

Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature

by Eric Schaefer

This article suggests that during the late 1960s the introduction of 16mm film technology into an adult film marketplace dominated by 35mm production and exhibition precipitated a series of industrial adjustments that resulted in the development of the hardcore narrative feature.

The relationship between the entertainment industry and filmed pornography is much like that between the proper moneyed family and the slack-jawed black-sheep cousin locked away in the attic. No one wants to acknowledge that it exists. No one wants to be caught near it. And certainly no one wants to admit it has a history, for fear of being tainted by revelations about its past. So the history of filmed pornography—such as it is—is fragmentary, frequently unreliable, and as much the stuff of whispers and folklore as of fact. What history has been written is most often told in the histories of other, albeit related, topics such as obscenity law.

Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito's *Sinema*, published in 1974, offers a fairly standard account of the development of the hardcore feature. It runs as follows: during the 1960s, feature-length softcore sexploitation films gained a foothold in the marketplace with *Playboy*-inspired imagery of nude women and later of simulated sex. Around 1967, the sexploitation film "had gone about as far as it could go."¹ At about the same time, shorts known as beaver films, which had previously circulated underground and which showed full-female nudity with a focus on the genitals, began to appear above ground in San Francisco. The split beaver, action beaver, and hardcore loop began to appear shortly afterward.² By 1969–1970, a series of "how-to" features emerged, sometimes referred to as marriage-manual films or "white-coaters," wearing the mantle of scientific respectability as they ticked through visual rosters of sexual positions. Concurrently, a group of documentaries hit the screens, purporting to examine the legal and social changes surrounding the emergence of pornography in Denmark and the United States. Compilation features, presented as histories of the stag film, quickly followed.³ By mid-1970, the first hardcore narrative feature, *Mona*, appeared. Much of this history is recounted by Linda Williams, who concludes that in 1972 the "transition from illicit stag films to the legal, fictional narratives" was signaled by the arrival of *Deep Throat*, which "burst into the public consciousness."⁴

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Even though we lack a programmatic history of filmed hardcore pornography, its development has been narrativized, as evidenced above. The result has tended to be an overly rigid chronology: filmmakers jumping through a series of hurdles, offering greater explicitness with each leap, on their way to a predetermined end—nonsimulated representations of sexual acts on screen.⁵ This same account of a steady teleological march undermined general film history for years and obscured many of the economic and industrial reasons for the eventual dominance of the narrative form in theatrical motion pictures. What has become increasingly evident is that the feature-length hardcore narrative was merely an entr'acte between reels of essentially plotless underground stag movies in the years 1908 to 1967 and the similarly plotless ruttings of porn in the video age (emerging in the mid-1980s and continuing to the present). Although the period between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s is now widely regarded as the “golden age” of the hardcore feature, little effort has been made to explain how and why the hardcore feature emerged when it did.⁶ The many difficulties involved in answering this question—and of constructing a history of the pornographic film—necessitate an approach that accounts not only for basic legal and industrial considerations but also for such causal factors as technology. This history must then be considered within the appropriate social and political context.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the origins of the hardcore narrative feature in the period from 1967 to 1972, the year *Deep Throat* thrust the hardcore feature into the center of the cultural stage. By examining articles in trade magazines and newspapers, advertising, product catalogs and brochures, and the films themselves (notably the overlooked “simulation” movies), as well as the discourse surrounding the films and the sexual revolution, we can arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how and why the pornographic feature developed and why narrative became, for a time, the dominant paradigm in porn. What I want to suggest is that a set of historically specific material conditions of production and reception—notably the introduction of 16mm as a theatrical mode in the adult market—contributed to the rise of the pornographic feature. These conditions were just as important as the individual legal decisions and the porn auteurs, often cited as major causes in the development of the feature. Indeed, 16mm films revolutionized the adult film market, and the discourse of revolution—sexual and otherwise—was used to differentiate the new 16mm films from existing product. Moreover, the sexploitation film, which has been characterized as a dead end in the history of filmed pornography, competed directly with 16mm films, making the sexploitation film instrumental in the development of the hardcore feature.

This inquiry affords us several important outcomes. First, it fills in some of the gaps in the history of filmed pornography, a history that has generally been ignored in film studies, despite the cultural and economic impact the form has had on American entertainment since the late 1960s. Whether one is “fer it or agin it,” an accurate understanding of the history of the pornographic feature would seem to be a prerequisite for continuing critical, social, or legal discussions. Second, recent work has demonstrated the degree of influence sexploitation and pornography had on mainstream film industry practices in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ It is thus

important that our understanding of the history of sexploitation and pornography approach the level of our understanding of Hollywood during this period. Third, and finally, this history helps us acknowledge the diverse ways in which the 16mm gauge has been used—in amateur moviemaking, experimental film, education and industry, and pornography.

The Sexploitation Film. Some discussion of the sexploitation market is necessary to contextualize the arrival of 16mm pictures and the emergence of hardcore features. In *“Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!”* I discuss how from the early 1920s to the late 1950s “classical” exploitation films offered U.S. audiences sights forbidden by the Production Code as well as by many state and local censorship bodies. Usually couched as exposés of contemporary problems, educational tracts, or morality plays, classical exploitation films maintained their position in the market by including moments of spectacle unlike anything seen in mainstream movies: scenes set in nudist camps, shots of striptease dances, and footage of childbirth, victims of venereal disease, and people engaging in a range of vices. The films survived in an often-hostile environment by including a “square-up,” an introductory educational statement that explained how exposure of the problem in question was necessary to bring about its eradication. But as the Hollywood studio system crumbled in the 1950s, and with it the self-regulatory infrastructure that had been in place since 1922, mainstream productions began to reintegrate most of the topics that had been taboo under the Code.⁸

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new crop of “nudie-cuties” appeared—films that contained nudity but that did not have an educational imprimatur. Russ Meyer’s *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) is generally acknowledged to be the first of this new breed of exploitation film. It was quickly followed by a raft of others, such as *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (1960) and *Mr. Peter’s Pets* (1962). Most of the nudie-cuties operated as comedies, and the dialogue or narration was often sprinkled with double entendres, but they lacked overtly sexual situations. Although female nudity provided the draw, it was always discreet. Actresses were shot only from the waist up or from behind.

Nudie-cuties gradually gave way to a greater range of sexploitation films that were usually, though by no means always, fictional narratives that included spectacle: nudity in the context of sexual situations, and, in time, simulated sexual activity. The range of sexploitation films made during the 1960s included suburban exposés (e.g., *Sin in the Suburbs*, 1964), dramas about big-city decadence (e.g., *To Turn a Trick*, 1967), psychodramas about sexual obsession (e.g., *The Curse of Her Flesh*, 1968), and spoofs of classic tales (e.g., *Dracula the Dirty Old Man*, 1969) and contemporary genres (e.g., *Thigh Spy*, 1967).

Shortages of Hollywood movies and foreign “art” films in the early 1960s had forced many exhibitors to turn to sexploitation. The *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* states that by 1969 roughly six hundred drive-in and hard-top theaters, including specialized chains such as the Art Theater Guild and Pussycat, regularly played sexploitation product.⁹ Louis Sher’s Art Theater Guild, for example, began as a string of houses specializing in European

art films in 1954. By 1965, Sher moved into distribution, releasing Andy Warhol titles like *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968) and *Flesh* (1968) and eventually exploitation and porn films such as *The Stewardesses* (1969), *Mona* (1970), and *History of the Blue Movie* (1970).¹⁰ In 1961, businessman Vince Miranda bought and renovated a Los Angeles building that contained a theater. After being arrested by the Sheriff's Department for showing an allegedly obscene movie, Miranda was drawn more deeply into the porn business as he expended time and money fighting the charge. Over time, he purchased more theaters that became California's Pussycat Theater chain. By 1981, Miranda operated forty houses.¹¹ Meanwhile, dozens of other urban theaters and rural drive-ins—particularly in the South—programmed steady streams of exploitation movies.

In addition to theaters that regularly played sexploitation films, hundreds of others booked them from time to time during the 1960s. This number grew, especially as break-out pictures such as *I, a Woman* (1966), *Vixen* (1968), and *Without a Stitch* (1970) had long runs in showcase and neighborhood theaters. As *Variety* observed, when Audubon's Danish import *I, a Woman* "freed itself from the exploitation houses, it invaded suburbia and immediately struck paydirt."¹² The film broke into respectable venues early in its American run in 1966, when it played the Trans-Lux on 85th Street in Manhattan.¹³ Other sexploitation titles followed—enough that the major film companies and their representatives became concerned that sexploitation pictures were getting bookings in major chains—and in early 1970, Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) president Jack Valenti launched a campaign to dissuade exhibitors from booking sexploitation films.¹⁴

The hundreds of theaters playing exploitation product, either regularly or occasionally, were served by an established group of distributors and subdistributors. American Film Distributing (AFD), Audubon, Boxoffice International, Cambist, Distribpix, Entertainment Ventures, Eve, and Olympic International were just some of the larger companies that carved out a lucrative segment of the motion picture marketplace. In 1968, AFD, Boxoffice International, Distribpix, and Olympic collectively released thirty-two pictures. In 1969, between 135 and 150 feature-length sexploitation pictures hit the circuit.¹⁶ A catalog issued by Distribpix in 1971, which listed product from the previous five years, included one hundred feature-length titles, the vast majority in color.¹⁵ In addition, dozens of smaller companies issued a film or two per year.

Sexploitation films were produced and exhibited in 35mm for \$15,000 to \$25,000, with "a fair number" coming in at \$40,000. While some were cobbled together for as little as \$5,000 to \$10,000, a few of the more elaborate color productions made in 1969–1970 cost more than \$100,000.¹⁷ Rental terms differed from city to city and state to state. Low-end and mid-range product usually rented for a flat fee, generally depending on the size of the market and past performance. Better features could command percentages.¹⁸

By 1970, the sexploitation industry was fracturing. Traditional sexploitation theaters were becoming either low-end houses, which ran the cheapest material possible, or high-end operations, such as the Pussycat chain, which sought out

only the highest-quality product.¹⁹ But more important to the development of hardcore motion pictures, the industry was also cleaving along the lines of 16mm and 35mm production and exhibition.

Eager Beavers and Storefront Theaters. As Patricia Zimmermann indicates, in 1923 16mm equipment was standardized and began to be marketed as an “amateur” gauge, in contrast to the 35mm gauge for “professionals.” From that point on, companies such as Kodak and Bell and Howell marketed the 16mm gauge as a leisure product for middle- and upper-middle-class families.²⁰ Families not only shot amateur movies and family subjects but also bought and rented short films on a wide range of topics. Outfits such as Castle Films, Official Films, and Blackhawk specialized in newsreels, sports films, and comedies, but other companies produced adult “art studies,” available to home collectors via direct mail and through camera stores and other outlets.²¹ Since at least the mid-1930s, several individuals and companies, including NuArt Productions, Pacific Ciné Productions, and Vanity Productions, produced and sold these nonnarrative shorts, which usually featured one or two women lounging around on a set, in an apartment, or in a landscape. Many shorts included full-frontal nudity as well as the caveat that they were “produced for the exclusive use of artists and art students.” The status of 16mm changed during World War II and in the postwar period as a result of its use in combat and newsreel photography, as well as in the burgeoning educational market. As lower-priced, easier-to-use 8mm equipment became popular among amateurs and home-movie enthusiasts in the 1950s, 16mm came to be considered a semiprofessional—but still a nontheatrical—gauge.²²

Sixteen-millimeter adult films began to move out of the home and into public exhibition at the beginning of 1967, the year the first beaver films were advertised in the *San Francisco Examiner*. The Roxie, a traditional theater with several hundred seats at 16th Street and Valencia, had been serving up a steady stream of “nudies” when it offered “Naughty Nymphs and Eager Beavers at Their Busy Best” and proclaimed itself “Home of the Eager Beaver Films.” A little over a month later, the Peerless, at 3rd and Mission, also began advertising “Eager Beaver Films.” Those two houses were soon joined by the Gay Paree and other venues. The designation of “eager beaver film” may have described the enthusiasm of the on-screen performers, but, more important, the term served as a signal for those who knew “beaver” was a euphemism for the female pubic area. The Gay Paree and Peerless used standard ads that indicated when their programs changed. The Roxie was far more imaginative in its advertising, announcing program changes with new titles such as “Beaver Picnic,” “Beaucoup Beavers,” “Beavers at Sea,” “Beavers in Bloom,” and Eager Beavers Demanding Their Rights in “Beaver Protest.”

The beaver films emerged from the tradition of home and arcade films shot on and exhibited with 16mm equipment and featuring completely nude models. Beyond use of the 16mm gauge, the early art studies and the beavers shared certain attributes. At the basic structural level, each featured a naked female, or females, posing for the camera. The films tended to be between three and ten minutes

long and were usually constructed of a series of shots rather than a single long take. The women who posed for the camera tended to acknowledge its presence and that of the unseen spectator.

There were differences between the art studies and beavers as well. The women in the art studies were more quiescent, in keeping with the contemplative qualities of the nude.²³ By contrast, the gazes and movements of the women in the beaver films were more overtly sexual: they licked their lips, grinded their pelvises, and humped the beds or couches on which they reclined. As Eithne Johnson suggests, the beaver films “were influenced by the ‘moving camera’ style of documentary productions [and] of amateur filmmaking,” which implied an “intimacy and spontaneity” that conveyed an “apparently spontaneous, seemingly unscripted scene of sexual display.”²⁴ The increased sense of intimacy and spontaneity in the beaver films were part and parcel of the 16mm gauge and the discourses of “naturalism” attached to it.²⁵

The shift in where 16mm adult films were shown, from homes, arcades, and low-profile peep-show venues to theaters, occurred for several reasons. First, in the home market, 16mm had been displaced by cheaper 8mm and Super 8mm products. Those who made 16mm adult movies were in search of a new market for their wares. Second, students in college film courses were using 16mm equipment to make adult movies, both to earn extra money and to hone their filmmaking skills. Making 16mm films with borrowed equipment in a field with no set ground rules was a realistic option for these students; making 35mm sexploitation films would have proven difficult. Third, and finally, sexploitation films were gradually becoming more explicit. By 1967, full-frontal female nudity—usually limited to fairly brief flashes—was a regular feature of sexploitation films. That 16mm production was relatively anonymous and inexpensive and that sexploitation films were somewhat more daring (as well as protected by increasingly “liberal” court decisions) seems to have given 16mm filmmakers and other low-end operators reason to push acceptable theatrical limits and make and show inexpensive beaver films.²⁶

Initially, there was little incentive for sexploitation theaters equipped with 35mm projection and with a steady customer base to install 16mm projectors to show plotless shorts. Indeed, the limited brightness of standard 16mm projection made 16mm hardly ideal for hard-tops, and certainly not for drive-ins. This necessitated the creation of new, smaller venues. Storefront theaters, sometimes called “pocket theaters” or “mini-cinemas,” began to crop up, many operated by those who made the films. These theaters were considerably different from sexploitation houses not only in the product they showed but also in their layouts and start-up and operating costs.

Much like turn-of-the-century nickelodeons, these theaters were, literally, storefronts. They had no more than two hundred seats, and some had as few as forty. In many cities, operators could evade zoning regulations and fire codes, as well as having to pay license and insurance fees, because they often had too few seats to qualify as theaters.²⁷ This meant that storefront theaters—and their product—could escape initial, potentially negative scrutiny from city officials, thus establishing a foothold before opposition could mount. Moreover, a storefront could

open and operate on a significantly lower investment than a standard hard-top or drive-in. Although some operators claimed to have poured as much as \$65,000 into storefront conversions (much of it to construct raked floors), a couple of days and a few thousand dollars were really all that was needed to convert a loft or a basement into a “mini-cinema.” Pete Kaufman of Astro-Jemco, a Dallas-based sexploitation distributor, estimated that a 16mm operation could be started for about \$3,000.²⁸ The most important and expensive piece of equipment was the 16mm projector. Beyond that, in the earliest days, when beaver films did not have synchronized sound, a record or a tape player was necessary to provide music.²⁹

Like the start-up costs, operating costs for storefronts were low. In San Francisco, average weekly operating budgets in 1970 totaled roughly \$3,500—\$250 for rent, \$750 for projectionists, \$400 for other employees, \$500 for management and miscellaneous expenses, \$500–\$750 for advertising, and \$750 for film. Operating costs were lower for venues where there was sufficient walk-in trade to make advertising unnecessary or that operated for fewer hours. Storefronts made up for their small number of seats with inflated ticket prices, usually at least \$3 or \$4 and sometimes \$5. “Five bucks, no matter who you are,” wrote James Fulton in 1969, “is a lot of bread for a movie. But it is, I still maintain, worth it.”³⁰ The \$5 ticket price tended to be higher than what sexploitation theaters charged, which in turn was more than the average admission (\$2) at mainstream cinemas. The higher price conveyed a sense of forbiddenness, but it also helped defray the periodic legal bills.

Some storefronts, such as the Venus Adult Theater in Pasadena, California, even imposed membership fees.³¹ Others offered discounts of a dollar or two for couples and senior citizens or free admission for women with escorts.³² Lengthy hours of operation also helped make up for minimal seating capacity. Most storefronts were open by midmorning and drew their largest crowds during the business day. Successful storefront theaters in San Francisco were able to pull in as much as \$10,000 per week, although researchers at the time claimed that most settled for weekly takes on the order of \$4,000.³³

The success of 16mm adult films in San Francisco, and the fact that they were relatively unmolested by law enforcement officials there, led to the proliferation of similar enterprises across the city and then the country. The Commission on Obscenity and Pornography estimated that as of June 1970 there were about fourteen storefronts operating in San Francisco and at least one hundred in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles area sported the Sandbox Adult Theater, the Xanadu Pleasure Dome, Cinematheque 16, the Film Festival in Hollywood, and the Venus Adult Theater in Pasadena. Most of these places were fairly nondescript and avoided provocative posters or pictures that might offend moral watchdogs. Perhaps the “loudest” front was the Film Festival, with its large “Open 24 Hours” sign and promise of “Hollywood’s New Super Stags.” The Xanadu’s large marquee discreetly promised “Adults Only—Fantastic Color Features—Best in Hollywood.” The entrance to the Cinematheque 16 was little more than an anonymous doorway under an awning.³⁴

New York was somewhat slower to make the move into 16mm. Regular clean-up efforts by police and politicians created a more cautious atmosphere, but by June 13, 1968, ads for beaver films had begun to appear in the *Village Voice*. Advertising

for 16mm movies began to appear regularly in late 1969, and by early 1970 the beavers were firmly ensconced.³⁵ John J. Sampson, who investigated the industry for the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, estimated that about three dozen 16mm houses were in operation in New York City by mid-1970.³⁶ One could see 16mm films at the Avon on Seventh Avenue or the Circus Cinema on Broadway between 47th and 48th Streets. Rex and Chelly Wilson operated the Cameo and the Tivoli, as well as the Eros I and II, which started with beaver shorts and moved into 16mm features.³⁷ There were also the storefronts of the New Era chain—considered the lowest of the low. The marquee of the Paree Adult Cinema on Seventh Avenue covered the sign of a billiard parlor, and the theater itself was little more than a space sectioned off from the pool room by 2x4s and sheetrock.³⁸ The Mermaid Theater on 42nd Street offered female beavers on one screen and male “beavers” on a second.³⁹ Other major cities had at least five or six storefront operations, and even some small towns had one or two. In an article entitled “How Skin Flicks Hit Bible-Belt Waterloo, Iowa,” *Newsweek* described the ninety-six-seat “Mini” Cinema 16, which had opened on Commercial Street to cater to farmers, traveling salesmen, and students from the University of Northern Iowa.⁴⁰

Except for possible legal bills, the largest ongoing expense to operate storefront theaters was the films themselves. As with the young movie business at the turn of the century, pictures were initially sold outright to storefront exhibitors. When interviewed by John Sampson for the Commission on Obscenity, San Francisco exhibitor Les Natali claimed that there was no system of national distribution for 16mm storefront films.⁴¹ He noted that one company, Able Film of Los Angeles, had traveling salesmen who peddled films from city to city. Adult film maven David F. Friedman has recounted how producers would send couriers out to sell prints directly to exhibitors for cash.⁴² Since sales often took place one-on-one, 16mm producers—unlike sexploitation producers—did not have to provide posters, pressbooks, or other advertising materials. Printed lists or one-page fliers, sometimes with a photograph or a crudely drawn picture, announcing a film’s availability to the storefront operator were all the promotion that was necessary, further shaving costs. Producers could hope to sell twenty to thirty prints to storefronts in various cities before pirates nabbed films and started duping them. (Since they operated on the borderline of legality, there is no evidence that producers tried to prosecute the pirates.) Natali stated that the average charge for a four-hundred-foot color print was \$50–\$60. This figure is backed up by a sales brochure from Los Angeles-based M&B Enterprises, which offered four-hundred-foot reels for \$45 and five-hundred-foot reels for \$50.⁴³

Some exhibitors produced their own 16mm films, and, after they were played in their theaters, they peddled them to other storefronts. Not only did this allow the exhibitors to remain aware of local obscenity prosecutions, but it also kept them in touch with what their patrons liked and disliked. For example, most of the two hundred or so movies made by the Mitchell Brothers prior to *Behind the Green Door* (1972) were rarely shown anywhere else but in their own theater, the O’Farrell in San Francisco, and Leo Productions, run by Arlene Elster and Lowell Pickett, produced films for the Sutter Cinema, also in San Francisco

What You've been Waiting for!

Here comes Dodi, a sweet young innocent from the Midwest to the wild and wicked big city. Visiting with her older sister Sandy for the summer, Dodi quickly senses that there is something a bit unusual about all the men that keep popping in to see her sister.

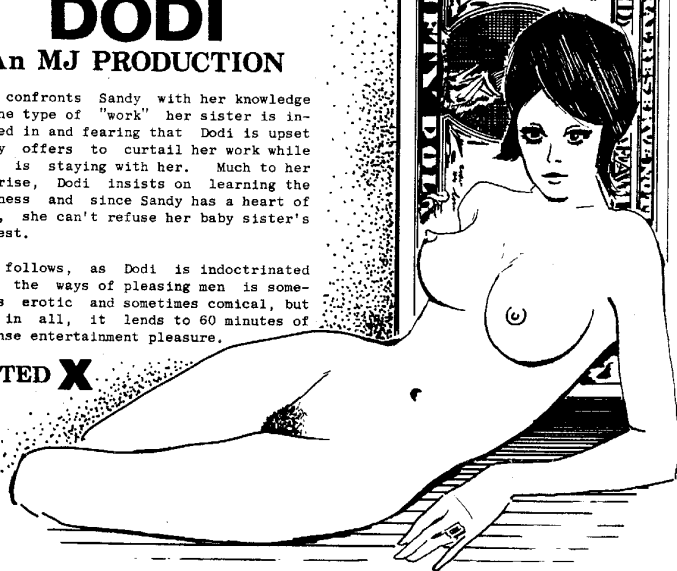
HERE COMES DODI

An MJ PRODUCTION

Dodi confronts Sandy with her knowledge of the type of "work" her sister is involved in and fearing that Dodi is upset Sandy offers to curtail her work while Dodi is staying with her. Much to her surprise, Dodi insists on learning the business and since Sandy has a heart of gold, she can't refuse her baby sister's request.

What follows, as Dodi is indoctrinated into the ways of pleasing men is sometimes erotic and sometimes comical, but all in all, it lends to 60 minutes of immense entertainment pleasure.

RATED X



16mm FEATURE LENGTH FULL COLOR PICTURE

Running time, Approximate: 60 minutes



ORDER FROM
MAR-JON
5420 Melrose Ave., Hollywood, Calif. 90038
(213) 466-6196



100 FOOT TRAILERS
AVAILABLE

Figure 1. Fliers such as this one—for MJ Production's *Here Comes Dodi* (1970)—alerted storefront theater operators of the availability of new features. Courtesy of Something Weird Video Collection.

(although both the O'Farrell and the Sutter were considered a step above typical storefronts).

The quality of the films that played storefront theaters ran the gamut. Initially, the films were short and silent, but the spread of 16mm storefronts pushed entrepreneurs to differentiate their theaters not only from sexploitation houses, by showing more graphic content, but also from competing storefronts. In addition to becoming

more explicit, by showing “split beavers” and “action beavers,” by spring 1969, 16mm theaters introduced a number of variations, including sound-on-film (“talking beavers”), 3-D, multiple screens, lesbian action, and male films.

Announcing a “new policy” was also a fairly regular ploy to attract patrons. An ad for San Francisco’s Paris Theater in the August 1, 1969, *Examiner* claimed that the theater was no longer showing one-girl-only shorts. “All of our films,” stated the ad, “are featurettes with boys and girls, girls and girls, and various combinations.”⁴⁴ Two weeks later, the Pink Kat advertised sixty minutes of “brand new favorites”—shorts—in synch sound, as well as a one-hour feature. It was the move to feature-length narrative films that gave the 16mm format continued viability.⁴⁵

In 1969, James Fulton described how boredom set in for the beaver film patron after only an hour: “You find yourself getting bored, even though, when you glance up at the screen, the Thing is still there in all its glory. Suddenly you are frightened. Is this it? You ask yourself. Am I getting too old to cut it?”⁴⁶

16mm Features and Revolutionary Discourse. Audience boredom may have helped push 16mm producers to move into features. But the 16mm producers were pushed into a position of innovation to stay a step ahead of traditional 35mm sexploitation, which, in turn, had been forced into greater explicitness by the arrival of the beavers and increasingly sexy Hollywood fare. Running out of variations for short films, the 16mm outfits began to improve their technical qualities and incorporate storylines into their displays of genital explicitness.⁴⁷ The initial feature-length 16mm sex films, often clocking in at barely one hour, were known in the trade as “simulation films.” These combined the increased genital explicitness of the beaver with the narrative conventions of the established sexploitation movie.

In an interview with Dan Rhys, Joan of MJ Productions and Mar-Jon Distribution explained that as of 1970 the 35mm sexploitation market and the 16mm market were melding. “There is a lack of 35mm sexploitation product,” she explained, “and the majors are producing general release films as hot as the old 35mm sexploitations were. So now the 35mm sexploiters have to get hotter, the same as the 16mm producers have been going for a long time. But they are not producing enough to satisfy the theaters. So the exhibitors are equipping now for 16mm films so they can have a continuous show every week.”⁴⁸ Although some exhibitors who had started with beaver loops were reluctant to change because they had a regular clientele, new 16mm theaters tended to open with features.⁴⁹

We can look to Cosmos Films for an example of the convergence between the explicitness of the beavers and the conventions of sexploitation. Ted Kariofilis, owner of the Capri Cinema, a New York sexploitation house, formed Cosmos around 1967 to produce sexploitation movies.⁵⁰ The company initially made four 35mm black-and-white features in New York. These films operated squarely within the sexploitation conventions of the day: a loosely structured narrative was combined with scenes of nudity and/or simulated sex. For instance, *Hot Erotic Dreams* (1968) follows a woman in New York who experiences a series of erotic daydreams and sexual encounters, several centered around a used-book shop. Although the cause-and-effect relationships are not particularly strong, there is a general trajectory as

she seeks, and eventually finds, sexual satisfaction. *The Mind Blowers* (1968), a satire on sex research, concerns Professor Gotterdam, who captures the sexual fantasies of his subjects by recording their “brain waves.” Havoc ensues when his assistant mixes up the tapes and induces alternate fantasies in the subjects. In these films, men in undershorts “humped” naked women, and women wore ecstatic expressions as men—or women—dipped below the frame to offer them oral pleasure.

In the latter part of 1969, Cosmos financed a series of 16mm color features shot in California. Like the sexploitation films, these simulation features included a narrative, albeit one that was rather limited. For instance, in Cosmos’s *The Line Is Busy* (1969), Jack spends his time finding women’s phone numbers in men’s rooms or on the walls next to pay phones. A call and some smooth talk lead him from one sexual adventure to another. “Unbelievable,” he exclaims, “Two days, three broads, and it only cost a dime.” Jack’s escapades are cut short when he visits his doctor, who tells him, “You’re in the advanced stages of a very rare genital disease. . . . Jack, I’m afraid your sex life is over forever.”

The Runaround (1970) is the story of Fred and Jackie, who suffer from marital problems. Jackie is always in an amorous mood when Fred returns from work, but he complains he is too tired to make love to her. This is because he spends all his time “at work” having sex with his secretary or other women with whom his office mate Richard hooks him up. Richard arranges for Fred to meet a “hot number” at a motel room. It turns out to be Jackie, who finally gets what she wants from her dallying husband.

What set Cosmos’s 16mm features apart from 35mm sexploitation movies—both Cosmos’s and those made by other companies—and aligned them with the beaver and other 16mm shorts was the degree of “heat” they included. This included full-male nudity without erections and, as in the beaver films, women on beds or couches with their legs spread, offering clear, full views of their vaginas. These “spread women” were caressed by men or women (or by themselves), running hands over thighs and vulvas. After a good deal of this foreplay, the men would mount the women and begin to simulate the movements of intercourse.

Working with Tom Gunning’s concept of the “cinema of attractions,” I have explained how in classical exploitation films narrative was interrupted in varying degrees by moments of spectacle in the form of displays of nudity, sex hygiene footage, drug use, and so on. Similar arguments, albeit using somewhat different theoretical models, can be found in Williams’s discussion of “narrative and number” in hardcore features of the 1970s and 1980s and in Craig Fischer’s analysis of “narrative and description” in Russ Meyer’s sexploitation film *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970).⁵¹ Regardless of the terminology used, in each of these instances, we witness an oscillation between narrative exposition and instances of sexual display. The 16mm simulation films married the narratives of sexploitation films, loose as they were at times, with the increased explicitness of plotless beavers. Much like the gravitation toward narrative in the early days of cinema, the addition of narrative to the 16mm film served to stabilize production and enabled producers and exhibitors more clearly to differentiate their films by title from shorts and loops, most of which did not have titles. The introduction of narrative made it easier to attract a broader

audience, of more than just single men. In 1964, the Supreme Court's decision in the *Jacobellis v. Ohio* case established the principle that material dealing with sex in a manner that advocates ideas, or that has literary, scientific, or artistic value or any other form of social importance, could not be held obscene. Narrative may have served a legitimizing function for pornographic films, because it was less of a stretch to argue that feature-length narratives contained social or artistic significance and therefore were not obscene under the *Jacobellis* standard.

The 16mm adult films rode the crest of a more general enthusiasm for 16mm as a gauge. As Addison Verrill wrote in 1970 in *Variety*, "Up to a year ago, 16mm was considered a nontheatrical mode of exhibition, primarily geared to college film societies and private film libraries."⁵² The association of 16mm film with college students implicitly linked the format with radical change since that cohort was often seen in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the streets, engaging in protests or rejecting the status quo in more symbolic ways, by growing their hair long, for example. Many of Leo Productions' 16mm films were made by students from San Francisco State University's film department: "For their first film, they were given 600 feet of stock and paid something like \$35 (the same fee the actors and actresses got). If the finished product was accepted, they were allowed to make a longer film for more money. If that was good, they moved up to features."⁵³

The 16mm gauge was also the choice of avant-garde and independent film artists. Juan Suárez describes how the oppositional thrust of 1960s underground filmmakers (Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, and Andy Warhol among them), most of whom made their films with 16mm, was tied "thematically and ideologically with other waves of dissent in the 1960s, such as youth movements, sexual liberation fronts, civil rights organizations, and other forms of protest and social experimentation often referred to as the 'counterculture.'"⁵⁴ Venues such as Cinema 16 and Anthology Film Archives cemented the link between 16mm, independent means of production and distribution and, often, a radical aesthetic. In the preface to his 1969 *Guide to Filmmaking*, Edward Pincus alluded to the revolutionary potential of 8mm and 16mm production, concluding, "Film to the filmmakers, that they may change the world."⁵⁵ Finally, Zimmermann has noted that 16mm's "amateurism" could be "reinvented as an asset and a resource for the filmmaker. It countered big-budget productions with high barriers to entry with low-cost films. It displaced expertise with imagination. It replaced professional equipment with simple cameras."⁵⁶ Indeed, the makers of 16mm sex films replaced professional equipment with simple cameras. They also countered bigger-budget sexploitation productions, with their (comparatively) higher barriers to entry, with low-cost films. And they displaced expertise, if not with imagination then with greater explicitness.

Low cost, fueled by imagination, expanded the possibilities of the film medium. This "expanded cinema," to use the title of Gene Youngblood's popular—and eccentric—book from 1970, could, in turn, lead to an "expanded consciousness" and social change.⁵⁷ "The more I make love, the more I make revolution."⁵⁸ That and similar slogans were common among the counterculture during the late 1960s.

The association among 16mm film, alternatives to mainstream practice, and freer sexual expression and social change was not lost on many of those who made

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Figure 2. This 1969 newspaper ad for the Center Theatre in Los Angeles aligned the sexually explicit 16mm beaver film with “experimental underground films.” Collection of the author.

storefront films or on those who observed the phenomenon. The *New York Times Magazine* labeled “the dirty movie” as “another aspect of hip culture,” claiming that many of the young filmmakers working in the Bay Area were using porn “to make a statement” and characterized Alex de Renzy as the “Jean-Luc Godard of the *nouvelle vague* in porn.” Arlene Elster, who ran the Sutter Cinema in San Francisco, spoke of the films as part of a move toward greater openness that appealed to the young, and the San Francisco Erotic Film Festival, which she and Lowell Pickett sponsored, was said to be an expression of their idealism.⁵⁹

Advertising continually made reference to the ways in which 16mm sex films challenged the status quo.⁶⁰ Even some of the performers took their roles as sexual revolutionaries seriously, choosing only to do films they felt had plots and some measure of social relevance. One model told the Commission on Obscenity that when she worked with “serious” directors, “the feeling I get is a positive, artistic one.”⁶¹ Whether as producers, talent, or viewers, individuals associated with 16mm sex films were encouraged to think of their involvement as a countercultural act. The new, franker 16mm movies marked the convergence of the revolution in film aesthetics and the sexual revolution.

The number of companies making 16mm films for the adult market proliferated rapidly.⁶² This growth not only signaled the importance of 16mm film in the adult market in the late 1960s but also demonstrated the comparative ease with which one could move into the field. Since the 16mm productions went further than sexploitation and, depending on the locality, were theoretically—if not always in actuality—more vulnerable to prosecution, there was little incentive to invest much in production. An hour-long 16mm feature could be completed for less than \$2,500, with most of the budget going to film stock and lab work—in other words, on average, for one-tenth the budget of a fairly basic 35mm sexploitation feature.⁶³ On the one hand, the lower budgets and “amateur” aesthetics of the 16mm films inscribed them with more naturalism or “authenticity” than sexploitation movies. On the other hand, the profits were very professional. By the end of 1970, Bill Osco and Howard Ziehm’s Graffiti Productions was expected to gross more than \$2 million. The company, which had begun operation a little more than a year before that, had started by cranking out some twenty beaver loops per week.⁶⁴ But the plotless loops were giving way to features. Harold Nawy, working for the Commission on Obscenity, determined that by 1970 features were commanding the market and even though they required a greater capital outlay, “the returns [were] more substantial than those from stag movies [shorts].”⁶⁵

As the range of films expanded to include men and women together and as the films shifted from shorts to feature-length narratives, some operations began aggressively seeking out a more varied clientele who viewed attendance at pornographic films as part of their participation in the sexual revolution. The Sutter in San Francisco offered a couples rate, and Arlene Elster voiced pride in the fact that young people and couples made up a good portion of the audience.⁶⁶ The Sutter’s ads, with gentle drawings of men and women, lines from Elizabeth Barret Browning poetry, and promises of “sensitive and creative exotic entertainment,” were clearly designed to attract a wider audience than the ads for beaver movies. The crowd at the “Mini” Cinema 16 in Waterloo, Iowa, was estimated to be about 40 percent women—no doubt most from the local university.⁶⁷ Osco and Ziehm claimed that “80 percent of their audience are couples, most of them in their 20s and 30s, and not just the ‘dirty old men’ of popular belief.” In an effort to attract more women, the pair “redecorated their theaters ‘so they won’t be so sleazy’ and changed the name of one from ‘The Eros’ to ‘The Beverly Cinema.’”⁶⁸ “Mary S.,” the ticket clerk and manager of the Peekarama, another San Francisco operation, explained that the theater did a good business with couples, perhaps because they

had a special area for love birds, who were cordoned off from the single men. She found that women were especially fond of movies like *The Runaway Virgin*, which had a strong emotional story line coupled with explicit action.⁶⁹ In addition to helping to draw a wider audience, the inclusion of narrative gave exhibitors firmer legal ground if they were prosecuted.

From Simulation to Hardcore Features. David F. Friedman has identified the 16mm simulation feature, which came to dominate storefront theaters, as the “missing link “ between the sexploitation film and the hardcore feature.⁷⁰ Indeed, by 1970, the line between simulation and hardcore was razor thin. When Marci of MJ Productions was asked to define hardcore in late 1970, her criterion was a single word: “insertion.”⁷¹ At the time, MJ Productions did not qualify as hardcore under Marci’s definition. For instance, an MJ feature from 1970, *Model Hunters*, is the story of two bickering bisexual roommates, Kim and Emma. Kim, who supports Emma, takes a job doing nude modeling for John, a photographer. Emma’s jealousy is aroused when she discovers Kim had sex with the shutterbug. Kim makes a second visit to John with Emma in tow. This time Kim has sex with a model, Pam, and with another photographer, Dave. John seduces Emma. When the roommates return home, Emma’s jealous streak is revived. Kim says that she will move out if Emma keeps it up. But Emma turns the tables by announcing she is leaving—John has invited her to move in with him. While hardly an elaborate narrative, like most sexploitation films, *Model Hunters* operates as a chain of cause-and-effect relationships that link and justify the scenes of sexual spectacle. And, like the beaver shorts, it features beaver close-ups, simulated oral sex, and simulated intercourse between fully nude participants, as well as male erections. The only thing missing is, to use Marci’s criterion, “insertion.” Thus, the only difference between the 16mm simulation films and what would become hardcore features was the lack of camera angles or close-ups that validated penetration, be it genital, oral, or anal.⁷²

Whether Graffiti’s *Mona* was the first feature actually to cross that line may be open to debate, but when it debuted in San Francisco in mid-1970, it was certainly the first such film to make a splash. Ads for De Renzy’s Screening Room assured patrons that the Sherpix release “surpasses its predecessors in a way that makes them instantly obsolete. The degree of explicitness and freedom exercised in *Mona* is unprecedented. It makes the so-called stag movies passé.”⁷³

One of if not the first hardcore sites in New York was the automated 16mm Mini-Cinema at Seventh Avenue and 49th Street, which began presenting a program of “San Francisco hardcore” at the beginning of September 1970. One of those early two-hour slates consisted of five color shorts and the feature *Electro Love* (a.k.a. *Electro Sex*), “the kind of thing that used to be run off at bachelor parties: all action and no ‘redeeming’ sex-education or documentary commentary on the soundtrack.”⁷⁴ While *Electro Love* lacked the serious trappings the white-coaters used for protection in court, Verrill’s assessment was somewhat overstated, since the film did have a semblance of a plot. He estimated that at \$5 per head and ten shows per day (at least some of which were standing-room only), the house could

pull in more than \$40,000 per week. The lure of a high return on a minimal investment certainly spurred producers and exhibitors to cross the line from “simulation features” into hardcore features. In New York City, distributor priorities that favored East Side theaters, coupled with product shortages, contributed to what Verrill called “creeping beaveritis” in the Times Square area. Some thirty-five theaters in the vicinity were playing not only sexploitation features but male and female beaver loops, and at least three sites were playing hardcore loops.⁷⁵ Within two months, six other sites had either opened or converted to a hardcore format.⁷⁶

Because production was not centralized and there were varying degrees of prosecutorial tolerance of sex films, it would be fruitless to attempt to identify a clearly discernible moment when the production of hardcore 16mm features began to outstrip the production of 16mm simulation features. Indeed, they coexisted for months, if not for a couple of years. In 1971, Scott Macdonough quoted Saul Shiffirin, vice president of Sherpax, who stated, “We believe that ‘Pornography is Geography,’ which means giving people what they want at the proper geographical locations.”⁷⁷ This was particularly true in the 16mm market. Storefront theaters showing 16mm features quickly became recognized as places to see films that pushed the boundaries as far as they could go—be that simulation or hardcore. Like their simulation counterparts, the plots of 16mm hardcore features were usually loosely tied together by a series of sexual episodes. *Electro Love* is such an example, involving a chunky jeans-wearing counterculture type who introduces his friend to the three female robots he has created to give him (and each other) sexual pleasure. He and his friend partake, trading off periodically, until they realize the robots cannot be turned off and they “end up literally devouring the gentlemen’s credentials.”⁷⁸

While also largely episodic, *Mona* included a greater degree of psychological motivation, as the titular heroine engages in fellatio with her boyfriend and a series of others in order to remain a virgin for her wedding night. Structurally, *Electro Love* and *Mona* were virtually identical to their simulation counterparts, such as *The Line Is Busy*, *Runaround*, and *Model Hunters*. It was only in their use of certain camera angles or the insertion of “meat shots,” close-ups that validated penetration or oral-genital contact, that they differed. While this difference may seem obvious now, such distinctions were rarely made in the marketing and exhibition of the films.

The arrival of the 16mm feature signaled a crisis in the adult film industry. The site where this divisiveness was most clearly manifested was in the Adult Film Association of America. In November 1968, Sam Chernoff of the Dallas-based Astro Film Company addressed a letter to his fellow sexploitation exhibitors encouraging them to organize in order to stave off harassment by law enforcement agencies.⁷⁹ In January 1969, 110 people representing some three hundred theaters, as well as producers and distributors, met in Kansas City to form an adult film trade association. Chernoff was elected president of the organization, initially called the Adult Motion Picture Association of America, soon changed to the Adult Film Association of America (AFAA). The AFAA’s first order of business was to put together a “legal kit,” prepared by Los Angeles attorney Stanley Fleishman, for the defense of motion pictures.⁸⁰ But within a year the sexploitation producers and exhibitors who

made up the AFAA were facing pressure not only from law enforcement but also from the mainstream industry in the form of Jack Valenti and the MPAA. Because of the inroads 35mm sexploitation was making into major chains, the MPAA started a campaign to dissuade theater owners from showing sexploitation films. In 1970, Valenti began a vendetta against exhibitors of these films, fearing that they would “clog the outlets for quality films,” and went so far as to suggest that eventually “no responsible producer will find a theater to exhibit his product.”⁸¹

At the same time, the AFAA was concerned about the 16mm operators it referred to as “the heat artists,” who went “too far” and were giving the exploitation industry a bad name.⁸² In November 1970, with the blessing of the city council, the New York City police began a crackdown on storefront theaters showing hardcore. The Patee and Capri on Seventh Avenue and the Avon 7 on Eighth Avenue had speakers ripped from walls and prints and projectors confiscated.⁸³ Some speculated that officials were hoping either to frighten exhibitors away from showing hardcore films or to put the adversary hearing rule to the test.⁸⁴ If they succeeded in frightening anyone, it was AFAA members. Members feared that prosecution of 16mm film exhibitors could expand to 35mm sexploitation. Established producers and distributors also found their hand being forced by the explicitness of 16mm films; they, along with exhibitors who had long played 35mm films, feared that the upstart movies were cutting into their business. A few consoled themselves with the belief that, as sexploitation producer/distributor Lee Hessel said, “audiences are tiring of [rutting bodies] and are demanding storylines and character interest along with the straight sex.” He noted as a good sign for the sexploitation business that some sites described as hardcore had dropped their prices from \$5 to \$2.⁸⁵ Of course, Hessel seemed to think that the audience with a yen for “storyline and character interest” would find its way back to sexploitation films. He overlooked that simulation features had those elements to varying degrees and that by simply changing camera angles or adding some “meat shots” a simulation film could become hardcore. Other companies making 35mm sexploitation, such as Donn Greer’s Xerxes, were jumping on the 16mm bandwagon because of better profit ratios.⁸⁶

When 16mm theatrical features were shown in public halls, schools, and churches, they had been seen as a threat to exhibition in the mainstream industry.⁸⁷ Now the same pattern was being replicated in the adult marketplace. The AFAA’s objection to 16mm initially was directed at the storefront theaters themselves with claims that the small sites were not subject to the regulations affecting most places of public assembly and that some were “fire traps and unsafe for exhibition without required facilities demanded of theaters.”⁸⁸ Then, at a meeting in New York in October 1970, the organization debated the status of 16mm “hardcore” producers within the organization. Writing in *Variety*, Addison Verrill noted that the discussion “showed how money worries can quickly make establishment figures out of former ‘outlaws’ and how principles vital to one’s existence can be bent to protect one’s bankroll.”⁸⁹ Verrill described how 16mm films could be made quickly and cheaply, putting them ahead of the 35mm producers in “the sexual ‘can you top this’ game.”⁹⁰ Arguments were put forth that 16mm producers

should not be included in the organization because 16mm was a nontheatrical gauge or their product was “operating outside the law”—even though that question was still being argued in the courts. Many members of the AFAA were in an untenable position, according to Verrill: “While crying total freedom of the screen to protect their business, they would at the same time act as censor themselves and force the 16mm people out of the game.”⁹¹ By the end of the meeting, the organization had voted to reaffirm its open-admission policy.⁹²

But the issue did not disappear, and in fact it was exacerbated as 1970 turned into 1971. With more sexploitation films, such as *Vixen* and *Without a Stitch*, achieving long, profitable runs in major chains, some sexploitation houses found their choice “to be between cheapjack sexploiters that have not been booked by product-short major houses” and 16mm fare.⁹³ In the face of the 35mm sexploitation shortage, and as more 16mm features became available, including hardcore titles such as *Caught in the Can* (1970), *The Coming Thing* (1970), *Journal of Love* (1970), *The Nurses* (1971), and *The School Girl* (1971), the choice to go hardcore was becoming an easier one. Joan of Marjon explained that many 35mm exhibitors were augmenting their situations with 16mm outfits and that “a lot of 35mm exhibitors have turned in their 35mm projectors and converted completely to 16mm. So, with more and more conversion, the 16mm feature is a growing market.”⁹⁴

The friction between the 35mm stalwarts and the 16mm newcomers reemerged at the third annual AFAA meeting in Los Angeles in January 1971. The “generation gap” between the sexploitation producers and the revolutionary 16mm filmmakers became obvious to Kevin Thomas, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*: “On the one hand, there are the old-line sexploitation producers who film in 35mm and don’t go ‘all the way’ but frequently equate sex and nudity with violence and morbidity on the screen and in their ads. On the other hand, is a group of younger filmmakers, working primarily in San Francisco and in 16mm, who are dedicated to total explicitness and attempt to present it artistically. (Privately, a veteran producer will admit he’s only against 16mm upstarts because they’re ruining his business. In San Francisco, a 35mm production that once might make as much as \$20,000 in two months can’t even get a booking there.)”⁹⁵

Lowell Pickett accused the sexploitation producers of equating sex with violence and of being guilty of fraud. He claimed that the 16mm producers were delivering “the goods”: “We’re attracting the under 30s – couples—and your audience is getting old and dying off. Our audiences don’t want to see people being punished in a Nazi camp,” he said, most likely referring to Olympic International’s *Love Camp 7* (1968). By focusing on generational conflict, Pickett mined the discourse of the counterculture to elucidate the differences between 16mm and 35mm films. Some producers expressed concern that 16mm filmmakers engaged in “flagrant abuses of the freedom of expression,” but Jay Fineberg of the Pussycat chain reasoned that “we cannot say what we do is all right and in good taste and what the hardcore guy does is not. We’re prejudicing even before the courts do!”⁹⁶ Throughout the discussion, the sexploitation old guard pointedly described 16mm product as the most problematic, not the white coater or the porn documentaries that contained hardcore scenes but that were distributed in 35mm and may have played in

their own theaters. It was clear within the industry that by crossing the hardcore line, 16mm films were driving innovation and change and that to remain viable the 35mm sexploitation producers would have to cross the line as well. While some of the major hardcore producers, notably the Mitchell brothers, came from the ranks of 16mm production, sexploitation stalwarts, such as Audubon, Distribpix, EVI, and Mitam, were pushed into making the switch to hardcore. According to David F. Friedman, 50 percent of the AFAA membership was making hardcore by 1974.⁹⁷

In his assessment of the porn industry for the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, John Sampson wrote, "By the time this report is published, it is possible that 16mm theaters will have assumed a more important role in the overall traffic of sexually oriented films."⁹⁸ They became, in fact, important and influential. The limited capital necessary to produce and exhibit 16mm films meant that entrepreneurs were willing to risk fines or the jail time that showing genital explicitness could bring about in exchange for potentially large returns. Sixteen-millimeter producers and exhibitors also rode the crest of the liberatory rhetoric of the sexual revolution and of changing filmmaking practice as exemplified by experimental filmmakers, college film societies, and other users of 16mm. Not only were these 16mm movies more daring than sexploitation and mainstream movies—pushing their direct competition, sexploitation movies, to become more graphic—but those who had produced beaver loops and who were just setting out with 16mm cameras were in turn forced to embrace the narrative elements of sexploitation films. The longer format necessitated material that could link the scenes of sexual spectacle in a logical fashion. Narrative filled the bill in a way that offered flexibility and potential for variation—and hence could draw repeat customers, including the lucrative couples market that was emerging from sexploitation. Moreover, narrative helped to legitimize hardcore films by permitting exhibitors to mount arguments that hardcore did not appeal solely to prurient interest but could have artistic merit or social importance. Despite fears that hardcore features could bring about increased censorship, many of the established sexploitation producers moved into hardcore features just as many 16mm producers shifted to the professional 35mm gauge.

The adult film industry has often been characterized as a monolithic, multi-million-(or billion, depending on the decade) dollar industry that moves with the steady, unified flow of a glacier. But just as we have come to see the mainstream Hollywood filmmaking industry as dynamic and made up of different (and often conflicting) interests, the foregoing account should point to the necessity of reconceptualizing the porn industry. Moreover, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the adult film industry did not exist in a vacuum. Hollywood was being influenced by, and influenced, the producers and exhibitors of sexploitation films, and they, in turn, were jockeying for position with the insurgent manufacturers of 16mm hardcore films. Finally, the above account should help us recognize that the hardcore feature developed as a reaction to conditions in the adult film marketplace in addition to more obvious social conditions. The hardcore feature was certainly not a predetermined end.

The hardcore narrative feature thrived until new changes in the adult market reached another critical point in the mid-1980s when the introduction of video

shifted the viewing space from the theater to the home. This new set of conditions and patterns of viewing practice contributed to the decreased emphasis on narrative and to the return to a pre-“golden age” emphasis on pure sexual spectacle.

Notes

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1. Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 77.
2. Split beavers referred to shots of spread labia. Action beavers usually referred to autoerotic manipulation of the genitals, or manipulation by a partner. The hardcore loop was male/female sexual intercourse.
3. While the “white-coaters” and porn documentaries have been seen as important stops on the road to hardcore features, it is becoming increasingly clear that from an industrial standpoint they constitute a mere footnote. See n45.
4. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible,”* expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 98.
5. Both *Sinema* and *Hard Core* are exemplary in their own ways, and my points about their brief takes on the history of the form should not be considered a criticism of their primary purposes: to provide a “snapshot” of the porn industry circa 1974 and a complex exploration of the generic parameters of the hardcore feature from 1972 to the early 1980s, respectively. If anything, they help to illustrate how difficult it is to write historical accounts of pornography.
6. At the World Pornography Conference in Los Angeles in August 1998, the diverse conferees—academics, lawyers, physicians, porn producers and performers, and some fans—all seemed to be in accord on one thing: from 1972, when *Deep Throat* was released, to the point when video came to dominate the production and distribution of hardcore, in the mid-1980s, constituted a classical period. Echoing some of the contemporary discourse about the Hollywood studio system, adult film stars (such as Veronica Hart, Richard Pacheco, and William Margold) were rueful that the days of high pay (comparatively), leisurely shooting schedules, posh premieres, and even a certain celebrity status outside the confines of the porn world were things of the past. See also Jim Holliday, “A History of Modern Pornographic Film and Video,” in James Elias et al., eds., *Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography, and the First Amendment* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1999), 341–51.
7. See Justin Wyatt, “The Stigma of X: Adult Cinema and the Institution of the MPAA Rating System,” in Matthew Bernstein, ed., *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 238–63. A modified version of that essay also appears under the title “Selling ‘Atrocious Sexual Behavior: Revising Sexualities in the Marketplace for Adult Film of the 1960s’” in Hilary Radner and Moya Luckett, eds., *Swinging Single: Representing Sexuality in the 1960s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 105–31. See also Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

8. See Eric Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).
9. John J. Sampson, *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 37.
10. "Sherpix: The Unusual Company," *Independent Film Journal*, April 27, 1972, 21.
11. Ralph Kaminsky, "Pussycat Chief Credits 'L.A. Times' and Vice Squad for Entering Business," *Film Journal*, March 23, 1981, 14.
12. "Far Out (Long Island) Sex," *Variety*, June 14, 1967, 13.
13. Richard Corliss, "Radley Metzger: Aristocrat of the Erotic: An Interview by Richard Corliss," *Film Comment* 9, no. 1 (January-February 1973): 23.
14. "Valenti on 'Personal' Campaign to Keep Sex Films out of Respectable Theaters," *Independent Film Journal*, February 4, 1970, 4–5; "Valenti: Too Many Playdates to 'Frankly Salacious Films,'" *Independent Film Journal*, January 21, 1970, n.p.; "Valenti's Personal Campaign Draws Fire of Independents; Lawsuit Charges Industry Conspiracy against Import," *Independent Film Journal*, February 18, 1970, 4–5; "Metzger and Leighton Have Two Words for It:—'Playing Time,'" *Film Journal*, February 18, 1970, 4.
15. 1971 Distribpix Catalog, Something Weird Video Collection, Seattle.
16. Sampson, *Technical Report*, vol. 3, 33.
17. *Ibid.*, 32–34.
18. *Ibid.*, 40.
19. Pete Kaufman interview, Commission on Obscenity and Pornography Records, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, box 19, Pete Kaufman File, no date.
20. Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 17, 19, 27–31.
21. Eric Schaefer, "Plain Brown Wrapper: Adult Films for the Home Market, 1930–1970," paper presented at the Society for Cinema Studies conference, Chicago, March 10, 2000. This paper draws on, among other sources, the Elmer Dyer Collection at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.
22. Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 117–18.
23. See Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5–33.
24. Eithne Johnson, "The 'Coloscopic' Film and the 'Beaver' Film: Scientific and Pornographic Scenes of Female Sexual Responsiveness," in Radner and Luckett, *Swinging Single*, 313–14.
25. *Ibid.*, 312.
26. Unlike 35mm films, 16mm movies could be chopped up and used as "loops" in peep shows and booths.
27. "AFAA: Danger to Let States Set Standards of Obscenity," *Independent Film Journal*, August 5, 1970, 4.
28. Kaufman interview.
29. In addition to the storefronts, 16mm films turned up in bars and nightclubs in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and—presumably—other locales. "Storefront Boom in Capital; Sex Policy Boosts Grosses," *Independent Film Journal*, January 21, 1971, 5. In 1969, the Famous Iron Horse Cinema Bar, on 8th Street between Normandie and Western, offered "2 giant screens, 24 movies changes [sic] all the time." An ad in the *Los Angeles Free Press*, June 27, 1969, asked, "Is there a theater with a plush night club atmosphere where for \$2.00 you're served a beer by nudely clad models at your

- own tables, listen to sexy records, see sound flicks, smoke, visit all you want and see all?" (40).
30. James Fulton, "Dirty Movies Are Dirtier Than Ever," *Adam Film Quarterly* 8 (February 1969): 75.
 31. Membership fees enabled exhibitors to argue, when they were prosecuted, that their venues were private clubs and not public places of amusement.
 32. "A Reader's Review of Erotic Theaters," *Sensuous One* (1973): 8.
 33. Sampson, *Technical Report*, vol. 3, 55.
 34. "Reader's Review of Erotic Theaters," 8.
 35. "N.Y. Rivals Frisco's Beavers: Female and Male Nudes alongside on Separate Screens at Mermaid," *Variety*, February 25, 1970, 4.
 36. Sampson, *Technical Report*, vol. 3, 55.
 37. Addison Verrill, "Sexpix Simplified: They Pay," *Variety*, April 1, 1970, 3.
 38. "Crackdown under Way on Storefront Theaters," *Independent Film Journal*, December 9, 1970, 4.
 39. "N.Y. Rivals Frisco's Beavers," 4.
 40. "How Skin Flicks Hit Bible-Belt Waterloo, Iowa," *Newsweek*, December 21, 1970, 28.
 41. Les Natali interview, Commission on Obscenity and Pornography Records, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, box 21, Lou Sher file.
 42. David F. Friedman, telephone interview with the author, January 24, 1996.
 43. Natali interview; M&B Enterprises flier, ca. 1970, Something Weird Video Collection, Los Angeles.
 44. Paris Theater advertisement, *San Francisco Examiner*, August 1, 1969, 27.
 45. Pink Kat advertisement, *San Francisco Examiner*, August 14, 1969, 30; white-coaters, such as *Man and Wife* (1969), *He and She* (1970), and *Black Is Beautiful* (1970), are generally cited as milestones in the development of the hardcore feature. This assumption seems to stem from the fact that they included scenes of sexual intercourse and were of feature length, rather than because of any industrial or generic similarity to subsequent features. There was, of course, little affinity between the white-coater, traditional exploitation, and hardcore feature as it would develop. White-coaters were most often released in 35mm and shown in larger venues, many of which were "legitimate" theaters. This enabled the movies to draw curiosity seekers as well as the regular adult film audience and initially to rack up sizable grosses. Although many of the films had long runs in some cities, the form itself had a short shelf life, offering nothing to create a base of regular customers. This also holds true to a large extent for the "porn documentaries," such as *Pornography in Denmark: A New Approach* (1970).
 46. Fulton, "Dirty Movies Are Dirtier Than Ever," 75.
 47. Dan Rhys, "'M-J Productions Presents!' ('M' Is Marci and 'J' Is Joan)," *Adam Film World* 2, no. 11 (1971): 55–56; "Porn and Popcorn," *Parade*, March 21, 1971, n.p.
 48. Rhys, "'M-J Productions Presents!'" 56. Unfortunately, Marci and Joan, the principals of MJ and Mar-Jon, were identified only by their first names in the article.
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. Something Weird Video Catalog, Suppl. 2, Seattle, 1992, 20–21. Kariofilis has been identified through other records.
 51. Schaefer, "*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*," esp. 76–95; Williams, *Hard Core*, 130–34; and Craig Fischer, "*Beyond The Valley of the Dolls* and the Exploitation Genre," *Velvet Light Trap* 30 (fall 1992): 18–33.
 52. Addison Verrill, "Skinpix Face 'New Dilemma,'" *Variety*, October 21, 1970, 18.
 53. John Morthland, "Porn Films: An In-Depth Report," *Take One* (March/April 1973): 14.

54. Juan A. Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 53. The term “underground film” was applied to avant-garde filmmakers as early as 1962 (54–55), but by the late 1960s it was picked up and exploited by the makers and exhibitors of 16mm sex films. Advertising the film *Sophie*, the Gay Paree Theater in San Francisco referred to itself and other “sex exploitation” houses as “underground theaters.” *San Francisco Examiner*, June 28, 1969, 9. Because both avant-garde movies and sexploitation/porn films offered nudity and frank depictions of sex, the term “underground film” was often applied to both types of film without much distinction.
55. Edward Pincus, *Guide to Filmmaking* (New York: Signet, 1972), 2.
56. Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 132.
57. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 41.
58. Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Citadel Press, 1985), 207.
59. William Murray, “The Porn Capital of America,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 3, 1971, 22–23.
60. For instance, after a show at San Francisco’s Peekarama was “charged as being for mature audiences to view,” ads claimed that the theater obtained a restraining order “to insure that you are not deprived from seeing what you’ve asked for time and again. This weeks [sic] show is right up your alley. We call it ‘Gutsy.’” *San Francisco Examiner*, February 19, 1970, 30. Such an oppositional stance in advertising was not infrequent. In announcing the move to full-length “talking stags” with *The Runaway Virgin* several months later, the theater claimed “This picture is sure to ‘Revolutionize’ the Adult Film Industry.” *San Francisco Examiner*, June 24, 1970, 42.
61. Harold Nawy, “The San Francisco Marketplace,” in *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 181.
62. Among the outfits operating between 1968 and 1971 were A.I.M. Productions, America Film Productions Co., Athena, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Cherry Productions, Cinema 7, Clamil, Cosmos Films, Dragon Films, Dun-Mar, Fearless Productions, Fleetan, Graffiti, Impressive Arts Productions, Jahlk Productions, Janus II-Academy Productions, Jo-Jo Productions, MJ Productions, John Samuels Films Ltd., Topar Productions, and Xerxes. Distributors of 16mm films included Able, Canyon Distributing Company, Dekan, Exhibitors Distributing Ltd., Jo-Jo Distributors, Kariofilms, M&B Enterprises, Mar-Jon, Probe Films, and Stacey. Sherpix, which dealt primarily in 35mm, also did some 16mm business. Able and Stacey alone released thirty-five and fifty-nine films respectively in 1970. This list is derived from material in the Something Weird video collection, the author’s collection, and *The American Film Institute Catalog of Feature Films, 1961–1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
63. Nawy, “The San Francisco Marketplace,” 180, and William Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema* (New York: Penthouse/Ballantine, 1973), 151.
64. Addison Verrill, “Bill Osco, Boy King of L.A. Porno, Grossing over \$2,000,000 Presently; 10-City Nucleus; ‘Actors’ A-Plenty,” *Variety*, December 30, 1970, 5.
65. Nawy, “The San Francisco Marketplace,” 178.
66. Murray, “The Porn Capital of America,” 23.
67. “How Skin Flicks Hit Bible-Belt Waterloo, Iowa,” 28.
68. “Porn and Popcorn,” n.p.
69. Rex Williams, “The Porno Movie Scene,” *Sensuous One*, (1973): 9. Although the article calls the theater the Pick-O-Rama, the writer was evidently referring to the

- Peekarama. *The Runaway Virgin* (1970), a pre-Mona Bill Osco effort, is sometimes identified as *The Virgin Runaway*.
70. David F. Friedman, telephone interview with the author, August 5, 1998.
 71. Rhys, "M-J Productions Presents!" 57.
 72. What would come to be known as the "money shot"—the shot of an ejaculation, validating male sexual pleasure—was not even at issue at this point. In the earliest hardcore features, it was not yet an unvarying convention.
 73. *Mona* advertisement, *San Francisco Examiner*, August 6, 1970, 25.
 74. Addison Verrill, "Hard-Core Porno: \$40,000 a Week; San Francisco Outdoes Copenhagen," *Variety*, September 16, 1970, 3.
 75. Addison Verrill, "B'way: Glory Road No More," *Variety*, September 30, 1970, 5.
 76. Addison Verrill, "Raid-&-Rip N.Y. Hardcore Pix," *Variety*, November 25, 1970, 18.
 77. Scott Macdonough, "The Story of Sherpix: Soft-Core, Hard-Core, Encore," *Show* (July 1971): 20.
 78. Verrill, "Hard-Core Porno," 3.
 79. Sam Chernoff, "Letter to Fellow Exhibitors," November 1968. Something Weird Video Collection.
 80. Stuart Byron, "Sex Films' Script for Action," *Variety*, December 18, 1968, 1, 24; "Set Up New Trade Assn. for Adult (Sex) Films," *Variety*, January 15, 1969, 1, 95; and "Sexploitation Filmmakers, Showmen Form Adult Motion Picture Ass'n," *Boxoffice*, January 20, 1969, 8.
 81. "Valenti on 'Personal' Campaign," 4.
 82. "Adult Film Group," 15.
 83. Verrill, "Raid-&-Rip," 18, and "Crackdown under Way," 4.
 84. Verrill, "Raid-&-Rip," 18.
 85. "Cambist's Hessel Sees Smart Sex Come-on Weathering 16mm Excess; Story, Characterization Still Count," *Variety*, January 20, 1971, 7.
 86. Sybil Malone, "Donn Greer—Where the Action Is," *Adam Film World* 2, no. 12 (February 1971): 54.
 87. Ben Shyler, "The 16mm Problem," *Boxoffice*, February 17, 1964, 3. The "problem" of competition from 16mm exhibition extended back to at least the 1930s.
 88. "AFAA: Danger," 4.
 89. Verrill, "Skinpix Face 'New Dilemma,'" 5.
 90. *Ibid.*, 18.
 91. *Ibid.*
 92. "Old-Time N.Y. Sex Site Showman Begins to Yearn for Censorship," *Variety*, December 2, 1970, 5.
 93. *Ibid.*
 94. Rhys, "M-J Productions Presents!" 56.
 95. Kevin Thomas, "Current Censorship Status in Adult Film Market," *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, February 7, 1971, n.p.
 96. *Ibid.*
 97. Friedman interview, 1998.
 98. Sampson, *Technical Report*, vol. 3, 57.