 4 April 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Charles H. Keating, Jr. founded Citizens for Decent Literature in Cincinnati in 1958, which advocated the eradication of "smut" literature. It was later renamed Citizens for Decency through Law, and boasted 300 national chapters and more than 100,000 members, making it the largest anti-pornography organization in the United States. In the 1980s, it served as a clearinghouse for anti-pornography groups, assisted in local obscenity cases, and generally put pressure on the government to eradicate pornography. Whitney Strub

In October 1983, Collins hired Randy Wakefield as a trial prosecutor, tasking him with making obscenity cases a top priority.<sup>6</sup> Collins' efforts to that point had failed, primarily because adult video and bookstore owners had successfully argued that Maricopa County and Phoenix officials had unfairly targeted them when mainstream video rental stores in "better neighborhoods" offered the same titles, thus creating an unfair double standard regarding the community's stance on obscenity.<sup>7</sup> Collins and Wakefield, in response, took a bold step: on 13 March 1985, Wakefield announced to reporters that mainstream video rental store owners had a few days to clear their inventories of "sexually explicit movies" before the county would take legal action against them for trafficking in obscenity.<sup>8</sup>

Both sides in the debate engaged in a struggle over "community standards," an essential element in the definition of obscenity and a critical part of the discussion in this chapter. A relatively recent phenomenon, the inclusion of local, rather than national, standards in the determination of pornography's legality stemmed from the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California*. That decision built upon and extended an earlier case, *Roth v. United States* (1957), that first established community standards in the process of determining obscenity, which *Roth* defined as "a thing... if, considered as a whole, its predominant appeal is to prurient interest, i.e., a shameful or morbid interest

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traces the long history of CDL, as well as the role of grassroots organizations in general, in his comprehensive book that examines much of the same period as this dissertation. See: Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Rubin. "Desperado, Esq." *phoenixnewtimes.com*. Phoenix New Times. 21 August 1997. Web. 4 April 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Cieply, "Risque Business: Video Outlets Face Mounting Pressure to Stop Carrying X-Rated Cassettes," *Wall Street Journal* 21 April 1986: 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Porn Suit Subject Sues Prosecutors," *Mohave Daily Miner* 28 May 1986: 3.

in nudity, sex, or excretion, and if goes substantially beyond customary limits of candor in description or representation of such matters.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, *Roth* required that the work needed to be taken as a whole, and, as Justice William Brennan wrote, be “utterly without redeeming social importance.”<sup>10</sup> The resulting liberalization of pornography led to an influx of pornography in the 1960s and 70s, as producers and distributors found ways to justify their products by including elements other than explicit content, or ensuring that the whole work was not pornographic.<sup>11</sup>

The Court’s 1973 decision in *Miller v. California* strengthened the “community standards” portion of *Roth* requiring that obscenity standards be based on applicable state laws, and eliminated Brennan’s “utterly without redeeming social importance” proscription in favor of new language: “whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”<sup>12</sup> Pleasure was utterly disregarded by the Court as a viable “value” and instead was suspiciously regarded as “prurient interest” threatening to the social order.<sup>13</sup> For prosecutors such as Collins and Wakefield, pleasure was equally irrelevant and, indeed, threatening; all that mattered, in the end, was their

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<sup>9</sup> *Roth v. United States*. 354 U.S. 476. Supreme Court of the United States. 24 June 1957. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 21 April 2013.

<sup>10</sup> *Roth v. United States*.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas C. Mackey, *Pornography on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws, and Documents* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2002) 52-55.

<sup>12</sup> *Miller v. California*. 413 U.S. 15. Supreme Court of the United States. 21 June 1973. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 10 February 2012.

<sup>13</sup> A complete review and analysis of the long, complicated, and contentious history of obscenity law is far outside the bounds of this dissertation, but I have drawn on several invaluable resources in my research. See: Mackey, *Pornography on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws, and Documents*; Edward De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Christopher Nowlin, *Judging Obscenity: A Critical History of Expert Evidence* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003); Leon Friedman, ed., *Obscenity: The Complete Oral Arguments before the Supreme Court in the Major Obscenity Cases* (New York: Chelsea House, 1980).

suspicion that the adult videos flooding into Maricopa County violated “community standards” and thus met the *Miller* requirement for prosecution. The warning to storeowners was, ultimately, merely a formality.

David Gibson, owner of Arizona Home Video in Glendale, a suburb of Phoenix, heeded the warning and stopped selling or renting his adult tapes the day of the announcement. Despite this, however, on 25 March 1985, a Maricopa County grand jury, at Collins’ and Wakefield’s urging, returned indictments against Gibson and two of his employees on seven felony counts of violating Arizona’s obscenity laws, stemming from five adult videotapes.<sup>14</sup> Potential penalties were severe: five years in prison and up to \$1,370,000 in fines.<sup>15</sup> Other Arizona video storeowners rallied around Gibson, forming a coalition for his defense led by Linda Lauer, owner of Starlite Video in Phoenix and a Video Association of America board member, with more than 120 stores eventually contributing \$100 weekly to a legal aid fund.<sup>16</sup> Additional funds came from Vidco and General Video of America (GVA), adult video distributors heavily invested in such cases, sensing the dire consequences for their own businesses if video stores continued to be prosecuted.<sup>17</sup>

Gibson’s trial began in mid-October 1985, and he presented as his defense a variation on the argument that had plagued Collins: Arizona Home Video was not

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<sup>14</sup> The five tapes: *Pumpkin Farm* (1983, dir. D.R. Williams) *Desires for Men* (1981, dir. Carol Connors), *Divine Atrocities* (1983, dir. Kim Christy), *Taboo 2* (1982, dir. Kirdy Stevens), and *800 Fantasy Lane* (1979, dir. Svetlana). See: General Video of America, *White Paper* (General Video of America, 1985) L-13.

<sup>15</sup> Alongside Gibson, Collins and Wakefield also targeted another store, Arizona Video Cassettes, leading to indictments on similar charges. “Porn Suit Subject Sues Prosecutors,” 3; Robert Lindsey, “Outlets That Offer Explicit Sex Tapes Facing Prosecution,” *New York Times* 3 June 1985: A1.

<sup>16</sup> John Sippel, “VSDA Given X-Vid Update,” *Billboard* 25 January 1986: 74.

<sup>17</sup> General Video of America, *White Paper* L-13.

violating community obscenity standards because other video stores all over Maricopa County offered the same adult material and were not facing prosecution.<sup>18</sup> The trial ended in a hung jury in November, and Superior Court Judge Alan Karmin subsequently dismissed a second trial, ruling that Collins and Wakefield violated their agreement not to prosecute storeowners who removed the tapes after the initial warning.<sup>19</sup> Despite these victories, however, Gibson faced legal fees of more than \$140,000,<sup>20</sup> as well as the cultural stigma of being branded a purveyor of obscenity by Maricopa County.<sup>21</sup> This case illustrates how the battle lines around pornography permanently shifted with the widespread dissemination of home video in the mid-1980s, away from the easily identifiable locations and spaces of the past and into the “better neighborhoods,” where average citizens (rather than “perverts”) could easily find pornographic material.

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<sup>18</sup> “First Video Trial Set to Begin,” *The Courier* 14 October 1985: 1B; “Defendant Says Others Do Same,” *The Courier* 29 October 1985: 6A.

<sup>19</sup> “Porn Suit Subject Sues Prosecutors,” 3. Collins and Wakefield also initiated the raids and indictments of other video stores in spring 1986, including Starlite Video, owned by Lauer. In June 1987, Bill Bavaro of K&K Video was acquitted by a jury, ending Collins and Wakefield’s efforts to convict mainstream video owners on obscenity charges. See: “Arizona Jury Acquits Video Store on Obscenity Charges,” *Adult Video News Confidential* September 1987: 26; “AZ Video Store Operator Indicted for Obscenity,” *Adult Video News Confidential* February 1987: 5.

<sup>20</sup> Sippel, “VSDA Given X-Vid Update,” 74.

<sup>21</sup> Gibson’s trial ended up a minor farce for Maricopa County. In late May 1986, long after his trials had ended, Gibson sued Collins, Wakefield, and the County for misconduct and slander, alleging that Wakefield’s 13 March 1985 promise not to prosecute storeowners who had removed adult inventory had been violated (the same conclusion that Judge Kamin had reached in Gibson’s second trial). Gibson also alleged that Wakefield slandered him, during a speech at Glendale Community College, by suggesting there was “an absolute direct link” between Gibson, Arizona Home Video, and organized crime—a statement which Collins later defended. During the ensuing investigation, grand jury member Charles Scott, a customer at Arizona Home Video, was indicted for leaking information to Gibson before the original indictment against him. Gibson was given immunity to testify against Scott, and the charges against Collins were eventually dismissed because of Scott’s actions. Later, Collins became a Superior Court Judge in Cochise County, Arizona. It is unclear what happened to Gibson and Arizona Home Video after this period, as Gibson and his wife did not respond to my interview requests. See: “Porn Suit Subject Sues Prosecutors,” 3; “Lawyer Opposes Grand Jury Probe,” *Mohave Daily Miner* 22 July 1986: A3; “Limited Immunity Offered,” *Mohave Daily Miner* 30 July 1986: 2; “Grand Juror Indicted in Information Leak,” *The Courier* 16 November 1986: 13A.

Historically, Gibson's trial stands out as an inevitable part of the journey that began the moment adult video entered the public sphere. If, as I argue in chapter two, the "legitimizing" of the adult video industry began when people such as Joel Jacobson, Robert Sumner, George Atkinson, and Arthur Morowitz decided to operate it like any other business, and then took on a new dimension when *AVN* pushed it into the open on straightforward economic terms, similarly aggressive efforts by pornography's opponents to counter its growing normalization immediately grew in response. Collins' decision to prosecute Gibson represents a critical moment in that process: pornography, in the 1980s, shifted away from obviously demarcated spaces to the "decent" places in American cities. By prosecuting a mainstream video storeowner, Collins sent a message that pornography was not just illegitimate; it also had the potential to *contaminate* the legitimate. In mid-1985, Anna Capek, leader of an anti-pornography group in Lincoln, Nebraska, illustrated the anxieties besetting "Middle America" with her comments to reporters about adult video's encroachment into mainstream video stores: "It subverts healthy sexuality. This is not aimed at the sleazy raincoat crowd. They rent to decent middle-class people."<sup>22</sup> The fears expressed by Capek were deeply indicative of the era—and bolstered prosecutors like Collins in their efforts to stop the "sleaze" from sneaking into the "decent" parts of town. The fear was, ultimately, quite simple: if unchecked, pornography might finally become respectable. "Community standards," that essential portion of *Miller v. California*, thus took on critical importance throughout this period.

Video made it possible for pornography to enter the home like it had never been able to previously, and the same technology allowed it entry into "safe" retail extensions

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<sup>22</sup> Lindsey B14.

rather than only the quarantined areas clearly marked and identifiable as spaces of and for pornography. Jane Miller, of Minneapolis' Pornography Research Center, described the results in 1985: "Pornography is creeping into the mainstream. What would have been off-limits even in a red-light district a few years ago is now available for people to see in their living room."<sup>23</sup> Charles Rutenberg, attorney for the Video Software Dealer's Association (VSDA), admitted a year later that the video rental industry was faced with an unforeseen development: "We are the leading means of communicating pornographic material to the American public."<sup>24</sup> Adult film's journey toward respectability made significant headway via video's entry into mainstream stores, but a relentless, widespread regulatory effort seeking to contain its progress matched it step-for-step. In 1986, William Swindell, vice president of CDL, outlined the stakes surrounding the issue: "You can't take an objectionable tape... and make it all right by selling it at ABC video store in the good part of town."<sup>25</sup> The palpable fear in Swindell's statement, that merely relocating something "objectionable" would render it "all right," in many ways defines the struggles around the adult video industry in the 1980s. The *New York Times*, in 1981, ran a story detailing precisely such gains: "The erotic landscape is expanding to include clean, well-lighted suburban stores... and everyday people. Thanks to new technologies such as video-cassette recorders... sexually explicit entertainment has found a pipeline into the bedrooms of couples across America."<sup>26</sup> For both sides, the stakes were high.

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<sup>23</sup> Lindsey A1.

<sup>24</sup> Dick Polman, "Store Owners Divided on Adult Tapes," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 7 September 1986: J1.

<sup>25</sup> Cieply 1.

<sup>26</sup> Tony Schwartz, "The TV Pornography Boom," *New York Times* 13 September 1981: SM111.

In this chapter, I explore these tensions by documenting how the efforts to gain respectability by the adult film industry as it moved to videotape met with vigorous and strident opposition laboring to regulate that process. If the industry, as I have shown, made the encouragement of private pleasure its business, it found itself in an increasingly paradoxical situation, as home video grew more popular in the early 1980s. Selling private pleasure still required public marketing and distribution, meaning the encouragement still had to occur out in the open, even if the acts of pleasure could move behind the closed doors of the home. Mainstream video stores, which gave adult video vast amounts of visibility, were still public spaces—and not wholly cordoned off only for pornography. Thus, a simultaneous (and relentless) *discouragement* of pleasure met this liminal positioning of adult video, resulting in moments such as Gibson’s trial, in which the “good parts of town” suddenly became the battleground over the meaning of “good” itself. Ultimately, I argue that these regulatory efforts were rooted in the same tensions and anxieties explored throughout this dissertation: the linking of quality and respectability to femininity, and the struggle to discourage pleasure that lacked particular types of justification.

By 1986, Americans had purchased more than 25 million VCRs, and the annual sale and rental totals for home video cassettes reached \$2.3 billion.<sup>27</sup> A 1985 VSDA survey estimated that 75% of the nation’s 20,000 video stores carried adult titles, accounting for roughly 13% of total sales and rentals, meaning adult video was entrenched in the “good part of town” as well as everywhere else, bringing in more than

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<sup>27</sup> Cieply 1.

\$250 million annually.<sup>28</sup> At least fifty companies specialized in the production/distribution of adult video by the mid-1980s, releasing more than 200 new titles every month.<sup>29</sup> No longer was adult video something played only on adult motel closed-circuit systems, rented in the underground economy of Los Angeles by pioneers such as George Atkinson, or shot as an experiment by filmmakers such as David Jennings. Instead, it was nearly everywhere, in mainstream video stores on the corners of every major city in America. Yet, that growth was not without serious, continual, and consequential resistance.

This resistance, I argue in this chapter, took on the form of a “panic,” a set of discourses and practices based less in fact and more in fear, rooted in a combination of three intertwined elements: 1) the proliferation of a machine designed for private, home use capable of easily playing pornographic content; 2) the widespread access to pornography through the exponential growth of mainstream rental stores willing to stock adult titles; and 3) the professionalization of the adult film industry, allowing it to meet the growing customer demand. I trace this panic through two, related streams: 1) cultural regulation; and 2) legal regulation. Cultural regulation took various forms: grassroots protests from various conservative (and often religious) organizations; anti-pornography feminist groups; corporate decisions by video chains to avoid or eliminate adult material; and myriad other responses. Legal regulation took familiar forms: investigations and arrests; obscenity trials; court decisions; municipal decisions; zoning regulations; and other, related actions by government at various national and local levels, culminating in

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<sup>28</sup> Cieply 1.

<sup>29</sup> Bob Davis, “X-Rated Video Losing Share of Tape Sales,” *Wall Street Journal* 19 January 1984: 1; Randi Henderson, “Pornography Moves from Seedy Theaters into Living Rooms,” *Evening Tribune* 11 October 1985: C2.

the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, more commonly known as the Meese Commission, which completed its Final Report in 1986. I undertake this examination in part by focusing on previously unexamined or overlooked examples indicative of the greater cultural context, with particular focus on the lengths pornography's opponents would go to restore "decency" by targeting video storeowners.

The panic discourses eventually operated very nearly as a bygone conclusion, meaning that the adult film industry had an uphill battle toward respectability even as, in many ways, its widespread presence in mainstream video stores everywhere suggested the struggle for accessibility was over. However, those stores, the sites of the tension of public versus private that had been in constant circulation since the Panoram examined in chapter two, quietly became the final, and most important, contested space in this history. Capitalism, I argue in the conclusion, won the battle when the corporate chains simply decided not to carry adult video. Gayle Rubin argues, "There are... historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated."<sup>30</sup> The battleground of adult video in the mid-1980s represents a site of just such renegotiation.

### *Moral, Technological, and Sex Panics*

The increase in availability of home video systems, widespread dissemination of adult tapes, and professionalization of the adult film industry created a cultural panic that erupted in the mid-1980s, typified by Capek's fear that "healthy" middle-class sexuality would be "subverted" by the mere availability of adult video in particular civic zones

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<sup>30</sup> Gayle Rubin. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole S. Vance. London: Routledge, 1984. 267-319.

unaccustomed to pornography's overt presence. This panic, while a continuation of the same fear-based backlash that had long plagued the industry, nevertheless took on new forms given the availability of pornography in such a widespread manner. In constructing this framework, I draw on the models of three related theoretical models: 1) the moral panic; 2) the technopanic; and 3) and the sex panic.

In his groundbreaking work on moral panics, Stanley Cohen outlines the various mechanisms surrounding the tensions between two 1960s British youth groups, the Mods and Rockers, and the subsequent discourses disseminated by various media and then taken up by the public. Using specific incidents between the two as a case study, he argues, much like Rubin, "Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic."<sup>31</sup> He offers a three-stage framework: 1) the media frames a person, group, or issue as a social threat; 2) cultural and institutional reactions lead to regulatory efforts; and 3) the threat recedes and the panic dissipates. In describing this cycle, Cohen places a great deal of emphasis upon the media as an instigator in the crisis, suggesting the result is often an escalation and inflation of the panic rhetoric. He argues, "The media have long operated as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain 'facts' can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation, or panic."<sup>32</sup> This difference is critical to Cohen's overall examination: whether or not the media has sincere interest or investment in the issues behind the story is mostly irrelevant; the coverage itself ensures legitimacy not otherwise present.

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<sup>31</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972) 9.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen 16.

Stuart Hall, et al., argue instead that moral panics stem from political motivations, particularly through the actions of the judiciary and the police. Yet, the media still plays a role in the formulation of public response. “The mass media,” they write, “are not the only, but they are among the most powerful forces in the shaping of public consciousness about topical and controversial issues.”<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the argument’s focus remains a “top down” approach, putting the impetus for the moral panic in an institutional effort at public control. Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda offer their own five-part criteria for determining a moral panic: 1) a heightened level of concern over the behavior of a group; 2) an increased level of hostility toward that group; 3) substantial public consensus that the threat is real; 4) an exaggeration of the measure of the threat; and 5) a specific volatility to the cycle of the panic, which suddenly erupts and later subsides.<sup>34</sup> While less specific than either Cohen or Hall, et al, Goode and Ben-Yahuda’s formulation offers space in which to see a variety of cultural forces and groups at work in the moral panic, rather than assigning direct agency simply to either the media or government bodies.

The technopanic model carries particular salience for this period given that home video technology allowed for the widespread—and affordable—dissemination of pornography with the advent of home video systems. Alice Marwick argues, “The technopanic is an attempt to contextualize the moral panic as a response to fear of modernity as represented by new technologies,” and offers three of her own defining

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<sup>33</sup> Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978) 220.

<sup>34</sup> Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994) 33-39.

characteristics: 1) a focus on new media forms; 2) a pathologization of young people's use of the new technology; and 3) an attempt to regulate the behavior of the young people, through either control of them or the creators of the media products.<sup>35</sup> The VCR was hardly the first technology to raise cultural fears of "inappropriate" sexual behavior, bringing to mind Joseph Slade's argument: "Whenever one person invents a technology, another person will invent a sexual use for it."<sup>36</sup> The mid-1980s represents merely one period in the long history of technopanics.

Pornography's connection to technology, as Jonathon Coopersmith argues, might serve as a primary defining feature.<sup>37</sup> Examples of pornography appear alongside new technologies nearly as soon as they are unveiled, and, in fact, predate "technology" itself, stretching back to the realm of cave drawings and folk art.<sup>38</sup> Print technology has long been the source (and target) of various panics—even before the printing press revolutionized the distribution of material to the masses.<sup>39</sup> Development of printing technology, however, changed everything. In what could serve as a prefiguring of adult video, Coopersmith notes, "[T]he immense increase in the circulation of [pornography] and its increasing political content meant easier access because of decreased cost as well

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<sup>35</sup> Alice E. Marwick. "To Catch a Predator? The Myspace Moral Panic." *uic.edu*. First Monday. 2 June 2008. Web. 1 December 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph W. Slade, *Pornography in America: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2000) 9.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathon Coopersmith, "Pornography, Technology and Progress," *Icon* 4 (1998): 96.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987) 6-10; Bernard Arcand, *The Jaguar and the Anteater: Pornography Degree Zero*, trans. Wayne Grady (London: Verso Books, 1993) 197-210.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the history of pre-printing press pornography, see: Henry L. Marchand, *The French Pornographers, Including a History of French Erotic Literature* (New York: Book Awards, 1965); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 93.

as greater availability. Pornography began the move from the elite erotica confined to the few to the material written and engraved for the growing literate population.”<sup>40</sup> Lynn Hunt and others trace this history, which intertwined with radical political movements and subversive literature, frequently using pornography as a vehicle for social and political change.<sup>41</sup> As I outline in chapter one, the rise of pornography in this period coincided with a massive upheaval in cultural notions of “appropriate” gender behavior, and the ensuing links between quality, respectability, and femininity.

Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, Frederick S. Lane argues that the inventions of mass printing and distribution were followed by regulatory efforts to contain the spread of “obscene” content; in particular, the appointment of Anthony Comstock to the post of “Special Agent” to the U.S. Post Office to act as a *de facto* national censor represents a turning point in the history of technopanics.<sup>42</sup> Reacting to the unprecedented amount of pornographic material sent through the mail, Comstock successfully altered the landscape of public perception in his quest to define “decent” behavior, particularly for women and children. The technological capability of publishers to utilize mass production led to the widespread dissemination of their products; Comstock and his supporters reacted by reframing the debate in terms of obscenity and perversion, and insisting on eradication. That action set a tone positioning regulatory control as a necessary and hegemonic reaction to private pleasures from pornography that continued into the 1980s and beyond. No room existed for Comstock to acknowledge the

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<sup>40</sup> Coopersmith, “Pornography, Technology and Progress,” 97.

<sup>41</sup> Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography, 1500-1800: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity* (Boston: Zone Books, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Frederick S. Lane, *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 15.

possibility of private pleasures had by consumers. Instead, he labored to reframe the issue as a cultural blight in need of control, making guilt and shame the only acceptable discourses.<sup>43</sup>

The industrial revolution brought new forms of communication technology used for purposes related to pornography and pleasure. In his history of the telegraph, Tom Standage argues, “Spies and criminals are invariably among the first to take advantage of new modes of communication. But lovers are never far behind.”<sup>44</sup> Tracing the behavior of telegraph operators, he illustrates how a new technology quickly becomes co-opted for sexual use. While literal records of these behaviors and messages do not exist, Thomas Edison claimed at the time that the some of “the tales passing over the wires [between operators] would find their way into the local newspapers,” although many did not, because “they were far too smutty or anatomically explicit.”<sup>45</sup> The operators, in other words, were quite adeptly sending pornographic messages. The development of the railroad also provided the means for the dissemination of pornography: George Douglas describes late-19<sup>th</sup> century salesmen frequently (and discretely) selling “faintly naughty literature” at high profits to passengers in train cars.<sup>46</sup>

The telephone, too, became a powerful sexual tool with the development of Dial-a-Porn in the early 1980s, traced in part in chapter three. By 1984, the Federal

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<sup>43</sup> For more on Comstock, see: Anna Bates, *Weeder in the Garden of the Lord: Anthony Comstock's Life and Career* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995); Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers* (New York: Walker and Co., 1998) 127.

<sup>45</sup> Standage 132.

<sup>46</sup> George H. Douglas, *All Aboard! The Railroad in American Life* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1992) 63.

Communications Commission was deluged with public complaints about the services, and in 1985, pornography's opponents, including Alan Wildmon's American Family Association (AFA), pressured the Justice Department into sponsoring a study on Dial-a-Porn's effects. Psychologist Victor Cline, a longstanding anti-pornography advocate, conducted the research.<sup>47</sup> His conclusion, that “without exception, the children (girls as well as boys) became hooked on this sex by phone and kept going back for more and still more,” illustrates the fears surrounding the use of technology for sexual pleasure—and the ways in which pornography's opponents inevitably link the corruption of children to the necessity of regulating the technology, illustrating my contention that the anxieties around pleasure often have less to do with sexuality and more to do with fears of “inappropriate” gender behavior.<sup>48</sup>

The development of technologies to reproduce and disseminate images, however, stands out in the history of pornography. As Paolo Cherchi Usai notes, pornographic

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<sup>47</sup> “Many Demanding Curb on Phone Pornography,” *New York Times* 19 February 1984: 80.

<sup>48</sup> Victor Cline, *Reports on the Effects of Dial-a-Porn to the US Department of Justice*. 1985. After numerous judicial and Congressional efforts to eradicate Dial-A-Porn (including outright bans, time restrictions, access codes, and other regulatory strategies), the Supreme Court ruled in 1989 that “indecent” speech was protected by the First Amendment, while obscene speech was not. Immediately after the decision, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina enacted Pub. L. No. 101-166, more commonly known as the “Helms Amendment,” which amended section 223(b) of the Communications Act of 1934, which banned “indecent” Dial-A-Porn if used by minors, as well as adding section 223(c), which required users to request access to Dial-A-Porn services in writing from their telephone service provider, as well as to require all Dial-A-Porn providers to notify telephone companies in writing of their (legally permitted) indecent communications services to potential adult subscribers. A Federal Appeals Court upheld the constitutionality of the new laws, claiming it did not constitute prior restraint, and the Supreme Court declined to hear the case. See: *Sable Communications of California v. Federal Communications Commission*. 492 U.S. 115. Supreme Court of the United States. 23 June 1989. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 5 April 2013; “47 U.S.C. § 223 : US Code - Section 223: Obscene or Harassing Telephone Calls in the District of Columbia or in Interstate or Foreign Communications.” *codes.lp.findlaw.com*. Find Law. 1989. Web. 5 April 2013; Carlos Briceno. “Law; 'Dial-a-Porn' Industry Battles U.S. Restrictions.” *newyorktimes.com*. New York Times. 13 April 1990. Web. 5 April 2013; David G. Savage. “Dial-a-Porn Dealt High Court Setback.” *latimes.com*. Los Angeles Times. 28 January 1992. Web. 5 April 2013.

postcards and magic lantern slides were popular before the turn of the 20th century.<sup>49</sup> The Mutoscope, a flip-card viewing machine invented in 1894, was more popularly known as the “What the Butler Saw” machine given the frequent images of women undressing.<sup>50</sup> The creation of photographic technology offered increased realism, and ushered in a new era for pornography. Lane points out that, shortly after Louis Daguerre created the daguerreotype photography system, erotic photographs followed in vast quantities.<sup>51</sup> In his history of pornography, Henry Hyde similarly argues, “The discovery and development of photography led to the manufacture and distribution of erotic and indecent photographs on an enormous scale.”<sup>52</sup> Coopersmith cites a particularly useful example for understanding the scope of pornographic photography almost immediately after its creation: the 1874 arrest of photographer Henry Haylor uncovered 130,248 obscene photographs and 5,000 obscene slides, illustrating the enormous demand for such material by Londoners.<sup>53</sup> In terms of motion picture technology, noted French photographer Eugène Pirou filmed dancer Louise Willy performing her popular striptease *Le Coucher de la Marie (The Bridegroom’s Dilemma)* as early as 1896; Dave Thompson argues that strong evidence exists for a thriving adult film industry in South America by

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<sup>49</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai. "Pornography." *The Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. Ed. Richard Abel. New York: Routledge, 2005. 525.

<sup>50</sup> “Let's Go to the Movies: The Mechanics of the Moving Image.” *moah.org*. The Museum of American Heritage. n.d. Web. 19 November 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Lane 41-44.

<sup>52</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *A History of Pornography* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964) 110-111.

<sup>53</sup> Coopersmith, “Pornography, Technology and Progress,” 99; Hyde 121.

1900, though none of these films have been found.<sup>54</sup> Janet Staiger notes that kinoscope parlors from the turn of the century featured the burlesque dances of Dolorita, Carmencita, and Fatima, which neatly fit the technology's time limitations of less than a minute per viewing.<sup>55</sup>

From its inception, intense public scrutiny defines, as much as any other element, the history of film production and exhibition. Staiger describes the early period, from the late 1890s to roughly 1907, as “an initial testing of the waters to determine what types of representations [would] constitute permissible formulaic treatments of nudity, eroticism, sexuality, and so forth.”<sup>56</sup> Public response varied between locales, but inevitably focused on the potential effect on children, that essential ingredient to a panic. Staiger offers a particularly important example: in December 1908, New York City Mayor George McClellan revoked all moving picture licenses in the city to prevent a “public calamity.” Citing fire safety and children in theaters without adult supervision as his primary motivators, McClellan immediately stopped all theatrical exhibitions in the city. The real, reason, however, was much more complicated. Stemming from a dedicated effort by a group of progressive reformers, McClellan's decision was a victory for those interested in stamping out “obscene” content. Staiger notes: “The reformers who went after the movies had earlier looked at corruption in city government and the social evil because of moral concerns ties to religious beliefs. Furthermore, these individuals would continue to be

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<sup>54</sup> “Who's Who of Victorian Cinema: Léar (Albert Kirchner).” *victorian-cinema.net*. British Film Institute. n.d. Web. 10 November 2009; Dave Thompson, *Black and White and Blue: Adult Cinema from the Victorian Age to the VCR* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007) 29-35.

<sup>55</sup> Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 56.

<sup>56</sup> Staiger 60.

involved in pressuring the movie business to take a stricter view about what was talked about in the narratives.”<sup>57</sup> Such patterns have recurred, to varying degrees, ever since.

The result in New York was obviously not a permanent ban on movies. What the actions did lead to, however, after protracted negotiations and public furor, was the creation of an organized censorship board, the Moving Picture Exhibitors’ Association of Greater New York, which later reorganized, first, as the National Board of Censorship, and, in 1915, as the National Board of Review.<sup>58</sup> Working with producers to clear films before distribution, the formation of the organization (which incorporated other, local censorship boards to create a national system) served as the precursor to later regulatory efforts such as the Legion of Decency and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). The MPPDA, created by the Hollywood studios in 1922 (and later renamed the Motion Picture Association of America, or MPAA) served as a powerful self-regulatory body that also labored to advance Hollywood’s business interests and avoid governmental oversight of content. Accomplished in part by the creation of the Production Code, which later led to the ratings process, such action ensured an internal, rather than external, oversight process keeping “obscene” content out of the industry.<sup>59</sup> As Jon Lewis notes, “The MPAA supervises the regulation of film content solely to

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<sup>57</sup> Staiger 92.

<sup>58</sup> For the histories of early, organized censorship efforts and boards of review, see: Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Richard Maltby. "The Production Code and the Hays Office." *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise*. Ed. Tino Balio. History of the American Cinema. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993. 37-72; Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

protect studio products in the marketplace.”<sup>60</sup> At the core of these histories resides the technopanic created by the invention of motion pictures. Such technology made the moving image available to the public in a widespread manner, and with that availability came the two necessary elements for a panic: the fear of “obscene” content, and unregulated exposure to women and children.

These moments, much like the ones that followed with home video, were not simply examples of technopanics, as Marwick describes, in which the technology represents a threatening escalation of modernity to an uncontrollable public, requiring regulation. Nor were they merely moral panics, models for which do not adequately account for the specific discourses surrounding the feared behavioral responses to the technological capability, which were rooted in sexual pleasure. Instead, adding the theoretical framework of the sex panic to these other models, with particular characteristics specific to the era in which it occurred, offer much to a historical understanding of the cultural discourses surrounding the regulation of adult video in the 1980s.

Janice M. Irvine, following Carol S. Vance and Gayle Rubin, argues that sex panics represent the political “moment” of sex, emerge in particular spaces and times, follow many of the same characteristics of moral panics, such as disproportionality and exaggeration, and eventually recede once the intensity fades.<sup>61</sup> She argues, “Sex panic

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<sup>60</sup> Lewis’ work on how the MPAA and the Hollywood Studios reacted to the economic threat caused by the adult film industry just prior to the advent of home video to the mainstream film industry illustrates how the tensions surrounding sexuality, pleasure, and pornography can simultaneously open and close cultural dialogue on those topics, as well as how hegemonic cultural beliefs about “inappropriate” gender behavior inevitably leads to capitalist reactions bolstering dominant (and regressive) ideologies. See: Jon Lewis, *Hollywood V. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2002) 3.

<sup>61</sup> Janice M. Irvine, “Transient Feelings: Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotion,” *GLQ* 14.1 (2008): 1-40.

scripts demonize sexual groups or issues through association with highly stigmatized forms of sexuality.”<sup>62</sup> Gilbert Herdt, drawing on Sean P. Hier, links these stigmatizations to economic structures: “Sexual panics in advanced welfare capitalism evoke strange, lurid, and disgusting images that merge media and popular reactions ‘below the surface of civil society,’ targeting individuals and groups in ways that produce coherent and incoherent ideological platforms and political strategies.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, Capek’s concern about “decent middle-class people” can be understood more completely as the fear of the corruption of “civil society” through an interest in pornography, itself a stigmatized sexual form. As Roger N. Lancaster describes, “Central to the logic of moral panic is the machinery of taboo: nothing, it would seem, incites fear and loathing, and initiates collective censure, more rapidly than the commission of acts deemed forbidden, unclean, or sacrilegious.”<sup>64</sup> In defining the unique characteristics of a sex panic as opposed to the other forms, Herdt outlines how the specifics of sex play into cultural reactions:

Through state and nonstate mechanisms that impinge on institutions and communities, people become totally overwhelmed by and defined through the meanings and rhetoric of sexual threats and fears. In this view, the sexual ‘folk devil’—the sexual other, whether oversexed, or undersexed—is stripped of rights, and the cultural imagination becomes obsessed with

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<sup>62</sup> Irvine 20.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert Herdt. "Introduction: Moral Panics, Sexual Rights, and Cultural Anger." *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear the Fight over Sexual Rights*. Ed. Gilbert Herdt. New York: New York University Press, 2009. 1-46; Sean P. Hier, “Conceptualizing Moral Panic through a Moral Economy of Harm,” *Critical Sociology* 28.3 (2002): 311-334.

<sup>64</sup> Roger N. Lancaster, *Sex Panic and the Punitive State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011) 23.

anxieties about this evil sexuality will do to warp society and future generations.<sup>65</sup>

Fear of the unknown, of the possible damaging potential pornography carried, crystallized frequently in anti-pornography discourses, which tended to emphasize imaginary possibilities rather than realities. Herdt's formulation is particularly useful for adult video, opponents of which, like Swindell, worried continually about what might become of society if pornography were normalized and made respectable. Adult video, with its entry into mainstream video stores, presented that possibility in bold new ways.

Pornography's opponents continually and stridently labored to forge links between the *actual* effects of the mainstream presence of adult videos of the 1980s with what they *imagined* were the effects. Much as Capek believed that pornography "subverts healthy sexuality," the anti-pornography discourses of the era repeatedly demonized an imaginary enemy rooted in the fears of cultural contamination. Lancaster argues, "[I]magined victimization takes precedence over any real victimization."<sup>66</sup> Swindell, in 1985, for example, illustrated precisely what Irvine describes in terms of exaggeration, association, and disproportionality: "We're talking about ultimate sexual acts, some would say perverted acts. A lot of these cassettes contain depictions of rape, bestiality, sadomasochism."<sup>67</sup> The fear of contamination was so profound, for Swindell and others, that what pornography *could* be was magnified well beyond what it actually was in

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<sup>65</sup> Herdt 5.

<sup>66</sup> Lancaster 20-21.

<sup>67</sup> Lindsey B14.

service of a greater political goal: solidifying a mythology of “community standards” in an effort to eradicate pornography.

*Community Standards: Legal Regulation of Adult Video*

Mainstream video storeowners increasingly found themselves in the mid-1980s in the crosshairs of the vocal public minority pressuring prosecutors to stop the encroachment of pornography into “decent” neighborhoods. In mid-1984, tensions boiled over in the Cincinnati suburb of Fairfield in a case that became a national example for other anxious storeowners concerned about grassroots pressure.<sup>68</sup> Members of Concerned Citizens for Community Values (CCCV), a local conservative group, confronted Jack Messer, owner of eight mainstream stores (a chain called The Video Store), wanting him to get rid of his adult videotapes.<sup>69</sup> Messer, incensed, decided to fight the opposition—even if it meant, as he suspected, that he would be arrested and charged with obscenity. “Once the community sets a standard,” he said later, “I’ll have no trouble abiding by it. But when they haven’t set a standard, you can’t give a small group of people the right to censor what you have in your store.”<sup>70</sup> CCCV took their fight to Fairfield authorities.

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<sup>68</sup> Ohio’s history in relation to pornography could be the basis of an entire dissertation. Cincinnati’s first regulatory efforts occurred as early as 1956, and county prosecutor Simon Leis effectively eradicated pornography there between 1971 and 1983. Keating founded CDL in the city in 1958, and Jerry Kirk’s National Coalition Against Pornography formed in Cincinnati in 1983. Reuben Sturman’s pornography empire was based out of Cleveland, and Larry Flynt opened his first strip club in Dayton before opening franchises all over the state, leading to the creation of *Hustler* magazine. Both men faced numerous prosecutions in Ohio. See: Michael Burns, “Cincinnati: Anti-Porn Capital,” *United Press International* 19 October 1986.

<sup>69</sup> Earl Paige and Edward Morris, “Obscenity Trials: Messer in Clear, Emerson on Hold,” *Billboard* 12 April 1986: 84; Polman J1.

<sup>70</sup> Marc Berman, “Jack Messer of the Video Store: First Amendment Advocate, First-Rate Retailer,” *Video Business* January 1986: 124.

In June 1984, undercover police purchased five adult videos in one of Messer's outlets and promptly arrested him along with an employee on charges of pandering obscenity.<sup>71</sup> Members of CCCV and the local Assembly of God church picketed in front of the store, and Fairfield city law director John Clemmons subpoenaed Messer's business records—including the membership list and all rental transaction records for the store's 20,000 customers.<sup>72</sup> The strategy was a deliberate attempt to disprove what prosecutors knew would be Messer's strategy: the widespread demand for adult material in the city meant it was well within the "community standards" permissible under *Miller v. California*. The list and transaction records, Clemmons believed, would show that the majority of the store's customers were coming from outside the community, and therefore violating its internal decency standards.

This tactic further illustrates the ways in which the dissemination of pornography made possible by adult video created a growing panic based in the fear of contamination. CCCV and Fairfield authorities believed the "decent" people of Fairfield could not be renting the material—it had to be outsiders, matching the belief that pornography was outside the normal bounds of "healthy" sexuality. A judge quashed Clemmons' subpoena, but the case still went to trial. Ironically, Messer used the very same records to show, as he later put it, "that the adult tape customers were no different from other customers, and the community had accepted this stuff for years."<sup>73</sup> The employee was

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<sup>71</sup> The five titles: *Doing It* (1982, dir. Sven Conrad), *Tapestry of Passion* (1976, dir. Alan Colberg), *Swedish Erotica 33* (1981, dir. Unknown), *Penetration* (1984, dir. Unknown), and *French Classmates* (1978, dir. Unknown). See: General Video of America, *White Paper* L-12.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Matza. "A Question of Privacy: Anyone Who Rents Videotapes Is at Risk of Having the List Made Public." *philly.com*. Philadelphia Daily News. 21 October 1987. Web. 10 April 2013; Berman 123.

<sup>73</sup> Polman J1.

exonerated, but the jury was unable to reach a verdict on Messer's guilt or innocence. Undeterred, and still under community pressure, prosecutors arrested Messer again on similar charges, but the case was thrown out for improper jury selection—but prosecutors still would not quit, and arrested Messer again. A third trial commenced in 1986. This time, the city brought in CDL vice president and attorney Bruce Taylor to prosecute the case, ironically illustrating that Fairfield deemed it perfectly acceptable to bring in an outsider to *defend* values and standards that the city believed were under siege from (less respectable) outsiders.<sup>74</sup> In response, Roy Whitman, chief of Psychiatry at the University of Cincinnati, testified for Messer that the adult videos in question were normal sexual outlets for healthy people, and that the “range of sexual normality” was wide among the people of Fairfield.<sup>75</sup> On 26 March 1986, the jury acquitted Messer 6-2, but the cost, as for Gibson, was steep: some \$80,000 in legal bills, the constant presence of picketers, and the stigma of being a “pornographer.”<sup>76</sup>

Such legal efforts to regulate adult video predated Messer, and Gibson, and in fact started as soon as pornography appeared on the new medium. In late 1979, the Los Angeles Police Department began taking an interest in the city's adult video distributors, and by January 1980 an undercover operation was underway to pin obscenity charges on anyone and everyone involved in the dissemination of video pornography. Detective Jack Rabinowitz opened Unique Video Specialties, a phony distribution business, and began

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<sup>74</sup> “Ohio's Messer Cleared of Obscenity Charges,” *Adult Video News Confidential* May 1986: 1.

<sup>75</sup> Polman J1; Paige and Morris 84.

<sup>76</sup> Polman J1.

As with Gibson, some of these legal bills were paid by adult video distributors. Select Essex, Caballero Control Corporation, Cal Vista, Holiday Video, VCA, and GVA all paid into the defense fund, as did the Cincinnati Dealer's Coalition. See: General Video of America, *White Paper* L-12.

soliciting material from wholesalers. A trip to the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in mid-January brought even more contacts, and by March the operation had yielded tapes from all the major companies then operating in Los Angeles.<sup>77</sup> On 13 March 1980, police simultaneously raided fourteen locations involving nine adult video producers, seizing business records and inventory. They also requested arrest warrants from the courts for 20 individuals on obscenity charges. Seized records showed that, in the previous four weeks, the nine companies had produced 185,000 tapes, making up 80% of the total sold in the United States.<sup>78</sup> While the busts certainly had the effect of demonstrating police interest in the growing enterprise, they ultimately made little difference: two months later, the warrants remained unfilled, and no arrests were made.<sup>79</sup>

By that point, however, another case with national scope dominated headlines. The ambitious effort later known as MIPORN (for Miami Porn) to eradicate pornography began in November 1975 in Dade County, Florida, only a few weeks after Sony released the Betamax to the consumer market. Detective Al Bonanni, operating a phony distribution front called Amore Productions, ostensibly to ship pornography to South America, ingratiated himself into the underground adult film economy. Authorities quickly realized the network of producers and distributors reached far beyond Florida,

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<sup>77</sup> Howard Polskin, "Pornography Unleashed," *Panorama* July 1980: 36.

<sup>78</sup> Joan Sweeney, "Sex-Oriented Videotapes Seized after Two-Month 'Sting' Operation in L.A.," *Los Angeles Times* 15 March 1980: A16; "Coast Raid Set to Shut Nine Pornography Mills," *New York Times* 16 March 1980: 18.

The raided companies: TVX, Wonderful World of Video, Arrow Films, S&L Distributors, Four Star Video, Video Home Library, V.T.S. Enterprises, Cal Vista Video, and JA-RAE Productions.

<sup>79</sup> Polskin 36.

and sought help from the FBI.<sup>80</sup> Already in motion on their own undercover operation, the FBI folded the two into a single, large-scale undercover investigation. The FBI initiated MIPORN in October 1977, an intricate project utilizing two agents, Pat Livingston and Bruce Ellavsky, who, under the pseudonyms Patrick Salamone and Bruce Wakerly, respectively, established Golde Coaste Specialties, yet another phony distribution business. Two-and-a-half-years and \$417,000 later, on Valentine’s Day 1980, 400 FBI agents in ten states conducted raids on 30 businesses, indicted 45 people on obscenity charges, and thirteen more for film piracy.<sup>81</sup> It was, simply put, the most sweeping, organized, and direct attack on the adult film industry in American history—and it captured, as one FBI official told reporters, “every major [adult film] producer and distributor in the country.”<sup>82</sup> Even more important than the arrests and subsequent convictions of a great many of the early adult video pioneers, however, was the larger message sent to both the industry and the public: pornography was dangerous, in need of constant regulation, and posed a threat to society. The investigation set a tone for the coming decade.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Polskin 36.

<sup>81</sup> “U.S. Indicts 45 on Smut, Film Piracy Charges,” *Los Angeles Times* 14 February 1980: A3.

<sup>82</sup> Allan J. Mayer and Ron LaBrecque, “Crackdown on Porn,” *Newsweek* 25 February 1980: 37.

<sup>83</sup> The MIPORN investigation ultimately became an embarrassment for the FBI when Livingston, who could not disengage from his undercover persona and had left his wife and children, was arrested for shoplifting in Lexington, Kentucky on 10 November 1981, using his undercover identity during the arrest and exhibiting psychologically unstable behavior. Deemed an unreliable witness, he was dropped by prosecutors, who were forced to re-indict or drop many of the cases. See: Ron LaBrecque, “An Agent Whose Role Got the Best of Him,” *Newsweek* 20 December 1982: 41; Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne and Peter Pavia, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 244-262, 309-314, 326-331; Ron LaBrecque, *Lost Undercover: An FBI Agent's True Story* (New York: Dell, 1987).

All of these efforts to eradicate pornography, however, failed to address the problem on a national level. Pornography's opponents sought something more systematic, organized, and coordinated in order not only to punish those responsible for contaminating "decent" neighborhoods, but also to shift the cultural discourse. Rather than the worrisome "permissive" status pornography was gradually being afforded with the creeping move into the mainstream through the inclusion of adult titles in video rental stores, the vocal minority wanted to reinforce a hegemonic response requiring guilt and shame as the only viable reactions in order to "protect" the family. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan gave the minority precisely what they wanted: an officially sanctioned effort to reposition pornography as something harmful, and in the process attempt to shift the discourse on "community standards" into a homogenous, hegemonic set of beliefs.

*The Meese Commission: Changing the Discourse*

On 21 May 1984, during a signing of The Child Protection Act, legislation amplifying penalties related to child pornography, Reagan announced the creation of a national commission to study the effects of pornography on society. "[P]ornography is ugly and dangerous," he said. "If we do not move against it and protect our children, then we as a society ain't worth much."<sup>84</sup> Reagan's decision, and his comments, fed directly into the growing panic over pornography, particularly his invocation of the need to "protect our children," which illustrates the fears that pornography was encroaching into "decent" neighborhoods where families were at risk. Indeed, Reagan had been elected on a "pro-family" platform in 1980, during which he called repeatedly for a return to

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<sup>84</sup> "Child Pornography Law Enacted," *New York Times* 22 May 1984: A20.

“traditional” moral values, and had been aided by various conservative and Christian groups in that regard—all of which were ready and waiting for precisely this moment to restore the “moral order” of society.<sup>85</sup> In fact, such groups had already pressured Reagan on this very issue: on 28 March 1983, members of Morality in Media, a federation of anti-pornography groups claiming to represent 100 million Americans, met with Reagan in an effort to push him into naming a “smut czar.”<sup>86</sup> James B. Hill, president of the group, outlined a plan for a coordinated attack by the Justice Department, Postal Service, Customs Service, and FBI that, if used vigorously, would mean “the back of the pornography industry would be broken within 18 months.”<sup>87</sup> In May 1983, 100 Roman Catholic bishops and a dozen Eastern Orthodox bishops followed up with a letter again pressuring Reagan to take action.<sup>88</sup>

Reagan acquiesced to these growing demands, assigning the responsibility for the pornography commission to then-Attorney General William French Smith in early 1985, but it was Smith’s successor Edwin Meese III that took charge in May. Meese, a longtime advisor to Reagan, was the White House’s unofficial liaison to the Evangelical Christian community, had a strict constitutionalist perspective on the Supreme Court, and

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<sup>85</sup> Leslie Bennetts, “Conservatives Join on Social Concerns,” *New York Times* 30 July 1980: A1, B6; Kenneth A. Briggs, “Evangelicals Debate Their Role in Battling Secularism,” *New York Times* 27 January 1981: A12.

<sup>86</sup> Morality in Media was founded by an interfaith clergy group in New York in 1962: Father Morton Hill, Rabbi Julius Neumann, and Reverend Robert Wittenburg as “Operate Yorkville” to combat pornography in local neighborhoods. They were later joined by Reverend Constantine Volaitis, and renamed the group in 1968. Like CDL, Morality in Media became a vocal supporter of grassroots protests and assisted local prosecutors in obscenity cases. See: Donald J. Farole, *Interest Groups and Judicial Federalism* (New York: Praeger, 1998) 135-136.

<sup>87</sup> Don Irwin, “President Tells Morality Group He May Appoint a ‘Smut Czar,’” *Los Angeles Times* 29 March 1983: A10.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Austin, “Bishops in Plea Against Smut,” *New York Times* 25 May 1983: A19.

maintained a rigid, unrelenting stance on law and order.<sup>89</sup> There was no doubt that this new commission would reflect his approach.

The creation of the Meese Commission was not an isolated act; it was born as a response to the *Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*, released on 30 September 1970. The report, based on the results of the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, set up by President Lyndon Johnson in 1969, and completed under President Richard Nixon, came to an unanticipated (and unprecedented) conclusion. After consulting a wide variety of experts and examining broad sets of data, the 18-member commission, chaired by University of Minnesota Law School Dean William B. Lockhart, issued its dramatic recommendation: "Federal, state, and local legislation prohibiting the sale, exhibition, or distribution of sexual materials to consenting adults should be repealed."<sup>90</sup> The commission decried the complete lack of evidence for the belief propagated by conservative groups that pornography caused violence, juvenile delinquency, or immoral character. They also advocated for increased sex education, and concluded: "In general, persons who are older, less educated, religiously active, less experienced with erotic materials, or feel sexually guilty are most likely to judge a given erotic stimulus 'obscene.'"<sup>91</sup> The commission's findings, intended by Johnson (and expected by Nixon) to support traditional conservative perspectives

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<sup>89</sup> A notorious example of Meese's view on crime and punishment occurred when he was asked, in late 1985, by the *U.S. News & World Report* to explain his criticisms of the Supreme Court's "Miranda Ruling," which required police to read suspects their constitutional rights and to have a lawyer present before any questions. Meese responded: "Suspects who are innocent of a crime should. But the thing is, you don't have many suspects who are innocent of a crime. That's contradictory. If a person is innocent of a crime, then he is not a suspect." See: "Justice under Reagan: Reagan Seeks Judges with 'Traditional Approach,'" *U.S. News & World Report* 14 October 1985: 67.

<sup>90</sup> Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, *The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* (New York: Random House, 1970) 51.

<sup>91</sup> Commission on Obscenity and Pornography 26.

seeking to condemn and heavily regulate pornography, caused widespread anger and disbelief.

The findings were immediately and categorically rejected by Nixon, who stated upon its release, “So long as I am in the White House, there will be no relaxation of the national effort to control and eliminate smut from our national life.”<sup>92</sup> The Senate, on 13 October 1970, voted 60-5 to denounce the Report and reject its major findings. Senator John J. McLellan, Democrat from Arkansas and sponsor of the measure, summed up the collective reaction: “The Congress might just as well have asked the pornographers to write this report.”<sup>93</sup> Not everyone on the commission disagreed. Charles H. Keating, Jr., the lone Nixon appointment to the commission (he received the post when Kenneth B. Keating, no relation, resigned in June 1969), had been a vocal and persistent critic during the entire process, disagreeing with nearly everything at every turn. He wrote a dissenting statement to the report that emphasized the urgent need for more regulation.

“Pornography,” he argued, “has reached epidemic proportions.”<sup>94</sup> Keating’s presence on the commission sent a clear message that Nixon was not interested in seeking impartial conclusions; as the founder of CDL in 1956, Keating was the preeminent anti-obscenity crusader in the United States. The strategies and ideologies of CDL made their way not only into Keating’s dissenting opinion in the final report, but also had a dramatic impact on what followed.

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<sup>92</sup> Warren Weaver, “Nixon Repudiates Obscenity Report as Morally Void,” *New York Times* October 25, 1970: 1.

<sup>93</sup> “Senate Votes, 60-5, to Reject and Censure Obscenity Report,” *New York Times* 14 October 1970: 30.

<sup>94</sup> Keating, “Statement of Charles H. Keating, Jr.,” 548.

Additionally, Keating behaved as a general nuisance during and after the proceedings, criticizing the makeup of the commission, accusing its members of bias, and suggesting that hearings had violated public access laws. Upon its completion, he filed for and received a temporary restraining order halting the publication of the findings, a disagreement eventually settled out of court, allowing for the Report's release.<sup>95</sup> Keating's angry response hijacked the media's coverage of the findings, moving the discourse away from the progressive conclusions and replacing it with the same efforts to bolster the hegemonic beliefs that CDL had long been feeding the public, based around three premises: 1) pornography was the same thing as obscenity; 2) it was obviously dangerous; and 3) its eradication required vigorous and continual prosecution. Debate and discussion were unnecessary, and any disagreement was the work of pornographers or suspicious sympathizers—most of which were academics, for whom Keating seemed to hold an unusually strong contempt.<sup>96</sup> Keating also took his condemnation to the pages of *Reader's Digest*, where his trademark panic discourses reached a broad and substantial audience.<sup>97</sup>

Panic was a familiar strategy for Keating, who built CDL on similar premises: position pornography as a threat to the family and the nation; create a one-sided debate demonizing the opposition; and utilize legal strategies based around obscenity laws rather than language of “censorship” to accomplish the eradication of adult material.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “Court Enjoins Publication of Obscenity Report,” *Publishers Weekly* 21 September 1970: 37.

<sup>96</sup> Commission on Obscenity and Pornography 523-527.

<sup>97</sup> Charles H. Keating, “The Report That Shocked the Nation,” *Reader's Digest* January 1971: 37-41.

<sup>98</sup> Whitney Strub, “Perversion for Profit: Citizens for Decent Literature and the Arousal of an Antiporn Public in the 1960s,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15.2 (May 2006): 260.

Furthermore, CDL advocated community politics over federal action and strenuously encouraged local authorities to enforce obscenity laws and for grassroots organizations to protest both lack of prosecution and the very presence of pornography in their communities. Indeed, “the thrust of CDL activity... is to acquaint [the] public and prosecutors with the law at their disposal.”<sup>99</sup> The strategy was remarkably effective: rather than stirring up hysteria or engaging in moralizing discourses susceptible to charges of censorship, Keating and CDL instead crafted an atmosphere in which “the law” was positioned as the important element rather than religious or political judgment, giving the strategy a legal legitimacy and preventing criticism. Thus, by appointing Keating to the commission, Nixon sent a clear message that any outcome other than strict dismissal of any legitimacy of pornography and urgent calls for increased prosecution under existing laws would be unacceptable.<sup>100</sup> Creating new legislation, pornography’s opponents thought, would stall in the court system, be rejected by the public, or simply take too long.

Reagan’s formation of the second commission was clearly a deliberate effort to sweep away the findings from the earlier commission and restore shame and guilt as the primary discourses around pornography. At his initial announcement, he addressed the matter directly: “I think the evidence that has come out since that time, plus the tendency

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<sup>99</sup> Edwin A. Roberts, *The Smut Rakers* (Silver Spring, MD: The National Observer, 1966) 103.

<sup>100</sup> In the 1980s, Keating ran American Continental Corporation, a home construction company, profits from which he used in 1984 to buy the Lincoln Savings and Loan Association, in Irvine, California. Over the next four years, taking advantage of financial deregulation, Keating grew the S&L’s assets to \$5.5 billion with a series of high-risk investments with depositor’s money. American Continental went bankrupt in 1989, triggering the seizure of Lincoln by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, and more than 23,000 investors lost all their money—leaving the government ultimately responsible for more than \$3.4 billion, a major event in the Savings and Loan crisis of the 1980s. Keating was ultimately convicted in both state and federal courts of fraud, racketeering, and conspiracy, and served more than four years in prison in addition to massive fines. See: Michael Binstein, *Trust Me: Charles Keating and the Missing Billions* (New York: Random House, 1993).

of pornography to become increasingly more extreme, shows that it is time to take a new look at this conclusion, and it's time to stop pretending that extreme pornography is a victimless crime.”<sup>101</sup> Meese, agreed, and noted that the rapid growth of the home video industry was “bringing too much pornography into the home.”<sup>102</sup> Clearly, the efforts by the adult video industry to garner respectability, finally achieving increasing success through the inclusion in mainstream video stores, represented a major threat to conservative values based around notions of “decent” behavior. Such beliefs were signaled in the mandate given to the new group: “Determine the nature, extent, and impact on society of pornography in the United States, and to make specific recommendations to the Attorney General concerning more effective ways in which the spread of pornography could be contained, consistent with constitutional guarantees.”<sup>103</sup> The language could not be more telling: it presupposes a pornography problem and an institutional failure to solve it; additionally, it ignores the previous commission’s effort to move away from just such an approach.

On 20 May 1985, a year after Reagan’s decision to form the commission, Meese announced the makeup of its members, selecting prosecutor Henry Hudson from Arlington County, Virginia to head the group.<sup>104</sup> Hudson had all but eliminated pornography in Arlington County through vigorous law enforcement efforts, garnering

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<sup>101</sup> Ronald Reagan. “Remarks on Signing the Child Protection Act of 1984.” *presidency.ucsb.edu*. The American Presidency Project. 21 May 1984. Web. 13 April 2013.

<sup>102</sup> “Q&A: Is New Action Needed on Pornography?,” *New York Times* 23 June 1985: E24.

<sup>103</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, *Final Report* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986) 215.

<sup>104</sup> Philip Shenon, “Meese Names Panel to Study How to Control Pornography,” *New York Times* 21 May 1985: A21.

the praise of Reagan in meetings with leaders of the Morality in Media activist group in March 1983.<sup>105</sup> “Arlington County basically is a residential community,” Hudson claimed, “and citizens have very little tolerance for adult bookstores and publications.”<sup>106</sup> Hudson, like Meese and Reagan, believed firmly in the “decent neighborhoods” paradigm, in which pornography had dire potential to contaminate hegemonic family structures.<sup>107</sup> Despite Hudson’s assurance that “this is not going to be a commission that that is trying to disgorge dirty thoughts from people’s minds,” he also made no distinction between pornography and obscenity, claiming “pornography is not covered or protected by the First Amendment,” the standard strategy taken by pornography’s opponents to get around constitutional protections.<sup>108</sup> Alan Sears, an anti-pornography prosecutor from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Louisville, Kentucky, with experience in more than 20 state and federal obscenity cases, was named Executive Director. Sears, another key participant in the panic discourses, said after the commission’s conclusion that “the largest consumers of pornography in this country are children.”<sup>109</sup> Sensing the bias from the beginning in the commission’s makeup, Barry Lynn, legislative counsel to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), noted that he feared the commission would

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<sup>105</sup> Stephen Vaughn, *Freedom and Entertainment: Rating the Movies in an Age of New Media* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 126.

<sup>106</sup> “Q&A: Is New Action Needed on Pornography?,” E24.

<sup>107</sup> Hudson was perhaps an ideal fit for the position, given Meese’s law and order emphasis. In 1980, freshly elected as Arlington County’s prosecutor, he told a reporter that “I live to put people in jail,” and that he got “a great deal of satisfaction from removing people from our community who prey on others.” See: Sandra G. Boodman, “I Live to Put People in Jail”; Henry Hudson: Chief Prosecutor Making a Name,” *Washington Post* 30 July 1980: B1.

<sup>108</sup> “Q&A: Is New Action Needed on Pornography?,” E24.

<sup>109</sup> “The Lawyer Behind the Government’s Pornography Report,” *Barrister* 13 (1986): 39.

“dream up new ways to curtail speech about human sexuality,” and that “a train marked ‘censorship’ ... has just left the station.”<sup>110</sup>

Ten others made up the rest of the commission, which Meese and Hudson both called a “balanced group.” Nearly all were conservative opponents of pornography. Harold “Tex” Lezar had worked for William F. Buckley, Jr., was a former Nixon speechwriter, and served as the Assistant Attorney General for Legal Policy.<sup>111</sup> Edward J. Garcia was a U.S. District Judge in California appointed by Reagan.<sup>112</sup> Diane D. Cusack, a city councilor from Scottsdale, Arizona, advocated rigorous obscenity prosecutions, and, while she acknowledged that not all pornography was obscene under the Miller Test, it was nevertheless objectionable to “the strongest unit of society—the family,” and that it “challenges one of those understandings held by society for thousands of years—that sex is private, to be cherished within the context of love, commitment, and fidelity.”<sup>113</sup> Later, after the commission concluded its work, she claimed that prosecution was the only way to “put the pornographers out of business.”<sup>114</sup> Frederick Schauer, Law Professor at the University of Michigan, an authority on obscenity laws, had argued in various articles that pornography was not constitutionally protected.<sup>115</sup> Park Elliot Dietz, Professor of

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<sup>110</sup> Shenon, “Meese Names Panel to Study How to Control Pornography,” A21.

<sup>111</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, *Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986) 480.

<sup>112</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 479-480.

<sup>113</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 478, 486-487.

<sup>114</sup> Matthew Scully, “Dark Side' Still a Threat 2 Years Later,” *The Prescott Courier* 23 March 1988: 1B.

<sup>115</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 481; Hendrik Hertzberg, “Big Boobs: Ed Meese and His Pornography Commission,” *The New Republic* 14 July - 21 July 1986: 21.

Law, Medicine, and Behavioral Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, believed that pornography was a threat to society's moral stability.<sup>116</sup>

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, a group founded in 1977 to advocate for religious-based social conservatism, and Reverend Bruce Ritter, Catholic Priest and founder of Covenant House, a charity for homeless teenagers, were particularly noteworthy additions, as each had no compunction whatsoever about expressing their long-standing and religious-based views on the evils of pornography throughout the proceedings.<sup>117</sup> The final three members of the commission were the least aligned with conservative politics. Deanne Tilton-Dufree, was a former social worker and president of the California Consortium of Child Abuse Councils; Ellen Levine edited *Women's Day* magazine and was vice president of CBS Magazines; and Judith Veronica Becker taught clinical psychology at Columbia University and had vast experience working with sex offenders and victims of sexual abuse.<sup>118</sup>

Whereas the 1970 commission had two years and a \$2 million budget, the second attempt had less than \$500,000 and twelve months, and funded no original research, instead relying on a Workshop on Pornography and Public Health hastily organized (at the request of Hudson) by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.<sup>119</sup> Unlike the array of

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<sup>116</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 478; Vaughn 128.

<sup>117</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 479-480.

<sup>118</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 477, 480-481.

Levine was the only member of the media invited to join the commission. While it may seem obvious, it is still worth pointing out that no one from the adult film industry was part of the commission, though many did testify at the hearings.

<sup>119</sup> This workshop, attended by none of the members of the commission except for Hudson, took place on 22 – 24 June 1986, at a hotel in Arlington, Virginia. Since no funding had been designated by the commission for research on pornography (a noteworthy omission), Koop had to find money elsewhere. The Department of Justice finally allocated \$50,000 for the project, which was designed to be an addendum to

social scientists and collections of data girding the first report, the second relied on a parade of witnesses recounting anecdotal stories of the dangers of pornography in their lives as its primary “evidence.” Twelve hearings in six cities were held between 19 June 1985 and 22 January 1986, with 208 witnesses appearing—among them 68 policemen, 30 self-identified “victims” of pornography, and 14 representatives from anti-pornography groups.<sup>120</sup> The few scientists that did participate strongly criticized the results, and accused the commission of misrepresenting their research.<sup>121</sup> Levine and Becker offered a particularly strong criticism, saying that the efforts to “tease the current data into proof of a causal link between [pornography and violence] cannot be accepted.”<sup>122</sup>

Meese took delivery of the Report on 9 July 1986 in the halls of the Justice Department.<sup>123</sup> During his press conference, Meese stood under a partially topless female

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the commission’s final report. Nineteen participants, mostly social scientists, attended, and five papers were presented, all on the social effects of pornography. Koop delivered the findings to Hudson on 1 August 1986—nearly a month after the commission released its final report, making the event somewhat pointless. See: C. Everett Koop, “Report of the Surgeon General's Workshop on Pornography and Public Health,” *American Psychologist* 42.10 (October 1987); Edward P. Mulvey and Jeffrey J. Haugaard, *Report of the Surgeon General's Workshop on Pornography and Public Health* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 4 August 1986).

<sup>120</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 465-470.

Two editors of *Forum* magazine (a subsidiary of *Penthouse*) documented the proceedings and got the first detailed analysis into the marketplace almost immediately after the Report’s release. See: Philip Nobile and Eric Nadler, *The United States of America Vs. Sex: How the Meese Commission Lied About Pornography* (New York: Minotaur Press, 1986).

The book was priced at \$3.95, according to Marcia Orovitz, vice president of newsstand circulation at *Penthouse*, because “the purpose was not to get rich, it was to get the information in the book disseminated.” See: Edwin McDowell, “Some Say Meese Report Rates an X,” *New York Times* 21 October 1986: 13.

<sup>121</sup> Hertzberg 23.

<sup>122</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 129.

<sup>123</sup> Robert Pear, “Panel Calls on Citizens to Wage National Assault on Pornography,” *New York Times* 10 July 1986: A1, B7.

statue, titled “The Spirit of Justice,” sending photographers scrambling for the indelible, deeply ironic image.<sup>124</sup> Concluding that pornography was indeed harmful to society, the Report offered 92 specific recommendations, all of which were designed to stifle or prevent pornography from ever reaching the marketplace, and condemned anyone who derived pleasure from the material as dangerous and perverted.<sup>125</sup> Central to the commission’s efforts, and taken directly from the CDL playbook, was the overt strategy of broadening the definition of obscenity as widely as possible. In keeping with any panic, they also tried to amplify the threat by exaggerating the crisis—and connecting it

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The Government Printing Office issued the Report in two-volumes after its release, pricing it at \$35, but sold few copies. Anyone could reprint the Report, which was public domain, but every major publishing house declined. Given that the Report’s recommendations included making it easier to prosecute those who disseminated adult material, and that the Report itself was filled with descriptions of such material, no one was willing to gamble on a potential obscenity trial. Finally, in September 1986, Rutledge Hill Press of Nashville, which specialized in books about Tennessee and the Southeast, reprinted the report in a single volume, with edited sections and none of the images, shrink-wrapped and with a warning label. Anti-pornography groups were by far the largest purchaser, buying more than 30,000 copies, with an additional 7,000 copies going to bookstores. Religious conservative bookstores hesitated to carry the book, with one dealer noting: “I agree with the commission’s findings, but there are many things objectionable in the book.” See: McDowell 13; Terry Teachout, “The Pornography Report That Never Was,” *Commentary* 84.2 (1986): 51-57.

Publishers had reason to worry. In late 1971, a jury convicted William Hamling, longtime publisher of adult books with his Greenleaf Classics company, and two employees, on obscenity charges related to their printing and distribution of the 1970 Report. Hamling had included more than 500 images with the book and sent out more than 50,000 advertisements. Unable to decide whether the publication itself was obscene (particularly as it was a government document alongside the images), the jury instead convicted the three for the related pamphlets and advertising. See: “Illustrated Version of Obscenity Study Brings Indictments,” *New York Times* 6 March 1971: 24; Murrery Schumach, “Obscene Photos Pornographic Regardless of Text, Court Says,” *New York Times* 5 August 1971: 30; Everett R. Holles, “4 Are Convicted in Smut Mailings,” *New York Times* 25 December 1971: 22.

<sup>124</sup> This image serves as the frontispiece for this dissertation. Attorney General John Ashcroft covered the statue in 2002 with curtains, which were removed by his successor, Alberto Gonzalez, in 2005. See: “Briefing,” *New York Times* 11 July 1986: A12; Dan Eggan, “Sculpted Bodies and a Strip Act at Justice Dept.,” *Washington Post* 25 July 2005: A2.

<sup>125</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography 260.

The first draft of the Report, written by nine staff members under the guidance of Executive Director Sears, tallied 1,200 pages, including 200 pages of the testimony. Schauer objected, calling many parts of the draft too one-sided and simplistic, and wrote a new draft himself, which became the basis of what was eventually released. See: Hertzberg 22.

to a need for the new commission, suggesting the previous one had clearly failed to address the problem. “Since 1973,” they wrote, “the nature and extent of pornography in the United States has changed dramatically. The materials that are available today are more sexually explicit and portray more violence than those available before 1970.”<sup>126</sup> Such phrasing occurred throughout the report, building a three-part strategy: disavow the earlier commission’s efforts; emphasize violence in pornography that harmed viewers; and characterize pornography as an epidemic requiring vigorous and immediate prosecution. As William E. Brigman describes, the recommendations were “designed to reorient, or repackage the war on pornography. Although the new laws appeared to be aimed at child pornography, they were designed to regulate the producers of all sexually explicit materials out of existence.”<sup>127</sup> Ultimately, the findings leave no question of the commission’s desire to dismiss the conclusion of the 1970 report: “We reject the argument that all distribution of legally obscene pornography should be decriminalized.”<sup>128</sup>

Specifically, the Report differed from the earlier commission’s findings in several distinct ways. First, there was a vigorous push to encourage the application of the Racketeering Influence and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act in obscenity cases, not only to serve as a deterrent, but also to bankrupt those engaged in pornography, rendering them obsolete.<sup>129</sup> “In addition to the penalties already prescribed by statute,” the

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<sup>126</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography 461.

<sup>127</sup> William E. Brigman, “Politics and the Pornography Wars,” *Wide Angle* 19.3 (1997): 159.

<sup>128</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography 363-364.

<sup>129</sup> Congress enacted RICO in 1970 as Title IX of the Organized Crime Control Act in order to limit the influence of organized crime on legitimate businesses and unions. In addition to enhanced fines, prison terms, and other penalties, RICO made it possible for courts to seize property and profits involved in and

commission wrote, “a defendant would be subject to forfeiture of any profits derived from or property used in committing the offense.”<sup>130</sup> Second, the commission encouraged prosecutions under pimping, pandering, and prostitution laws—which, as they pointed out, had the added benefit of circumventing the issue of obscenity entirely.<sup>131</sup> Paying people to have sex, the commission reasoned, was the basis of the adult film industry, and thus fell squarely under such regulatory laws.<sup>132</sup> Third, they supported the creation of a national obscenity task force, in order to organize, coordinate, and assist with prosecutions around the country.<sup>133</sup> Fourth, the commission actively, stridently, and

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derived from criminal activity—even property and profits from otherwise legitimate activities. Necessary for RICO to be invoked were what the act deemed “predicate acts,” or previous, related criminal actions, thus establishing a pattern. It was not necessary to have a legal record for these predicate acts; in fact, no prior prosecution was necessary, and even acquitted charges could be used as the basis for RICO.

Originally, Congress did not include obscenity violations as predicate acts, but Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina buried an amendment to allow them on the last day of the session in 1984 in an extensive rewriting of the federal criminal code (that was, in turn, buried within a continuing resolution intended to keep the government functioning) that received no debate, no press coverage, and no dissent. See: Matthew D. Bunker, Paul H. Gates and Sigman L. Splichal, “Rico and Obscenity Prosecutions: Racketeering Laws Threaten Free Expression,” *Journalism Quarterly* 70.3 (Autumn 1993): 692-699.

<sup>130</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 86-88.

<sup>131</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 104-106.

<sup>132</sup> While there were numerous prostitution and pandering arrests in throughout the adult film industry's history, the issue escalated to a serious degree in the early 1980s when police crackdowns on adult film production led to most producers leaving Los Angeles to shoot outside the city limits or in San Francisco. In 1982, the passage of a California law requiring a mandatory three-year prison sentence for anyone convicted of hiring people to perform sex acts made the situation even more dire. Harold Freeman, veteran adult filmmaker, was arrested in October 1983 on five counts of pandering surrounding the production of the film *Caught From Behind II* (1983). The five counts were for hiring female performers for the film, and did not include the male performers. Freeman was convicted in May 1985, lost on appeal to the California Court of Appeals, and finally had his conviction overturned by the California Supreme Court, which ruled on 1 February 1989 that pandering would only apply to an adult film production if the performers were paid for the sexual gratification of the producers or the actors, rather than merely for a performance. This groundbreaking decision makes adult film production possible in California, and highlights the performance-based nature of pornography, regardless of its basis in sexual activity. See: Stephen G. Bloom, “Judge Refuses to Give Mandatory 3 Years to Maker of Porn Films,” *Los Angeles Times* 16 July 1985: V\_A6; *California v. Harold Freeman*. 488 U.S. 1311. California Supreme Court. 1 February 1989. [openjurist.org](http://openjurist.org). Web. 20 April 2013; McNeil, Osborne and Pavia 402-414.

<sup>133</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 100.

urgently encouraged the opponents of pornography to engage in activist, grassroots protests—as accorded them under the First Amendment (an encouragement they did not extend to the pornographers, despite identical constitutional protections), an overt suggestion designed to utilize the power of the marketplace to shut down the industry.<sup>134</sup>

The final recommendation I wish to spotlight hinged on the regulation of peep show booths, a history I detail in chapter two. The commission argued that peep show facilities should “not be equipped with doors,” and that “the occupant of the booth should be clearly visible to eliminate a haven for sexual activity.” They added, “Any form of indecent behavior by or among ‘Adults Only’ pornographic outlet patrons should be unlawful.”<sup>135</sup> These recommendations, among the least controversial (and shortest) in the Report, nevertheless bluntly illustrate the commission’s stance on sexual pleasure. Something to be avoided, contained, regulated, eliminated, or made unlawful, pleasure is treated in the recommendation as something “indecent,” unacceptable for public discussion or enactment, and in need of discouragement. It also illustrates the careful tiptoeing the commission did around the purpose of pornography at all, which the Report treats in a clinical, removed fashion, as if sexual pleasure were an unmentionable, distasteful, and indecent set of unfortunate behaviors. Vance, who attended the hearings, reaches a similar conclusion: “Pornographic images were symbols of what moral conservatives wanted to control: sex for pleasure, sex outside the regulated boundaries of marriage and procreation. Sexually explicit images are dangerous, conservatives believe,

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<sup>134</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 72.

<sup>135</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 82-83.

because they have the power to spark fantasy, incite lust, and provoke action.”<sup>136</sup>

Discourses of shame ultimately define the commission’s legacy, and their refusal to invite anyone to testify about the possibility of pleasure—or even to acknowledge such people existed—illustrates most directly the ideological agenda at its core.<sup>137</sup> The possibility of women’s pleasure, in particular, is distorted so completely in the Report that one could conclude from reading it that such a possibility did not even exist, and that any “inappropriate” sexual behavior could destroy society’s moral foundation through its apparent attack on the “family,” always the strongest code word more accurately meaning women. The burden of responsibility placed so completely on women in the Report ultimately makes the possibility of female sexual pleasure—from pornography or otherwise—seem like grotesque perversion.

Such discourses might be most evident in the individual statements by the commissioners, nearly entirely a collection of moralizing judgments that must have made members of the adult film industry nervous. Commission member Dietz’s statement encapsulated not just his own views, but also much of the panic then gripping culture more broadly regarding the potential for pleasure from pornography, and is worth quoting at length:

I, for one, have no hesitation in condemning nearly every specimen of pornography that we have examined in the course of our deliberations as

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<sup>136</sup> Carole S. Vance. "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography." *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*. Eds. Faye Ginsberg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990. 118-134.

<sup>137</sup> Vance notes that Hudson acknowledged the lack of testimony on the possibility of pleasure, and was fond of asking journalists if they knew of anyone who could relate positive experiences. He even said the staff had been unable to find such people, further illustrating how the panic discourses created deep divides between “decent” and “contaminated” people. See: Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,” 130.

tasteless, offensive, lewd, and indecent. According to my values, these materials are themselves immoral, and to the extent that they encourage immoral behavior they exert a corrupting influence on the family and on the moral fabric of society. Pornography is both causal and symptomatic of immorality and corruption. A world in which pornography were neither desired nor produced would be a better world. [...] A great deal of contemporary pornography constitutes an offense against human dignity and decency that should be shunned by the citizens, not because the evils of the world will be eliminated, but because conscience demands it.<sup>138</sup>

Dobson was no less vitriolic in his statement, arguing that “pornography is a source of significant harm to the institution of the family and to society at large,” and claimed “what is at stake here is the future of the family itself.” He noted that “America could rid itself of hard-core pornography in 18 months” if the commission’s recommendations were followed.<sup>139</sup> Ritter was equally severe, positing that “all sexually explicit material solely designed to arouse in and of itself degrades the very nature of human sexuality and as such represents a grave harm to society and ultimately to the individuals that comprise society.”<sup>140</sup> In one of the few moments in the Report where the relentless containment of

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<sup>138</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 478-479, 491-492.

<sup>139</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 507-509.

<sup>140</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 512.

Ritter grew Covenant House into the largest shelter network for homeless teenagers in the United States, with sites in 15 cities and more than \$90 million in annual funding. In 1990, he was forced to resign after allegations of sexual misconduct with the young people under his care, as well as financial mismanagement. He was never charged with a crime, although the statute of limitations had expired for his accusers. He died in seclusion on 7 October 1999. See: Tina Kelley, “In Quiet Fields, Father Ritter Found His Exile,” *New York Times* 22 October 1999: B1; Kathleen Hendrix, “Bruce Ritter: A Puzzle for His Friends,” *Los Angeles Times* 19 April 1990: 1.

women's sexuality was called into question, Becker, Levine, and Tilton-Durfee defended the rights of consensual behavior. "We respect... the rights of all citizens to participate in legal activities if their participation is truly voluntary," they wrote. "We reject any judgmental and condescending efforts to speak on women's behalf as though they were helpless, mindless children."<sup>141</sup> It was among the only moments where women's sexuality was addressed in anything other than the terms of victimization.

Women's sexuality was addressed most directly in the Report through the voices and ideological frameworks of various anti-pornography feminists, courted strategically by the commission for their perspectives on pornography that, somewhat paradoxically, aligned with the conservatives' political goals. As Vance argues, "the commission's staff and the Justice Department correctly perceived that an unabashedly conservative position would not be persuasive outside the right wing. For the commission's agenda to succeed, the attack on sexually explicit material had to be modernized by couching it in more contemporary arguments, arguments drawn chiefly from anti-pornography feminism and social science."<sup>142</sup> In one of the more perplexing alliances of the 1980s panic, the decidedly non-feminist conservatives bent on destroying pornography found themselves not only warmly welcoming feminist activists to their hearings, but invoking and praising their rhetoric and strategies—with substantial and calculated alterations—in the final Report. However, anti-pornography feminism had its roots in far different agendas than the commission's efforts to eradicate pornography.

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<sup>141</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 540.

<sup>142</sup> Vance, "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography," 121.

*Harm, Degradation, and Shame: Anti-Pornography Feminism*

As Nan Hunter points out, the “core of the feminist debate about pornography occurred during a ten-year bell curve” between 1976 and 1986, but its roots stretch back much further, through the “second wave” of the larger feminist movement, which had long been concerned with issues of power, representation, sexuality, and violence.<sup>143</sup> The anti-pornography specifics of the movement coalesced with the formation of three groups in the mid-1970s: Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) in Los Angeles, Women Against Violence in Pornography in Media (WAVPM) in San Francisco, and Women Against Pornography (WAP) in New York. Each group was concerned with what they perceived to be the links between pornography and violence against women, including rape, which became the focal point for the movement.<sup>144</sup> The movement grew quickly, leading to rallies, marches, and conferences on both coasts, where activists began solidifying the movement’s message: free speech concerns had overshadowed the harm pornography was causing women by inciting men to violence and rape, as well as being a visualization of those same elements. These sentiments were summarized by activist, WAP member, and author Andrea Dworkin at a pornography conference at New York University in December 1978: “All over this country, a new campaign of terrorism and vilification is being waged against us. Fascist propaganda celebrating sexual violence

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<sup>143</sup> Nan D. Hunter. "Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates: A Chronology." *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*. Eds. Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter. New York: Routledge, 1995. 16-29.

<sup>144</sup> My very brief examination of the anti-pornography feminist movement hardly does justice to what is an extraordinary period in American history. Carolyn Bronstein masterfully details the intricate and detailed histories of these three groups in her extraordinarily well-researched book. See: Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Also see: Laura Lederer, ed., *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1980).

against women is sweeping this land. Fascist propaganda celebrating the sexual degradation of women is inundating cities, college campuses, small towns. Pornography is the propaganda of sexual terrorism.”<sup>145</sup> Such rhetoric, which filled Dworkin’s 1979 book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, in some ways, aligned with the panic then sweeping through conservative groups, which similarly argued that pornography was not only toxic, but causing harm to women—even if the two groups’ views on women’s place in society could not be more diametrically opposed.<sup>146</sup>

The anti-pornography feminist movement, particularly in New York, escalated their tactics to involve more direct confrontations, creating slide shows (featuring the most extreme and violent examples, hardly representative of the vast majority of pornography, despite their claims otherwise) and guided tours of Times Square adult bookstores and theaters.<sup>147</sup> Resistance and disagreement from other feminists came in late 1979 when Samois, a lesbian sadomasochism (S/M) group founded in 1978 in San Francisco, began publicly confronting WAVPM about its insistence that all forms of violence in pornography were equally in need of eradication—even those that were

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<sup>145</sup> Judy Klemesrud, “Women, Pornography, Free Speech: A Fierce Debate at N.Y.U.,” *New York Times* 4 December 1978: D10.

<sup>146</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigree, 1979).

<sup>147</sup> Georgia Dullea, “In Feminists’ Antipornography Drive, 42d Street Is the Target,” *New York Times* 6 July 1979.

Noted queer historian John D’Emilio wrote about his firsthand experiences with the WAP slideshow and tour in 1980, noting the ways in which the event was framed in particular ways to discourage debate or disagreement, created simplistic conclusions, blurred distinctions, ignored any concept of fantasy, and assumed causal connections where there were none, all in an effort to create absolutist links between pornography equaled violence. He argues, “Women Against Pornography is at best misguided and at worst downright dangerous,” and concluded the group’s continual contradictions would eventually be its demise. See: John D’Emilio. “Women Against Pornography: Feminist Frontier of Social Purity Crusade?” *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University*. New York: Routledge, 1992. 202-215.

consensual.<sup>148</sup> Samois published *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M* in 1981, and members of WAVPM (which never took an official stance on S/M, despite its incessant invocation of it as being representative of all pornography) countered with the anthology *Against Sadomasochism* in 1982.<sup>149</sup> The pitched battles that ensued have more commonly come to be known as the “Feminist Sex Wars,” in which “pro-sex” feminists argued vociferously against what they perceived to be censorship and the repression of normal, healthy sexuality.<sup>150</sup> Rubin, one of the founders of Samois and a frequent target of anti-pornography feminists, summed up the period and the ways in which anti-pornography feminists mistakenly used pornography as a target.

“[P]ornography has become an easy, convenient, pliant, and overdetermined scapegoat for problems for which it is not responsible,” she argued, and insightfully added, “Gender inequality and contemptuous attitudes toward women are endemic to this society and are consequently reflected in virtually all our media, including advertising and pornography.

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<sup>148</sup> "Samois." *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*. Ed. Marc Stein. New York: Thomson Gale, 2004. 67-69.

<sup>149</sup> Samois, ed., *Coming to Power: Writing and Graphics on Lesbian S/M* (San Francisco: Alyson Books, 1981); Robin Ruth Linden, Darlene Pagano, Diana E. H. Russell and Susan Leigh Star, eds., *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* (Palo Alto, CA: Frog in the Well Press, 1982).

<sup>150</sup> The “Sex Wars” erupted most visibly at the “Toward a Politics of Sexuality” conference at Barnard College in April 1982, at which anti-pornography feminist groups protested and disrupted the proceedings, leading administrators to pull the conference program from distribution. This watershed event and the chaos it produced represented a historical turning point, coalescing both “sides” of the issue into even greater public action. The events at Barnard College are detailed in an anthology of works presented at the conference, and the conference program was also eventually published. See: Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London: Pandora Press, 1992); Carole S. Vance, ed., *Diary of a Conference on Sexuality* (New York: Faculty Press, 1983); Elizabeth Wilson, “The Context of ‘Between Pleasure and Danger’: The Barnard Conference on Sexuality,” *Feminist Review* 13 (Spring 1983): 35-41.

Also see: Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol, eds., *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures* (Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1993).

They do not originate in pornography and migrate from there into the rest of popular culture.”<sup>151</sup>

The legacy of the anti-pornography feminist movement, however, most clearly resides in a series of civil rights ordinances written by Dworkin and feminist lawyer Catherine MacKinnon in 1983. First attempted in Minneapolis, the legislation made pornography (which was defined as the “graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words”) a civil rights violation and a form of sex discrimination, allowing women who had been “harmed” by its effects to sue producers and distributors in civil court and collect damages. The Minneapolis city council passed the ordinance in December 1983, but Mayor Donald Fraser vetoed it immediately. It passed again in July 1984, but was vetoed again by Fraser. Simultaneously, another version of the ordinance focusing specifically on pornography containing violence was passed by the Indianapolis city council and signed into law in May 1984 by Mayor William Hudnut.<sup>152</sup> It was struck down as unconstitutional by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in *American Booksellers v. Hudnut*, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court, affirming that pornography that was not obscene was constitutionally protected, even from a civil rights perspective.<sup>153</sup> Further attempts were made in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Los Angeles in 1985, as well as Bellingham, Washington in 1988, but

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<sup>151</sup> Gayle Rubin. "Misguided, Dangerous, and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-Pornography Politics." *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures*. Eds. Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol. Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1993. 18-40.

<sup>152</sup> Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, eds., *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>153</sup> *American Booksellers Association. v. Hudnut*. 475 U.S. 1001. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals. 1986. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 13 April 2013.

all failed for similarly violating the constitutional protections held by non-obscene pornography.<sup>154</sup>

None of this stopped the Meese Commission from aligning with the anti-pornography feminists. MacKinnon and Dworkin testified in the hearings, and Dworkin's full testimony was included in the Report.<sup>155</sup> The commission, while acknowledging that the Supreme Court had rejected Minneapolis-style ordinances, agreed with the intentions of the approach—even suggesting that traditional obscenity laws could be strengthened with the addition of civil damages, clearly ignoring the fact that anti-pornography feminists had long been opposed to obscenity laws as moralistic and anti-sexual.<sup>156</sup> In the end, the commission essentially hijacked anti-pornography feminism for its own political gain, distorting and manipulating its discourses in a twisted effort to eradicate pornography rather than challenge underlying social structures. Vance outlines the specifics of this process, particularly in terms of the differences over the meaning of “degradation,” a key term used frequently by both groups:

For anti-pornography feminists, pornography degrades women when it depicts or glorifies sexist sex: images that put men's pleasure first or suggest that women's lot in life is to serve men. For fundamentalists, “degrading” was freely applied to all images of sexual behavior that might

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<sup>154</sup> MacKinnon and Dworkin, eds., *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings*.

In response to the ordinances, pro-sex feminists and other free speech advocates formed the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT), with groups in New York, Madison, Wisconsin, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their responses to the censorship efforts proposed by MacKinnon and Dworkin in the civil rights ordinances are collected in: Caught Looking Inc., ed., *Caught Looking: Feminism, Pornography & Censorship*, 2nd ed. (East Haven, CT: LongRiver Books, 1992).

<sup>155</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 198-199.

<sup>156</sup> Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,” 121-122.

be considered immoral, since in the conservative worldview immorality degraded the individual and society.<sup>157</sup>

Issues of power, inequality, male dominance, and patriarchy were evacuated by the commission because, as Vance concludes, there was never any real doubt that the desired goal for the Report was to shift the discourse away from those very issues, and to reinstate a paradigm in which “the only reliable protection for women was to be found in returning to the family and patriarchal protection.”<sup>158</sup>

Upon the Report’s release, anti-pornography feminists, unlike the social scientists who felt their work had been misinterpreted and misused in pursuit of a political agenda, did not protest or criticize the findings. In fact, Dworkin and MacKinnon *praised* the commission’s conclusions, arguing that the Report recommended the types of civil rights legislation that had already been rejected by the Supreme Court; additionally, WAP founder Dorchen Leidholdt claimed she was not “embarrassed at being in agreement with Ed Meese.”<sup>159</sup> Ultimately, the legacy of the paradoxical alignment of the two groups, which could not have been more stridently opposed in terms of the underlying ideologies governing their stances, remains a deeply illustrative example of the toxicity of pornography, as well as the ways in which the panic surrounding it often created, as it were, strange bedfellows. It also reveals the patriarchal power of the commission itself, which systematically and successfully shifted the discourse surrounding pornography back to a hegemonic, assumed state of danger. On that level, it succeeded wildly in

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<sup>157</sup> Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,” 123.

<sup>158</sup> Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,” 125.

<sup>159</sup> Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,” 124; David Firestone, “Battle Joined by Reluctant Allies,” *Newsday* 10 July 1986: 5.

erasing any lingering traces of the earlier commission's efforts to rethink the cultural climate, particularly in terms of pleasure.

*After Meese: The Assault on Adult Video*

The scope of the commission's power was demonstrated even before the Report was released. Sears, in February 1986, following the testimony of Donald Wildmon, founder of the National Federation of Decency (which later became the American Family Association), and with the direction and approval of the commission, sent a letter to 23 retailers that carried adult magazines. The letter notified the retailers (primarily drugstore and convenience store chains) that the commission had "received testimony alleging that your company is involved in the sale or distribution of pornography," and that "this commission has determined that it would be appropriate to allow your company an opportunity to respond to the allegations prior to drafting its final report section on identified distributors." He closed the letter with an ominous warning: "Failure to respond will necessarily be accepted as an indication of no objection."<sup>160</sup> Obviously fearful of what appeared to be a threat of impending obscenity prosecution, Southland Corporation, owners of 4,500 7-Eleven stores (and franchisers of an additional 3,600), bowed to the pressure and pulled *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Forum* magazines from its shelves in mid-April. Southland President Jere Thompson issued a public statement that might as well have come from the commission: "The testimony indicates a growing

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<sup>160</sup> "Chill Factor," *Time* 23 June 1986: 46.

Attached to the letter was a photocopy of Wildmon's testimony, though it was not labeled as such. In part, the photocopy read: "Few people realize that 7-Eleven convenience stores are the leading retailers of porn magazines in America." See: Hertzberg 24.

public awareness of a possible connection between adult magazines and crime, violence and child abuse.”<sup>161</sup> The panic was clearly escalating.

By late April 1986, The People’s Drug, Dart Drug, and Rite Aid joined Southland, and on 1 May, Thrifty Drug capitulated as well, removing *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Playgirl* from its 582 stores, issuing a brief statement saying that the empty magazine racks would be used to “improve displays and give more space to ‘family-type’ magazines.”<sup>162</sup> Conservative groups, predictably, applauded the decision. Wildmon, denying that his testimony or the letter had anything to do with it, said: “These decisions have been made by some socially conscious businessmen who are thinking about how they can better serve the interests of family values.”<sup>163</sup> The magazine publishers, however, were outraged. *Playboy*’s lawyer, Bruce Ennis, decried the decisions, asserting the original letter was a deliberate intimidation effort with no basis in law, and Maxine J. Lillienstein, general counsel to the American Booksellers Association (ABA), condemned the actions: “This is the kind of conduct one might expect from

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<sup>161</sup> “No More Adults: 7-Eleven Bans Skin Mags.” *time.com*. Time. 21 April 1986. Web. 14 April 2013.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Richter, “Thrifty Drug to Quit Selling Adult Magazines,” *New York Times* 2 May 1986: 1.

<sup>163</sup> Richter 12.

Wildmon authored two books characteristic of the panic in the 1980s, both of which fed the mythology of the besieged family needing protection from the “filth” invading “decent” neighborhoods. The first, *The Home Invaders* (1985), offered this cover tagline: “A shocking analysis of TV and the media, and how you can help stem the mind-polluting tide seeking to submerge us all!” The second, *The Case Against Pornography*, carried this cover tagline: “A foremost authority shows the startling effects of mind pollution in our land and outlines the ways to win the war we dare not lose.” See: Donald E. Wildmon, *The Home Invaders* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985); Donald E. Wildmon, *The Case Against Pornography* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986).

organized crime or from a totalitarian dictatorship, not from an official agency of the United States Government.”<sup>164</sup>

In May 1986, *Playboy*, the Association of American Publishers, and the ABA filed suit against Meese and the commission, alleging that they had created a “blacklist” amounting to prior restraint of free speech, and *Penthouse* filed a similar suit alleging “intimidation and coercion” by the commission. Specifically, *Playboy*’s suit demanded that the commission not include the list of retailers in the final Report, withdraw its letter to retailers, and advise them that Report’s conclusions did not find *Playboy* to be obscene or in violation of the law.<sup>165</sup> On 3 July, Judge John Garret Penn granted the requests, noting, “It can be argued that the only purpose served by that letter was to discourage distributors from selling the publications, a form of pressure amounting to an administrative restraint of the plaintiff’s First Amendment rights.”<sup>166</sup> The final Report, as ordered, did not include the list. Sears never backed down from sending the letter, saying later that its intention all along had been “fairness,” and that it ultimately made no difference because the circulation of adult magazines had been precipitously dropping anyway, a clear sign that “the American people have been voting with their pocketbook for a long time.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> “Chill Factor,” 46; Philip Shenon, “Playboy and Booksellers Suing Pornography Panel,” *New York Times* 20 May 1986: A24.

<sup>165</sup> Shenon, “Playboy and Booksellers Suing Pornography Panel,” A24.

<sup>166</sup> Philip Shenon, “Pornography Panel Barred from Publicizing Retailers,” *New York Times* 4 July 1986: A6; “Court Bars Porn Panel from Listing Retailers in Report,” *Publishers Weekly* 18 July 1986: 16.

<sup>167</sup> “The Lawyer Behind the Government’s Pornography Report,” 15.

Sears was right about adult magazine circulation numbers. *Playboy* fell from a high of 7 million to 3.4 million between 1972 and mid-1986, *Penthouse* from 4.5 million to in 1978 to 2.7 million, and *Hustler* from 1.9 million in 1976 to 800,000. It would be disingenuous, however, to suggest that these were simply people turning away from pornography. Adult video’s entry into the market and rapid growth during this

Ultimately, “voting with the pocketbook” might have been the message the commission wanted to send all along, particularly with their encouragement of grassroots opposition. Although the verdict in the *Playboy* case might appear to be a victory, it was, in the end, remarkably useless. The stores did not restock the magazines, and conservative groups, emboldened by their growing power, fed the panic by demanding further action. The CDL strategy of reconfiguring the discourse away from pleasure and back to control proved overwhelmingly successful. As Vance notes, “[T]he true genius of the Meese Commission lay in its ability to appropriate terms and rhetoric, to deploy visual images and create a compelling interpretive frame, and to intensify a climate of sexual shame that made dissent from the commission’s viewpoint almost impossible.”<sup>168</sup> The next step was to make the Report’s recommendations a reality. On 23 October 1986, Meese announced the formation of a team of prosecutors to handle pornography cases, the creation of a national center for obscenity prosecution that would serve as an information clearinghouse and training facility, and a mandate requiring all 93 U.S. Attorney’s offices around the country to have at least one lawyer trained in pornography prosecution. It was, he said, the beginning of an “all-out campaign against the distribution of obscene material,” and the primary target was adult video.<sup>169</sup>

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same period was undoubtedly responsible to a large degree for these losses. *Hustler* magazine conceded as much in late 1984: “Will X-rated videotapes make men’s magazines obsolete? You can bet on it.” See: Thomas B. Rosenstiel, “Sex Losing Its Appeal for Playboy,” *Los Angeles Times* 25 August 1986: 17; Ben Pesta, “X-Rated Video: Will It Make Adult Theaters and Men's Magazines Obsolete?,” *Hustler* October 1984: 54.

<sup>168</sup> Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography,” 119.

<sup>169</sup> Philip Shenon, “Meese, in a Move on Pornography, Creates Special Prosecution Team,” *New York Times* 23 October 1986: A21.

Meese’s action was welcomed by conservatives, particularly since the first major cultural test of the reaction to the Meese Report had resoundingly failed: on 11 June 1986, Maine voters overwhelmingly voted against legislation that would have made it a crime to sell or promote obscenity, defined by the

To find an example of the empowerment and determination felt by members of law enforcement, prosecutors, and the judiciary following the release of the Meese Report, one need only look a few miles away from where it was assembled. On 14 August 1987, Dennis Pryba, his wife Barbara, and her sister Jennifer Williams were indicted in Fairfax County, Virginia, under federal RICO laws for distribution of obscene materials through a chain of video and bookstores, the first time in the United States such tactics were used in relation to pornography.<sup>170</sup> While Gibson and Messer were relentlessly targeted and prosecuted multiple times by zealous officials, the Pryba case took on entirely new and different significance: if convicted, the three faced forfeiture of all their assets—not just their businesses, but their homes, vehicles, and anything and everything potentially related to the income garnered from the sale of the pornography in question. Authorities charged that the Prybas had systematically engaged in the connecting of multiple pornography-related businesses since 1973, had distributed obscene materials through those businesses, and, due to prior obscenity convictions, had committed predicate acts, the crucial requirement to invoke RICO prosecution.

While the investigation of Pryba's dealings began in September 1985 when Fairfax police and FBI agents from Alexandria, Virginia began to work together in a joint probe of Washington D.C. adult businesses, the case more accurately serves as the legacy

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“community standards” test established by *Miller*. It was the first such statewide measure in the country. In some senses, the measure itself was meaningless, since obscenity was not constitutionally protected anyway; the measure, then, can be seen as indicative of the larger panic gripping the nation in the mid-1980s. Its defeat was among the few bright spots for those seeking to stem the tide of relentless containment and eradication of pornography. See: Matthew L. Wald, “Obscenity Debate Focuses Attention on Maine, Where Voters Weigh Issue,” *New York Times* 10 June 1986: A18; Matthew L. Wald, “Maine Anti-Obscenity Plan Soundly Defeated,” *New York Times* 12 June 1986: A27.

<sup>170</sup> Ken Jenkins, “3 in Fairfax Indicted in Pornography Case; Charges Brought under Racketeering Law,” *Washington Post* 15 August 1987: G1.

of the Meese Commission's direct recommendation to use RICO laws to eradicate pornography.<sup>171</sup> In fact, Hudson, as a reward for his work heading the commission, was nominated by Reagan to serve as United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia—and it was his office that spearheaded the Pryba case, thus bringing the recommendations full circle.<sup>172</sup> Pryba and his wife operated the nine-location Video Rental Centers chain in the D.C. area, as well as the Educational Books chain of adult bookstores, which had three outlets. Prosecutors, electing to use the RICO Act, charged the Prybas with three counts of racketeering, four counts of interstate transportation and distribution of obscene videocassettes, three counts of interstate transportation and distribution of obscene magazines, and two counts of tax evasion. Williams, the bookkeeper for Educational Books, was charged with two counts of racketeering and seven counts of interstate transportation of obscene materials. If convicted, the Prybas faced 101 years in prison, fines up to \$25,000 on each racketeering count, fines up to \$5,000 on each obscenity count, and fines up to \$100,000 on each tax evasion count, and complete forfeiture of all of their assets.<sup>173</sup> At issue were four adult videos and nine adult magazines, seized in raids on the Pryba's businesses in October 1986 that, prosecutors

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<sup>171</sup> Caryle Murphy, "Federal Grand Jury Probe Launched; U.S. Grand Jury in Alexandria Subpoenas Records of 11 Firms," *Washington Post* 29 November 1986.

<sup>172</sup> Hudson was later nominated by President George W. Bush to be a federal judge in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia in 2002, where he continues to preside as of 2013. See: Linda Greenhouse, "Prosecutor in Pentagon Case: Quiet 'Bulldog' and Moralizer," *New York Times* 28 June 1988: A20; "Biographical Directory of Federal Judges: Hudson, Henry E." *ffc.gov*. Federal Judicial Center. n.d. Web. 13 April 2013.

<sup>173</sup> "Racketeering Law Used for First Time on Obscenity Case," *New York Times* 16 August 1987: 29.

admitted, had generated a grand total of \$105.30 in sales and rentals.<sup>174</sup> It was, needless to say, a pivotal moment in the history of adult video.

The effort by Hyde's office was not designed to punish Pryba, or to regulate his business activities. The indictments were intended to stop him, permanently, from selling pornography. D.C. area officials had long been aware of Pryba, a protégé since the late 1960s of Herman Womack, an infamous former philosophy professor at George Washington University turned adult bookstore owner and publisher, convicted of obscenity in 1961 and 1971.<sup>175</sup> The latter conviction permanently barred Womack from engaging in commerce related to pornography. Pryba was also convicted in May 1971 on six counts of selling and exhibiting obscene films, but that did not deter him; by 1981, he had left behind the highly restrictive zoning policies of metropolitan D.C. for the more open suburbs of Silver Springs and Takoma Park, and the *Washington Post* called him a

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<sup>174</sup> Caryle Murphy, "Tape Seizures Part of Wider Investigation; Area Obscenity Probe Linked to N.Y., Ohio," *Washington Post* 16 October 1986: A37; Caryle Murphy and Kent Jenkins, "Obscenity Case Battlefield Shifts; Meese's Pornography Crusade Hinges on Forfeiture," *The Washington Post* 12 November 1987: C1; Caryle Murphy, "Va. Pornography Dealers Guilty of Racketeering," *Washington Post* 11 November 1987: A1; Robert F. Howe, "Panel Upholds Racketeering Conviction in Va. Pornography Case," *Washington Post* 11 April 1990: B4.

The four adult videos: *She-Male Encounters 9: She-Male Confidential* (1984, dir. Kim Christy), *Wet Shots* (1981, dir. Unknown), *The Girls of the A-Team* (1985, dir. Jerome Tanner), and *The Punishment of Anne* (1975, dir. Radley Metzger). The nine magazines: *Torment*, *She... Who Must be Obeyed*, *Bottoms Up*, *Slave Training*, *Tied Up*, *Super Bitch*, *Tender Shavers*, *Crotches*, and *Poppin' Mamas*. See: United States of America v. Dennis Pryba. 900 F.2d 748. United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. 9 April 1990. *LexisNexis*. Web. 13 April 2013.

<sup>175</sup> James Lardner, "A Pornographer's Rise, Fall; the Rise and Fall of City's First King of Pornography," *Washington Post* 12 January 1978: A1.

Womack was also a gay rights pioneer who fought against obscenity prosecutions of gay publications, created a chain of adult bookstores and cinemas for gay men, created Guild Press to print and distribute gay books and magazines, supported the Mattachine Society (among the earliest homophile organizations in the United States, founded in 1950) by printing their publications through his printshop, published the national gay newspaper *The Gay Forum*, among other activities. He died in 1985. See: Rainbow History Project. "Dr. Herman Lynn Womack." *rainbowhistory.org*. Rainbow History Project. Web. 13 April 2013.

“pornography kingpin.”<sup>176</sup> Residents were not pleased, forming the Concerned Citizens’ Effort to stop what they saw as the encroachment of pornography into their “decent” neighborhood. “People have to pass [Pryba’s bookstore] to go to work and to church and to school,” noted organizer Brian Weatherly, once again illustrating the fear that pornography would contaminate “normal” society.<sup>177</sup>

Prosecutors agreed. Between 1981 and the racketeering indictments in August 1987, juries convicted Educational Books fifteen times on obscenity charges, and in 1985 convicted one of the Video Rental Center outlets for renting obscene material (a verdict thrown out by the Virginia Supreme Court for improper jury selection).<sup>178</sup> Still, an undeterred Pryba continued to exercise his rights to rent and sell pornographic material—until, emboldened by the Meese Commission’s recommendations, authorities escalated the effort by realizing the only way to stop him was to eradicate any further potential of engaging in commerce by utilizing RICO as a legal strategy. Following the seizures and indictments, the trial commenced in Alexandria, Virginia in October 1987, and on 10 November, a federal jury, after three days of deliberation, found the Prybas guilty on all the obscenity and racketeering counts, and acquitted them on the tax evasion charges; they also convicted Jennifer Williams on two counts of racketeering and seven counts of

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<sup>176</sup> “P.G. Shop Owner Found Guilty in Porno Case,” *Washington Post* 4 May 1977: B8; Michael McQueen, “Portable Porn; Porno Migration; Suburbanites Fear Influx of Sex-Oriented Businesses,” *Washington Post* 5 March 1981: MD1.

<sup>177</sup> McQueen, “Portable Porn; Porno Migration; Suburbanites Fear Influx of Sex-Oriented Businesses,” MD1.

<sup>178</sup> Murphy, “Federal Grand Jury Probe Launched; U.S. Grand Jury in Alexandria Subpoenas Records of 11 Firms,” B1; Jenkins, “3 in Fairfax Indicted in Pornography Case; Charges Brought under Racketeering Law,” G1.

interstate transportation of obscene materials.<sup>179</sup> The jury reconvened on 16 November to determine the extent of the potential forfeitures, and after nine hours of deliberation ordered the Prybas to surrender all of their business assets—including their warehouses, the entire inventories of the eight video stores and three bookstores, and five company vehicles. Hudson put the value of the assets at well over \$1 million—but expressed disappointment that the jury did not also seize the couple’s home and personal car, illustrating the degree to which, in his desire to eradicate pornography, he had inherited the mantle of Comstock.<sup>180</sup> RICO laws permitted such action, arguing that the fruits of illegal ventures could not be used for further profit, even if the materials were otherwise constitutionally protected. This was how Hudson turned \$103.50 worth of “obscene” materials into more than \$1 million in seized assets that were never brought to trial.<sup>181</sup>

On 18 December 1987, Dennis Pryba was sentenced to 58 years imprisonment (with all but three of them suspended), five years’ probation, 500 hours of community service, and fined \$75,000. Barbara Pryba was sentenced to 37 years imprisonment (all suspended), three years’ probation, 500 hours of community service, and fined \$200,000 dollars.<sup>182</sup> Educational Books was fined a total of \$200,000, and Williams received three years probation.<sup>183</sup> District Judge T.S. Ellis III urged Barbara Prybas during the sentencing to “find employment in some wholesome area,” and suspended her sentence

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<sup>179</sup> Murphy, “Va. Pornography Dealers Guilty of Racketeering,” A1.

<sup>180</sup> Murphy, “Va. Pornography Dealers Guilty of Racketeering,” A1.

<sup>181</sup> Of course, the federal government could not sell the inventory of pornographic material. It was placed into storage, perhaps the ultimate (to use Walter Kendrick’s term) “secret museum.” See: Caryle Murphy, “Adult Book Store Owner Sentenced to Three Years,” *Washington Post* 19 December 1987: F3.

<sup>182</sup> Murphy, “Adult Book Store Owner Sentenced to Three Years,” F3.

<sup>183</sup> Ruth Marcus, “Racketeering Test Upheld in Va. Obscenity Case,” *Washington Post* 16 October 1990: B5.

because he did not want to separate her from the Prybas' 13-year-old son—a concern he did not extend to Dennis Prybas.<sup>184</sup> The court immediately dispatched marshals to padlock the doors of all the Prybas' businesses. On 9 April 1990, the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the conviction, and on 14 October 1990 the United States Supreme Court declined to hear the case, thereby upholding the lower court's ruling.<sup>185</sup> In denying the Prybas' claim that the seized goods were constitutionally protected, the Appellate Court wrote, "The First Amendment may be used as a shield, but it is not a shield against criminal activity."<sup>186</sup> The Prybas' career as purveyors of pornography was over.<sup>187</sup>

For the Justice Department, however, this case was only the beginning. In 1986, prior to the release of the Meese Report, prosecutors indicted only 10 people on obscenity-related charges in the United States; that number rose to 71 in 1987 and showed no signs of slowing down.<sup>188</sup> The Prybas case was one among many. Six owners of five video stores were arrested in December 1986 in St. Louis after a three-month undercover investigation led to the seizure of more than 300 adult videotapes.<sup>189</sup> In

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<sup>184</sup> Murphy, "Adult Book Store Owner Sentenced to Three Years," F3.

<sup>185</sup> Barbara A. Pryba Dennis E. Pryba, Educational Books, Inc. and Jennifer G. Williams v. United States, 498 U.S. 924. Supreme Court of the United States. 15 October 1990. *LexisNexis*. Web. 13 April 2013.

<sup>186</sup> United States of America v. Dennis Pryba. 748. United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. 9 April 1990. *LexisNexis*. Web. 13 April 2013.

<sup>187</sup> Ronald Selinger, owner of the Transworld Video Sales, a wholesaling operation in Florida, was another victim of RICO prosecutions in the mid-1980s. Prosecuted twice, Selinger was the focus of two sting operations in which authorities created phony, operational video stores to ensnare him and his employees on obscenity and racketeering charges. See: Paul Blythe, "Dealer Charged: Boca Police Arrest Film Wholesaler," *Palm Beach Post* 14 June 1985: B1; Earl Paige, "Racket Busts Hit Fla. Sellers of Adult Video," *Billboard* 13 July 1985: 1, 74; Lisa Getter. "15 Arrested in Probe of Pornography." *Miami Herald*. 26 September 1986. Web. 17 April 2013.

<sup>188</sup> Philip Shenon, "Justice Dept. Plans Anti-Racketeering Drive Against Pornographers," *New York Times* 12 January 1988: A16.

<sup>189</sup> "Five Video Stores Busted for Obscenity in St. Louis," *Adult Video News Confidential* February 1987: 4.

September 1985, owner Donald Wiener, his son Steven, and three employees of Lemon Grove Video Exchange outside San Diego were arrested and charged with distributing obscene matter in regards to six adult videotapes.<sup>190</sup> In keeping with the legacy of MIPORN, authorities often created elaborate undercover operations and phony businesses. In January 1985, two Los Angeles police officers, posing as the owners of “Blue Moon Video,” attended an adult video convention in Las Vegas and feigned interest in various distributors’ catalogs. The resulting investigation led to the indictments of more than 20 people in February 1986.<sup>191</sup> Panic rhetoric was a key part of the case, with authorities exaggerating and distorting the seized materials in order to justify the “protection” of the public. Los Angeles city attorney James Hahn told reporters, “Videotapes seized by the police during this operation go far beyond the average public perception of pornography.”<sup>192</sup>

Various communities opted for methods other than prosecution, frequently bordering on prior restraint of free speech. In mid-1986, prosecutors in Livingston and Oakland counties in Michigan sent letters to video stores warning them that eight titles had been deemed obscene, giving them the opportunity to pull them to avoid prosecution.<sup>193</sup> Often, containment efforts crossed over beyond pornography. In 1986, a

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<sup>190</sup> “X-Rated Film Shown as Evidence in Obscenity Trial,” *Los Angeles Times* 1 March 1986: SD\_A3.

<sup>191</sup> Jan Klunder, “Porn Suspect Allegedly in Organized Crime,” *Los Angeles Times* 15 February 1986: V\_A10; John H. Weston, “It’s the Law? Obscenity Laws and the Effects on Video Retailers,” *Adult Video News Confidential* September 1987: 12; John H. Weston, “Nine Misdemeanor Obscenity Cases Filed Against Video Wholesalers,” *Adult Video News Confidential* May 1986: 8.

<sup>192</sup> “20 Charged in L.A. Obscenity ‘Sting,’” *Los Angeles Times* 14 February 1986: V\_A3.

<sup>193</sup> The eight films: *Sex Busters* (1984, dir. Adam), *Night of the Spanish Fly* (1976, dir. Bob Mason), *Fast Cars Fast Women* (1981, dir. Scott McHaley), *Seduction of Lana Shore* (1984, dir. Kaye Vie), *Ass Busters* (year, director unknown), *Blazing Zippers* (1976, dir. Boots McCoy), *Up and Coming* (year, director

North Carolina sheriff ordered a rental storeowner to remove copies of Paramount Home Video's *Strong Kids, Safe Kids*, an educational film starring Henry Winkler designed to teach children about the dangers of child abuse, because it used correct anatomical terms like penis, anus, and vulva. Ironically, the film suggested that children "shouldn't be punished for using obscene or sexual words," and advocated early sexual education.<sup>194</sup> North Carolina authorities obviously disagreed. Obscenity, it seemed, often extended even to descriptions of the human body, let alone its representations. Such action kept squarely in line with the panic, particularly in its fear of the corruption of children.

Even those companies only peripherally related to the industry felt the wrath of community and legal pressure. In spring 1986, Noel Bloom, founder of Caballero Video (sold in 1986 to other members of the company), moved his Creative Video Services company to Thousand Oaks, California, a quiet suburb of Los Angeles. CVS specialized in videotape duplication—including adult videos. A small group of incensed local citizens banded together to form Citizens Against Pornography (CAP), aligned it with CDL, and declared war on Bloom, who had earlier been targeted in the MIPORN investigations.<sup>195</sup> Marilyn Wade, vice president of CAP, spoke at a public forum that included Mayor Alec Fiore. "We won't permit the onslaught of garbage into our town."<sup>196</sup> Frustrated city officials, however, could do nothing, since forbidding the

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unknown), and *Bodacious TA-TA's* (1985, dir. Paul Vattelli). See: "Michigan Prosecuting Attorneys Crack Down on Obscenity," *Adult Video News Confidential* June 1986: 6.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Silverman, "X-Rated Hv Suppliers Stay Blue, but over Competition, Not Meese," *Variety* 3 September 1986: 117; *Strong Kids, Safe Kids*. Dir. Rick Hauser. 1984. VHS.

<sup>195</sup> Bloom's was one of the cases dropped in the MIPORN investigation due to Livingston's shoplifting arrest.

<sup>196</sup> Thomas Omestad, "Alarm Sounds in Thousand Oaks over Sex Video Supplier," *Los Angeles Times* 20 April 1986: V\_A4.

company from doing business would violate CVS's constitutional rights. Instead, Fiore vowed to monitor the facility's activities, promising prosecution at the first sign of obscenity.

Preoccupying activists like those in CAP were municipal zoning issues, another key element in adult video's regulatory history. Cities, struggling to accept that pornography was, barring obscenity, constitutionally protected, had long sought other ways to restore "decency" within their borders. Zoning provided an ideal solution, allowing municipalities to ignore more traditional legal means in an effort to regulate, contain, or eradicate adult entertainment industries.<sup>197</sup> Most notorious among these efforts was undoubtedly Boston, which, in 1974, designated a downtown area known as Liberty Tree Park as the only space permissible for adult-oriented businesses. More commonly known as the "Combat Zone," the area drew intense scrutiny due to the centralization of crime and violence.<sup>198</sup> By 1977, the city created the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) to eradicate the adult businesses through aggressive business strategies and create a more "respectable" neighborhood.<sup>199</sup> Cities across the United States, desperate to get rid

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<sup>197</sup> Seth S. King, "Foes of Pornography Winning a Few Skirmishes, but Not the Major Battles," *New York Times* 28 November 1975: 52.

<sup>198</sup> John Kifner, "Boston 'Combat Zone' Becomes Target of Police Crackdown," *New York Times* 4 December 1976: 10.

<sup>199</sup> "Americana: Taming the Combat Zone." *time.com*. Time. 19 September 1977. Web. 12 March 2013.

Eric Schaefer and Eithne Johnson's extensive research on the history of the "Combat Zone" remains not only essential for understanding its history, but also for the very necessary continuing work on municipal zoning strategies and how they dramatically impacted pornography. See: Eric Schaefer and Eithne Johnson. "Quarantined! A Case Study of Boston's Combat Zone." *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*. Eds. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. 430-453.

of the “porno plague,” as a *Time* cover story described it in early 1976, turned increasingly to zoning strategies.<sup>200</sup>

As with obscenity prosecutions, such efforts were met with intense and unrelenting legal challenges from the adult industry. Two specific Supreme Court decisions historically stand out, and illustrate how cities inserted “community standards” into municipal zoning strategies designed, ultimately, to eradicate rather than protect pornography. In the first, *Young v. American Mini Theatres* (1976), the Court upheld a Detroit ordinance forbidding adult businesses from congregating together, within 1,000 feet of churches or schools, or within 500 feet of a residential zone; it was, in effect, the opposite of Boston’s strategy, and aimed to eliminate the “pollution” of city areas by the concentration of pornography, but also to keep the “decent” parts of town from being infiltrated. The Court argued that such a strategy was a routine part of land use regulation, and designed to keep the city safe from the types of crime and violence evident in areas such as the “Combat Zone.”<sup>201</sup> For adult businesses, however, it was a reminder that they were different, “diseased,” and highly suspicious—and were subject to municipal regulations not faced by other types of commerce.

In 1986, the Court decided the second case, *Renton v. Playtime Theatres*, in which they upheld a Renton, Washington ordinance that had taken the Detroit model and amplified it. In addition to the distance regulations, Renton had created “zones,” similar to Boston, where adult businesses could operate—dispersing them in small areas where no congregation could occur, thus dramatically limiting land parcel availability. The

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<sup>200</sup> “The Porno Plague,” *Time* 5 April 1976: 58-63.

<sup>201</sup> Mayor of Detroit Young, et al. v. American Mini Theatres, Inc., et al., 427 U.S. 50. Supreme Court of the United States. 24 June 1976. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 13 April 2013.

Court upheld the ordinance, arguing that Renton had merely created a “time, place, and manner” regulation rather than a content restriction. Thus the city had concerned itself with “secondary effects” rather than restricting speech, a crucial distinction allowing cities everywhere to contain the locations of adult businesses with extreme prejudice—so long as area was available, somewhere, within the city.<sup>202</sup> For the adult industry, the combination of *Young* and *Renton* meant that cities could regulate them through either dispersal or containment zoning strategies—and, all the while, position them discursively as threatening to the communities in which they resided.<sup>203</sup> Pleasure, once again, was left out entirely of the “community standards” debate in favor of control.

Video storeowners as a whole reacted to the escalation of censorship efforts with a wide variety of responses, with some forming coalitions to hold firm against prosecutorial and zoning efforts and others welcoming the chance to “clean up” the rental industry. The spectrum of reactions at the 1986 VSDA convention typifies the lack of unity. With the Meese Report looming, tensions were high going into the annual dealers’ gathering. Given the theme “Freedom of Choice” by organizers in a effort to recognize the censorship struggles faced by retailers, the event nevertheless did not offer a single official discussion, panel, or workshop on topics related to adult video (a standard offering at previous events), instead preferring to address it indirectly—and, perhaps, more from a concern that cultural censorship efforts might escalate to include R-rated

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<sup>202</sup> Inc. City of Renton et al. v. Playtime Theatres, et al., 475 U.S. 41. Supreme Court of the United States. 25 February 1986. *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 13 April 2013.

<sup>203</sup> As with obscenity laws, a more detailed and nuanced history is not possible in the limited space of this dissertation, but I have drawn on useful research in order to understand what can be a very complex and complicated set of histories. See: Mackey, *Pornography on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws, and Documents*; Sam R. Collins, “Adults Only! Can We Zone Away the Evils of Adult Businesses?,” *Journal of Natural Resources and Environmental Law* 13.1 (1997-1998).

films.<sup>204</sup> Christine Hefner, president of *Playboy*, was invited to give the keynote speech, in which she vociferously attacked the Meese Report and its supporters. She encouraged storeowners to resist cultural censorship efforts, noting that they were the most important line of defense in a larger battle. “[I]f retailers interpret the report as a legitimization of extreme pressure groups’ right to dictate their merchandising mix,” she noted in a related interview, “then it won’t matter what the majority of consumers want in terms of choice. We will have self-censorship.” She also warned retailers that pornography’s opponents would return, again and again, if not met with firm, organized resistance.<sup>205</sup> Despite these tacit admissions of support, not every VSDA member felt encouraged by the organization. Reuben Sturman, for example, the veteran adult film industry member and owner of GVA and the Visual Adventures rental stores in Cleveland, argued, “if the adult video marketplace were to disappear tomorrow morning, the powers in the VSDA would be thrilled and delighted.”<sup>206</sup> In the end, however, the VSDA’s opinion on the issue mattered not at all.

*“What a Difference!”: Corporate Policy and the End of Respectability*

While the tensions around adult video swirled in the courts, on the streets, in the VSDA convention hall, and in the Meese Commission’s Final Report, perhaps the major battle against the encroachment of pornography into “decent” neighborhoods ended

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<sup>204</sup> Such concerns led to the brief moment in which the VSDA and MPAA, bitter historical enemies due to battles over the “first sale” doctrine, nearly formed a coalition against censorship, fearing that community groups might begin pressuring prosecutors to go after “obscene” content in Hollywood films. Nothing came of the idea. See: Earl Paige, “VSDA & MPAA May Team to Battle Porno Legislation,” *Billboard* 22 March 1986: 86.

<sup>205</sup> Chris Morris, “Fighting the Climate of Censorship,” *Billboard* 30 August 1986: 13.

<sup>206</sup> Tony Seideman, “Video Dealers Are Tense over Anti-Porn Drive,” *Billboard* 30 August 1986: 88.

quietly in a handful of corporate boardrooms. The effort waged by the opponents of pornography found no better ally, ultimately, than capitalism. While the overwhelming majority of early video storeowners carried (and profited from) adult titles, they were mostly independent, single-store owners, or members of small regional chains. As the rental industry matured, pornography represented an obstacle to those seeking sanctioned forms of respectability. Coopersmith argues “one tendency across technologies and businesses is that, as they mature and reach wider audiences, some participants have tried to improve their status by repositioning themselves and their products. They may accept some market loss for a gain of prestige and legitimacy.”<sup>207</sup> This proved especially true for the home video rental industry, which, in its quest to avoid the panic spreading across the country, increasingly positioned itself as “family-oriented,” a strategy defined by the jettisoning of pornography.

George Atkinson’s Video Station chain, examined in chapter two, steadfastly carried adult video until it failed in the mid-1980s (as outlined in chapter two), but it was virtually alone in that decision as the “Mom-and-Pop” stores grew into an increasingly formal, corporatized industry of franchises. The only other major video rental operation in the 1980s to offer adult video was Movie Gallery, founded in Dothan, Alabama in 1985 by Joseph T. Malugen and H. Harrison Parrish. While only a small chain in the late 1980s, with a total of 50 outlets by 1987, the company’s aggressive mergers and stock offerings in the late 1990s and early 2000s eventually led to more than 2,000 stores by 2003.<sup>208</sup> In many of their stores, the company carried adult video, recognizing that,

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<sup>207</sup> Coopersmith, “Pornography, Technology and Progress,” 117.

<sup>208</sup> Sheila M. Poole. “Georgia Video Rental Company Foresaw More Than a Fad in the Mid-1980s.” *galegroup.com*. Knight-Ridder/Tribune Business News. 15 June 1995. Web. 12 April 2013.

despite making up only 5% of revenues, the material had a long shelf life and a base of interested customers.<sup>209</sup>

Outside of Movie Gallery, however, the development of large-scale adult video rental corporations occurred without adult tapes. Turkish immigrant Erol Onaran started his career repairing television sets in the 1960s, began selling movies on video in 1980, and eventually built a video rental business into more than two hundred Erol's Video stores—all without adult titles.<sup>210</sup> "It's a matter of our being a family-oriented company," said Onaran in 1984. "People can come in and take anything off the shelf and not be offended."<sup>211</sup> Oranan never wavered from the policy, and the stores, a fixture in the Mid-Atlantic states, permanently refused to offer adult video to its customers.

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<sup>209</sup> Seth Lubove. "Porn Gallery." *forbes.com*. Forbes. 28 February 2005. Web. 12 April 2013.

Movie Gallery's policy came under fire in 2001 when the American Family Association (AFA) formed a coalition of other conservative groups, including the Christian Coalition, Family Policy Network, Kids Hurt Too, and the Florida Family Association to protest, and AFA Special Projects Director Randy Sharp even had multiple meetings with Movie Gallery executives, but the company steadfastly refused to change its policy. "Movie Gallery's position is and will remain that we can't allow any organization, or person, or handful of people, to censor the product lines that we carry," said a company spokesperson during the protests. It was, perhaps, the only moment in video rental history that a major chain stood up to protest groups in defense of pornography. See: "Movie Gallery Refuses to Remove Porn." *afajournal.org*. American Family Association. January 2001. Web. 12 April 2013.

Movie Gallery's long-standing corporate policy met criticism again in 2005 when the company acquired Hollywood Video, then the second largest chain in the United States, taking Movie Gallery's total number of stores to nearly 5,000. The AFA, fearing that Movie Gallery would permit adult video in the former Hollywood Video locations, initiated a massive publicity campaign. Supporters sent 34,000 emails to Mark Wattles, the devout Mormon founder of Hollywood Video, urging him to stop the merger, but Wattles was powerless to stop the deal with only 10% ownership of the company. He ultimately quit rather than work for Movie Gallery—which, ultimately, never placed adult movies into the Hollywood Video locations. See: Lubove, "Porn Gallery." Web.

<sup>210</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) 282-282.

<sup>211</sup> Luis Aguilar, "Erol's Video: Rental King Made the 'American Dream' His Own," *Washington Post* 1 July 1984: 5.

Sounds Easy, founded in 1980 in Salt Lake City, Utah, eventually grew to more than 130 stores, but founder David Meine firmly refused to carry adult tapes from the beginning. When the panic erupted in the mid-1980s, and owners began banding together to defend their constitutional rights to carry pornography, Meine blasted them: “What percentage of our customers already perceive the video store as a porn outlet and are no longer renting adult movies? I cannot understand how stocking X-rated movies allows a video store to be a respectable, family-oriented business.”<sup>212</sup> Meine’s comments illustrate, once again, the links between quality, respectability, and gender. As I outline in chapter one, the association between respectability and family points to a deeper set of beliefs about women’s pleasures. If, as Meine correctly argues, the typical neighborhood video store had become a “porn outlet” by 1986, what ramifications did that have on the cultural fantasy that women were the bearers of “decency” for society at large? From that perspective, just as it had been during the trials of Jack Messer in Cincinnati, “decent” people had to be protected from pornography, which surely was only being rented by outsiders, “perverts” who would contaminate the community much like pornography itself.

The depths of this belief, as well as the illusory nature of its contours, can be seen in an incident involving Meine in the mid-1980s. Learning that a franchisee in Minnesota was in violation of the corporate pornography policy, Meine went to confront him and restore order. Before doing so, however, he waited, silently observing the customers and their adult video selections. What he saw shocked him: “It was all these businessmen and

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<sup>212</sup> David Meine, “The X-Rated Image,” *Video Store* August 1986: 12.

housewives,” he noted. “I had been picturing all these biker types, but heck no.”<sup>213</sup>

Meine’s comments illuminate the power of the cultural belief in the toxicity of pornography, its capability of contaminating “decent” neighborhoods, and the way it must always be assigned to an outsider, rather than the “normal” people making up the community in order to demonize its threatening potential. Yet, the comments also reveal the power of the highly gendered, familial structures at work: Meine’s specific identification of “businessmen” and “housewives” was not incidental. Those two descriptors, making up what he (and others) clearly perceived to be the “normal” social order, had to be protected, even if that meant paternalistically protecting them, as it were, from themselves. Despite the evidence confronting him, Meine was undeterred. Sounds Easy did not change its corporate policy.<sup>214</sup>

Adventureland Video, founded by Martin Ehman in Pleasant Grove, Utah, in 1981, grew to more than 600 locations by 1986, mostly in rural areas, and all with a strict policy forbidding adult video. The company went even further: in November 1985, all locations asked customers to sign a petition asking the Hollywood studios to release edited versions of R-rated films. “Many excellent movies cannot be brought into the home because of scenes they contain,” the petition read. “Therefore, we, the undersigned, support Adventureland Video in their effort to have motion picture studios produce and distribute, for family viewing, edited versions of existing R-rated movies.” More than 10,000 customers signed the document by late 1986.<sup>215</sup> National Video, founded in 1981

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<sup>213</sup> Polman JI.

<sup>214</sup> Polman JI.

<sup>215</sup> “Adventureland Video Buys Video Biz and... Raps R-Rated Pix,” *Video Business* September 1986: 16; Earl Paige, “Adventureland Video Maps Growth,” *Billboard* 16 March 1985: 4.

in Portland, Oregon by Ron Berger, grew by 1986 to be the largest video chain in North America, with more than 1,100 locations—many of which were obtained through mergers and acquisitions. On 1 April 1986, a three-member storeowner committee voted unanimously to force new and existing franchisees to abide by a policy forbidding adult video. Proving Coopersmith's argument regarding temporary profit loss for perceived long-term gain, Berger noted, "We're likely to be taking a step backward in terms of market share," but added that the move was designed to be part of "the image we're trying to cultivate," which was, as committee chairman Michael Katz described, to be "synonymous with family entertainment."<sup>216</sup> National Video further linked the "family" to the gendered mythology fearing the consequences of encouraging women's sexual pleasure in its quest to reposition itself to gain legitimacy: "We depend on the support of the family—the mother, the children—and have always had that message," claimed Sherri Canel, public relations spokesperson for National Video.<sup>217</sup> Women, here reduced to the most simplistic maternal ideal, could not possibly be interested in adult video and, indeed, would undoubtedly threaten the company's profit potential if it carried the contaminated product. Commtron Corp., the largest video distributor in North America, took similar action in February 1986, dropping adult titles from its inventory. "We'd like to be a family oriented company," said national sales manager Vern Ross, "and felt like this was not an area we wanted to be associated with."<sup>218</sup> The panic surrounding the encroachment of pornography into respectable places once again erupted into action.

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<sup>216</sup> "National Bans X-Rated from New Franchises," *Video Business* August 1986: 16.

<sup>217</sup> "Major Video Chain Bans Adult Videos," *Adult Video News Confidential* July 1986: 3.

<sup>218</sup> "Commtron Drops All Adult Videos," *Billboard* 15 February 1986: 78.

The decision by the largest video rental chain and largest distributor to ban adult video illustrates the ways in which the perceived toxicity of pornography, when linked to the gendered mythology of women's disinterest in pleasure alongside the capitalist impulse to maximize profits, results in an economic enactment of panic. The company, pointing to the mythology of the "family" as the basis of its fears, instituted a policy of officially discouraging pleasure. Katz, in a moment of candor exemplifying the lengths video store chains went to claim such decisions would not result in eliminating access to pornography, noted that the company still believed in "freedom of choice" for its customers—so long as that choice did not include adult video. "There are always going to be places to satisfy that demand. We're not saying, 'Ban it outright from the individual.' We're just saying that we won't be a part of it."<sup>219</sup> The editors of *Adult Video News Confidential* condemned the decision, pointing out that "families" were precisely who was renting adult video, part of the "one for the adults, one for the kids" trend the magazine had long observed.<sup>220</sup>

Finally, there was Blockbuster Video. The corporate juggernaut that redefined the video rental landscape had its roots, as I describe briefly in chapter two, in the economic imagination of Hank Cartwright, former adult video distributor. Cartwright, an early Pizza Hut franchisee, violated SEC regulations in 1983 by selling stock in his King of Video distribution business early to a group of investors. Forced to leave the company, Cartwright, looking for other business opportunities, purchased five Captain Video stores in Las Vegas. In March 1985, sensing the small video stores dominating the market could

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<sup>219</sup> "National Bans X-Rated from New Franchises," 16.

<sup>220</sup> "Viewpoint," *Adult Video News Confidential* July 1986: 3.

be improved with more selection, opened a 4,500 square foot store in Las Vegas, which quickly became the basis of a franchise operation under the name Major Video, part of Cartwright's National Entertainment company.<sup>221</sup> Included in that operation was adult video.

In 1985, David Cook, owner of a highly successful business selling computer software to oil companies started in the late 1970s, visited Cartwright and inquired about opening a franchise. The two ended up not closing the deal (even after Cook offered to buy Cartwright out)—but Cook, with his partner Kenneth Anderson, decided to open his own store.<sup>222</sup> On 19 October 1985, the first Blockbuster Video store opened at a busy intersection in Dallas, complete with the blue and yellow colors, computerized inventory systems, and nearly ten thousand titles that would later define the company. Another trademark present that first day was the policy against adult video. Cook later claimed the decision was not related to any moral principles: “While we don’t care if people watch pornography, we just don’t want to sell it to you. A lot of families come to our store... because they didn’t mind their kids running around the store because they wouldn’t see any garbage.”<sup>223</sup> Cook’s comments, much like the many others who agreed with that stance, illustrate the growing false belief within the video rental industry that there was nothing “moralizing” about refusing to stock adult titles; such decisions, ultimately, led to the eradication of any chance for pornography to stay in the mainstream.

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<sup>221</sup> William M. Alpert, “What’s Wrong with This Picture?,” *Barron’s* 21 September 1987: 8-9, 46-48; John Sippel, “National’s Major Chain Puts Emphasis on Superstores,” *Billboard* 3 May 1986: 42, 45; Homer Brickey, “Entrepreneur Tries Franchising New Type of Motorized Game,” *Toledo Blade* 23 October 1983: C6; Dave Gardetta, “The Lust Tycoons,” *Los Angeles Magazine* December 1998: 141-145, 184-185.

<sup>222</sup> Alan Abelson, “Up & Down Wall Street,” *Barron’s* 1 September 1986: 45; Alpert, “What’s Wrong with This Picture?,” 8-9, 46-48.

<sup>223</sup> Gail DeGeorge, *The Making of a Blockbuster* (New York: Wiley, 1996) 95-98.

Among the initial customers at the first Blockbuster store was Scott Beck, who, along with his father Larry, bought nine percent of Blockbuster's stock; they also convinced two of their former business colleagues, Peer Pederson and John Melk, to invest.<sup>224</sup> By early 1987, the fledgling company had eight corporately owned stores and eleven franchises, but plans to create a thousand more. On 3 February 1987, Melk convinced his former boss Wayne Huizenga to tour the suburban Chicago location, and the two, along with another colleague, Donald Flynn, quickly put together a deal to buy 35 percent of the company for \$18.5 million ten days later.<sup>225</sup> In the 1970s and early 1980s, Huizenga built the nation's largest garbage hauling service with Waste Management, Inc., and all six men had made fortunes together at that company, acquiring and consolidating hundreds of independent "mom and pop" outfits into a \$6 billion business. When Huizenga left Waste Management in 1984, he utilized the same consolidation practices to acquire more than a hundred service-related companies in auto-parts cleaning, dry cleaning, lawn care, bottled water, and portable toilet rental, generating \$100 million annually through the results.<sup>226</sup> When Melk approached him in early 1987, Huizenga was ready for the next challenge, and video rental seemed to fit what the *New York Times* would later describe as his tried-and-true criteria: "A pedestrian service business, with a steady cash flow, in an industry of under-capitalized mom-and-pop companies ripe for consolidation."<sup>227</sup> Adult video, a fixture in the "mom-and-pop"

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<sup>224</sup> Alpert 98-99.

<sup>225</sup> Richard Sandomir, "Wayne Huizenga's Growth Complex," *New York Times Magazine* 9 June 1991: 25; David Altaner, "Fort Lauderdale Investors Close Deal on Video Stock," *articles.sun-sentinel.com*. Sun Sentinel. 14 February 1987. Web. 24 October 2012.

<sup>226</sup> Sandomir 24; DeGeorge 28-91.

<sup>227</sup> Sandomir 24.

landscape of independent rental stores and small chains across the United States, was doomed.

The meteoric rise of Blockbuster that ensued permanently altered home video rental in the United States. By the end of 1987, the company expanded to 133 stores; two years later there were 1,079, and by 1994, when Blockbuster merged with Viacom in an \$8.4 billion deal, there were 3,600.<sup>228</sup> By 1991, the company controlled 10% of the video rental market, and had revenues larger than its 99 closest competitors *combined*.<sup>229</sup> Part of this was due to a decision Huizenga made early on when he hired two McDonald's marketing veterans, Tom Gruber and Luigi Salvaneschi, who initiated a relentless strategy of saturating the country with Blockbuster outlets and a corporate image based on unquestionable decency. Gruber created the marketing slogans for the company, such as "Wow! What a Difference!" and "America's Family Video Store," all of which subtly promised there would, under no circumstances, be any pornography.<sup>230</sup> Huizenga, who did not own a VCR, rarely watched movies, and thought video stores were, in the words of a 1991 *New York Times Magazine* profile, "dingy little retailers that purveyed porno from behind windows splattered with peeling movie posters," never even considered carrying adult titles, and banned them from all chains swallowed up in the many acquisitions made by the company.<sup>231</sup> At its peak, the company may have only controlled

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<sup>228</sup> DeGeorge 125-126; Geraldine Fabrikant, "Viacom Announces Merger and Raises Bid for Paramount," *New York Times* 8 January 1994: 51.

<sup>229</sup> Sandomir 25.

<sup>230</sup> DeGeorge 126-127.

<sup>231</sup> DeGeorge 127; Sandomir 24.

20% of the video rental market—but that 20% was spread far and wide, dominating virtually every locale in the country, driving out or acquiring competitors, and implementing the ban on pornography everywhere it went. Blockbuster’s decision, made originally by Cook and carried forward by Huizenga and his management team, effectively did what all the years of protests and prosecutions could not: it removed pornography from the “decent” neighborhoods across the United States.

These decisions raise a deeper question: what happens to pornography when the largest potential distributors refuse to carry it? Much like the Southland Corporation’s decision to bow to cultural pressure and stop carrying adult magazines in its 7-Eleven stores, these policies prohibiting adult video meant that the vocal minority seeking to defend “decent” people from pornography had, finally, influenced the corporate bottom line. The courts, in other words, might have guaranteed various rights to citizens regarding pornography, but that did not mean private companies had to sell or rent it. The willingness to eliminate potential income—15% of total receipts, on average—speaks to the ways the panic over pornography in the mid-1980s superseded even the capitalist impulse to maximize profit. Furthermore, the widespread belief that “there are always going to be places” for pornography reveals an even deeper, more disturbing layer to the gendered structures: that place, apparently, would be the adult bookstore, cordoned off from “decent” people. While many people tried to pin the censorship efforts on

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Some of the chains Blockbuster acquired already had policies against adult video in place. Major Video, Hank Cartwright’s chain that initially inspired Cook to start Blockbuster, was acquired in a highly contentious deal in 1989, and National Video was acquired in 1990. See: DeGeorge 143-144, 151-156.

The Sounds Easy chain was acquired by the Home-Vision chain in 1994, which was later swallowed up by Movie Gallery. See: “Sounds Easy, Home-Vision to Join Forces,” *Sun Journal* 11 August 1994: 3.

Adventureland Video was sold to RKO-Warner Video in 1989. See: Roger Pusey, “Placing Ads on Sides of Semitrailers Puts Utah Firm in Fast Lane,” *Deseret News* 2 September 1990: 4.

conservative groups with a religious agenda, the reality was much more complicated. The slow push of pornography back into the shadows of shame and guilt came from a wide variety of sources, including the executives of video store chains determined to bolster the mythology of “family” for their own bottom lines. Most importantly, and overlooked by everyone, was the dramatic loss for those consumers who most benefited from the move of adult video into mainstream stores: women.

While the mainstream video store (particularly the chain stores) offered safe, discreet, and widely available spaces for women to obtain pornography, the actions by the corporate chains profoundly illustrate the fear that such availability might simultaneously be a tacit support for women’s sexual pleasure. Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage argue that the importance of public space cannot be separated from discussions of gender and pornography—and that the problematic, gendered ideologies *within* pornography get reproduced *around* pornography. “Men’s access to sexually explicit material for arousal indicates a social structure that limits and oppresses women,” they write. “Commercial pornography is men’s turf. It not only obsessively repeats male sexual fantasies, often misogynist, it also reinforces more generalized male heterosexual privilege to express and define sexuality.”<sup>232</sup> For Blockbuster and other companies, corporate profits, ultimately, were less important than ensuring pornography remained “men’s turf,” whether or not they were able to articulate it in such terms.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage. “The Politics of Sexual Representation.” *ejumpcut.org*. Jump Cut. March 1985. Web. 10 January 2010.

<sup>233</sup> While I have chosen 1986 as the endpoint for this dissertation, and choose not to delve too far into what happened to the adult film industry after that period, it is worth noting that, as of 2013, home video rental has moved almost entirely to online streaming platforms. The most popular among these—Amazon, Hulu, Netflix, Redbox, and others—do not offer hard-core content, meaning the decision by the corporate video rental chains in the 1980s has had long-lasting effects. In many ways, the current landscape for consumers in terms of pornography’s availability has never been greater (or more simplified) with online technologies;

### *Conclusion: Adult Video and a Culture of Shame*

The regulation of adult video continued long after the corporate chains made their crucial decision to avoid it. Meese's national team of advisors turned into the National Obscenity Enforcement Unit (NOEU) in 1987, and escalated nationwide efforts to eradicate pornography. Eventually, nearly every major adult video producer and distributor was ensnared, in one way or another, in the Unit's prosecutorial net.<sup>234</sup> Grassroots protests, too, dramatically amplified their efforts, aggressively targeting with moralistic hubris anyone who dared disagree with them. On 30 September 1987 Kirk's National Coalition Against Pornography announced a nationwide plan demanding the vigorous enforcement of obscenity laws. Kirk, mobilizing the language of panic, suggested that all pornography eventually leads to child molestation, so it all needed to be eradicated.<sup>235</sup> As usual, authorities listened to the vocal minority, lending credence to their position: in early 1988, William F. Weld, head of the Justice Department's Criminal

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yet, it has also returned to a model in which pornography is nearly universally segregated. Adult streaming sites, in other words, resemble the adult bookstores of earlier eras, cordoned off from the "decent" sites.

<sup>234</sup> According to a Department of Justice summary in 1995, the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Unit (CEOS), which grew from Meese's National Obscenity Enforcement Unit, garnered more than more 126 obscenity convictions involving more than \$24 million in fines and forfeitures had occurred since the unit's inception in 1987. Among those convicted were many early pioneers in adult video, including Anthony, Louis, and Joseph Peraino of Arrow Video; Charles Brickman of Cinderella Distributors; Russ Hampshire of VCA; Reuben Sturman of GVA; Rubin Gottesman and Steven Orenstein of Excitement Video; and Andre D'Apice of VHL, among many others. While I have detailed the beginnings of the adult video industry's history, further work picking up where this dissertation ends would undoubtedly detail these cases. See: Criminal Division U.S. Department of Justice, Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, *Summary of Activity of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section*. 16 October 1995 11-15.

<sup>235</sup> Robert P. Hey. "Uncle Sam and Private Citizens Go after Child Pornography." *csmonitor.org*. Christian Science Monitor. 28 September 1987. Web. 13 April 2013.

In 1985, Kirk published an "action plan" for local communities seeking to stamp out pornography, which included many of the strategies outlined in this chapter. See: Jerry Kirk, *The Mind Polluters* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

Division, said: “This will be a big year for prosecutions. It will involve cases across the country.”<sup>236</sup> A 1987 operation dubbed “Project: Postporn,” reminiscent of the earlier MIPORN investigation, targeted dealers advertising through the mail—with the training of Sears, who had graduated from being Executive Director of the Meese Commission to working for CDL.<sup>237</sup> The core of the NOEU strategy was to drive pornographers out of business through the use of multiple prosecutions. NOEU attorneys indicted adult industry members in various jurisdictions around the country on the same charges simultaneously—a strategy discouraged by the Justice Department, but endorsed by Weld *only* for obscenity cases. Any company or individual that managed to survive the multiple, simultaneous prosecution strategy would then be indicted in their own district on RICO charges.<sup>238</sup> The goal was the complete eradication of the pornography industry.

On 1 July 1988, twenty people and fourteen companies were indicted on obscenity charges, leading to nearly all of them being forced out of business entirely. Brent Ward, United States Attorney for Utah and chairman of the Attorney General’s Subcommittee on Obscenity, told reporters: “I think it’s an accepted fact that the depiction of explicit sex acts... has the effect of conditioning individuals to committing those acts and conditioning society so that that is accepted as the norm.”<sup>239</sup> In other words, the pressure by conservative groups on law enforcement was so effective that, by

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<sup>236</sup> Shenon, “Justice Dept. Plans Anti-Racketeering Drive Against Pornographers,” A16.

<sup>237</sup> “Project Postporn,” *Playboy* September 1990: 49-50.

<sup>238</sup> ACLU Arts Project, *Above the Law: The Justice Department’s War Against the First Amendment* (Medford, NY: American Civil Liberties Union, 1991) 5-7.

<sup>239</sup> Eileen Putnam, “Pornography Outlets Charged in Obscene Mailings,” *Associated Press* 1 July 1988.

the time of Ward's press conference, sex itself (the definition of "those acts") was something to be treated as suspicious and perverted.<sup>240</sup>

The adult film industry, however, kept moving forward, selling "those acts" much like it had always done. Despite the continual blitzkrieg against its very existence, the industry's output of product continued to rise, signaling that, whatever the *public* disagreements over pornography, consumers still wanted their *private* pleasures. "Community standards," in other words, meant different things in terms of public and private consumption. In 1984, adult industry attorney John Weston estimated there were 54 million adult video rentals in the United States—a number that jumped to 104 million by 1986.<sup>241</sup> As much as pornography's opponents wanted to portray anyone interested in sexual pleasure as perverts, outsiders, sinners, or threats to "decency," the truth was, they were simply ordinary people, everywhere, in vast and increasing numbers.<sup>242</sup> Bill Margold, the industry veteran who testified before the Meese Commission (whose experience in every area of the industry is described in chapter two), put it another way,

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<sup>240</sup> One of the companies targeted by Project: Postporn was PHE, Inc., one of the major adult video distributors through its Adam & Eve line (which distributed Candida Royalle's *Femme* films, as described in chapter four). While outside the bounds of this dissertation, it is worth noting that PHE's founder and president, Philip Harvey, decided to fight what ended up being an astounding set of repeated efforts to shutter his business—eventually resulting in multiple, simultaneous indictments in various locations around the United States in an effort to drive Harvey to bankruptcy. Harvey eventually pleaded guilty to lesser charges but won resounding victory on the majority of the charges. Future work on the history of adult video will undoubtedly highlight Harvey's efforts. See: "Project Postporn," 49-50; Philip D. Harvey, *The Government Vs. Erotica: The Siege of Adam & Eve* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001).

<sup>241</sup> John H. Weston, "How Many Stars in the Sky?," *Adult Video News Confidential* September 1987: 6.

<sup>242</sup> Susan Squire made the same argument in an insightful *Playboy* essay following the release of the Meese Report, in which she followed a single video store in Bellwood, Illinois for one weekend in 1986. The results, the greatest fear of pornography's opponents, were that adult videos were being rented consistently, continually, and quite happily by "ordinary," "decent" Middle Americans. See: Susan Squire, "Ordinary People," *Playboy* November 1986: 113-114, 159-161.

describing the United States as a “nation of hypocrites... that [masturbate] to us with their left hand and condemn us with their right.”<sup>243</sup>

The industry, too, was complicit in much of this regulation, albeit from a different perspective. I have argued throughout this dissertation that the adult film industry’s quest for respectability by invoking discourses of quality simultaneously conveyed deeply gendered ideologies containing and limiting women’s sexuality. Ultimately, such strategies, which superficially seemed to support women’s sexuality in ways absent elsewhere in culture, ironically align with pornography’s opponents—who fought vigorously against any effort by the industry to achieve that respectability. Though diametrically opposed, these two positions share one essential feature: both refuse to admit that women might obtain sexual pleasure from something other than highly justified behavior. In other words, the industry pushed for the justification of women’s pleasure by advocating narrative, aesthetic, and other markers of quality, while its opponents refused to cede that women’s pleasures *could* be justified outside of highly contained, limited, and frequently religiously-based structures. All sides agreed pornography lacked “something more” to make it respectable; what that “something more” really meant, however, was centered squarely on women’s pleasures, an embodiment of the “mystery of difference” located so firmly within the films themselves, and played out in culture at large. If women had long held the position of cultural “gatekeepers,” then the fears of contamination so widely held by those terrified of pornography’s encroachment into the mainstream in the 1980s, the fear that “decency” was being threatened, were in actuality articulating a familiar narrative in which women’s behavior was in danger of being

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<sup>243</sup> Ian Jane. “God Created Man, William Margold Created Himself: An Interview with the Renaissance Man of Porn.” *dvdmaniacs.com*. DVD Maniacs. N.D. Web. 31 March 2013.

radically corrupted—thus putting all of society at risk. As Kleinhans and Lesage note, “The whole social discourse around sexuality functions to constrain women in the public sphere.”<sup>244</sup>

In the end, the tensions and struggles of the adult video industry and its opponents to capture control of the cultural discourse in the 1980s occurred on a somewhat separate plane than the sexual pleasures pragmatically obtained by consumers. The long journey of pornography from stag film to Panoram to peep show to adult motel to VCR was accompanied, at every turn, by intense regulatory reaction—but it never, much as its opponents wanted, disappeared. Morowitz, among the first to seize the potential of the video medium (described in chapter two), identified that crucial dichotomy in September 1986, when he argued for pornography’s staying power. “Meese and his followers will be gone some day,” he said, “and [adult] video will still be here. And people out there will still be happily having orgasms.”<sup>245</sup> Morowitz was wrong in the first part, however, because the two sides have always co-existed, serving each other’s ideological needs. For the moralists, adult video represented the perfect threat, invoked regularly to protect a slippery and illusory notion of the “family,” while those same moralists also served, as had always been the case, as the best possible marketing tool for an industry forever served by its illicit and “dangerous” status. Neither could, nor will, ever simply disappear.

Thus, while it might be tempting to endorse Morowitz’s comment as an easy “answer” to understand the complicated structures outlined in this history, there is

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<sup>244</sup> Kleinhans and Lesage. Web.

<sup>245</sup> Polman J1.

another, deeper layer to consider. Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine and another veteran with a similarly long view on the industry, recognized that the regulatory debate itself defined pornography perhaps better than anything else, and, in fact, kept it alive. For all the efforts by Paul Fishbein, Steve Hirsch, Candida Royalle, and the many others to gain respectability by invoking quality, Goldstein intrinsically knew that pornography could never achieve that mythical status. In a *New York Times* editorial following the release of the Meese Report, Goldstein eloquently captured that dichotomy. “Puritan proscriptions and the cult of the taboo,” he wrote, “is the raison d’être of the whole adult entertainment industry, and the Commission’s report is eminently satisfying to it in both regards.”<sup>246</sup>

This push-and-pull tension, in which the pornography industry attempted to escape regulatory constraints even as it, ironically, required them for its continued survival, succinctly captures the climate under investigation in this dissertation. Furthermore, that tension had consequences that maintained the cultural belief that shame and guilt were the only appropriate responses to pornography. Adult industry lawyer Allen Brown, in 1984, discussing the necessity of creating separate, discrete spaces within mainstream stores for adult titles that would later become the ubiquitous and familiar “back rooms,” identified as much: “There’s a catch-22 there. Mixing adult titles with the rest of the films is delinquent in terms of fairness and courtesy to the public. But to segregate them, you open yourself up to saying, ‘See, you knew they were dirty.’”<sup>247</sup> That liminal position, in which adult video existed somewhere in between “dirty” and part of the “rest” of the video store as well as within “community standards,” defines the

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<sup>246</sup> Al Goldstein, “Pay Dirt, as It Were,” *New York Times* 23 July 1986: A23.

<sup>247</sup> Marc Berman, “See No Evil,” *Video Business* November 1984: 26.

industry from 1976 to 1986, and points to the ways in which it could never really escape either position.

## EPILOGUE

### The Death and Life of Adult Video

Pornography is the work not of devils but of human beings.<sup>1</sup>

I.S. Levine, 2003

Near my home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a construction supply company does business in the same building that housed a thriving video rental store until its closure in 2011. Just off the same road, a few miles away in the city of Ypsilanti, a different scene plays out at another, still operational video store. While not necessarily busy, a steady flow of traffic enters. Video Hut, an independent business, has been open since 1983, moving a few blocks from a previous location in 1987. Long gone and forgotten now is the Hollywood Video, replaced by the construction business, along with six other locations in the area that have also disappeared. Movie Gallery, Inc., which owned the Hollywood Video and Movie Gallery video store chains, is no more, in Ann Arbor or anywhere else.

The primary difference between these stores is also the one usually ignored by scholars and historians in their discussions of home video, the one that has been the subject of this dissertation. Inside Video Hut, to the side of the counter through a pair of swinging doors, is a large room full of adult films, some on VHS, but most on DVD. Such titles were never even a possibility at the Hollywood Video. Like its corporate rival

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Stoller and I.S. Levine, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) 11.

Blockbuster (also now in bankruptcy protection), Hollywood Video did not offer adult titles. In fact, by the time Movie Gallery realized adult titles could help salvage their operations, in 2002, when they began adding back rooms to more of their locations (copying their own highly successful model discussed in chapter five), it was too late—and the long-standing policy against pornography held by Hollywood Video, which they had acquired in a merger, meant they faced a backlash from consumers.<sup>2</sup> At the Video Hut, adult video thrives. Most of the traffic I have observed during various visits goes directly to the adult room—a conjecture confirmed by owner Mark Johnson, who readily admits that the room keeps the store in business.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the store offers minimal catalogue titles, focusing primarily on new (and recent) mainstream releases and the adult room for the majority of its revenues. Ultimately, the importance of adult video to this store might best be seen in terms of floor space: the room occupies a significant portion of the overall location, and its inventory, according to Johnson, makes up at least 20% of the store stock. Not coincidentally, this is the maximum percentage Johnson can carry before the city classifies his operation as “adult entertainment,” which would open it to intense regulatory efforts designed to shut the store down.

As scholars continue to re-examine the history, cultural importance, and remaining life of video stores, the beginning of the industry is starting to resemble its impending end, much as Video Hut’s floor plan, customer interests, and insistence on carrying (and profiting from) adult video harkens back to the birth of the video rental industry. Curiously, then, despite the apparent corporate success of the video rental chains in erasing its existence, adult video might once again be a primary economic

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<sup>2</sup> “Soapbox,” *Video Business* 7 January 2002: 48.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Johnson. Personal interview. 15 August 2010.

engine in the remaining rental industry. In other words, reports of the death of adult video as a rental object might have been both premature and greatly exaggerated. As Johnson admits, the adult room has carried his business through two recessions, and remains the epicenter of his profits even as his competitors have closed (some of them the victim of Ypsilanti's 20% rule). Now, as online distribution has emerged as the primary means of connecting producers to consumers, new challenges face the rental business model—as do unexpected solutions. Johnson claims that the influx of illegal online downloading of adult films has led to creative marketing by producers seeking to re-capitalize on the rental model, resulting in new and innovative marketing strategies that have helped bring back his rental customers.

Those customers have, to varying degrees, always been a mainstay of Video Hut's business. Imagine the average adult in the Ann Arbor area in 1983, two years after manufacturers first dropped VCR prices in 1981, spurring the first massive increase in sales. Perhaps these customers had been to the adult bookstores in Ann Arbor, or to the adult theaters in Detroit, but if they had purchased a VCR, they had also obtained a new avenue for privacy. If they chose to browse the new Video Hut's back corner (it would not become a separate room until the move in 1987) they could expect to find a small selection of Golden Age adult films from the 1970s, many of which, like *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door* had long since entered popular discourse. They could also find myriad queer titles, which Video Hut has always carried, creating a space where the mediated depictions of sexuality extended well beyond the heteronormative. Johnson agrees, suggesting that Video Hut is friendly to "all walks of life," and that his staff regularly encounters people with a wide variety of interests. The store does not limit its

adult purchases based on sexuality, nor does it hold a political stance on those issues. Instead, Johnson tells his staff to maintain a positive attitude toward the customers' interests.

Video Hut serves what some might call a vital community need, and what others have decried as a community problem. Johnson receives periodic mailings from local religious groups, and remembers well the city zoning board putting some of his competitors out of business over technicalities, a fate which he has avoided as of 2013. I frequently check to make sure Video Hut is still in operation. After all, it represents a crucial link not just to the past, but also to the future. Pornography is not going away, nor is the market for its exhibition. Nor, sadly, are the many efforts to regulate the pleasures that accompany its existence. Video Hut might appear to be a solitary outpost in a world overrun by digital technology, but it is not alone. There are Video Huts everywhere, just as there are regulatory efforts right alongside them seeking to contain and even eliminate their contents. With each store death, more potential evidence disappears. Yet, these adult rooms can live on, provided scholars and historians include their complicated, contentious, and layered pasts—and presents—as they continue to write the history of home video.

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