

porn studies



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

ERIC SCHAEFER

* 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—remains 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 hard-core feature. It runs as follows: during the 1960s, feature-length soft-core 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" (Turan and Zito 1974, 77). At about the same time, shorts known as beaver films, which had previously circulated underground and showed full female nudity with a focus on the genitals, began to appear above ground in San Francisco. The split beaver, action beaver, and hard-core loop began to appear shortly afterward.¹ By 1969–70, 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, while offering hard-core sequences by way of illustration. Compilation features, presented as histories of the stag film, quickly followed.² By mid-1970, the first hard-core narrative feature, *Mona* (dir. Bill Osco, 1970), 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* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972), which "burst into the public consciousness" (1999, 98).

Even though we lack a programmatic history of filmed hard-core pornography, its development, as evidenced above, has been narrativized. The result has tended toward an overly rigid chronology: filmmakers jumping across a series of hurdles, offering greater explicitness with each leap on their way to a predetermined end—nonsimulated representations of sexual acts on screen.³ 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 hard-core narrative constituted 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 hard-core feature, little effort has gone into explaining how and why the hard-core feature emerged when it did.⁴ 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 hard-core narrative feature in the period from 1967 to 1972, the year *Deep Throat* thrust it 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 so-called 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 16 mm as a theatrical mode in the adult market—contributed to the rise of the pornographic feature. These conditions proved just as important as the individual legal decisions and the porn auteurs, often cited as major causes in the development of the feature. Indeed, 16 mm films revolutionized the adult film market, bringing hard-core films out of the back room and placing them “on scene” in cities around the United States. The discourse of revolution—sexual and otherwise—was mobilized to differentiate the new 16 mm films from existing adult motion picture product. Moreover, the sexploitation film, which has been characterized as a dead end in the history of filmed pornography, competed directly with 16 mm films, making the former instrumental in the development of the hard-core 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 gone 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 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 (Wyatt 1999; Lewis 2000). 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 16 mm gauge has been used—in amateur moviemaking, experimental film, education, industry, and pornography.

The Sexploitation Film

Some discussion of the sexploitation market is necessary for contextualizing the arrival of 16 mm pictures and the emergence of hard-core features. In “*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*,” I discuss how from the early 1920s to the late 1950s “classical” exploitation films offered U.S. audiences the 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 taboo under the Production Code (Schaefer 1999).

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new crop of so-called nudie-cuties appeared—films that contained nudity but did not have an educational imprimatur. Russ Meyer’s *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) is generally acknowledged as 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* (dir. Hershell Gordon Lewis, 1960) and *Mr. Peter’s Pets* (dir. Dick Crane, 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 always remained 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 usually, though by no means always, constituted fictional narratives including 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* [dir. Joe Sarno, 1964]), dramas about big-city decadence (e.g., *To Turn a Trick* [dir. Charles Andrew, 1967]), psychodramas about sexual obsession (e.g., *The Curse of Her Flesh* [dir. Julian Marsh, 1968]), and spoofs of classic tales (e.g., *Dracula the Dirty Old Man* [dir. William Edwards, 1969]) and contemporary genres (e.g., *Tight Spy* [dir. William Hennigar, 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 hardtop theaters, including specialized chains such as the Art Theater Guild and Pussycat, regularly played sexploitation product (Sampson 1971, 37). Louis Sher’s Art Theater Guild, for example, began as a string of houses specializing in European art films in 1954. By 1965, Sher had moved into distribution, releasing Andy Warhol titles like *Lonesome Cowboys* (dir. Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey, 1968) and *Flesh* (dir. Paul Morrissey, 1968), and eventually sexploitation and porn films such as *The Stewardesses* (dir. Alf Silliman Jr., 1969), *Mona*, and *History of the Blue Movie* (dir. Alex DeRenzy, 1970) (“Sherpix” 1972, 21). 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, which ultimately became California's Pussycat Theater chain. By 1981, Miranda operated forty houses (Kaminsky 1981, 14). Meanwhile, dozens of other urban theaters and rural drive-ins—particularly in the South—programmed steady streams of sexploitation 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 breakout pictures such as *I, a Woman* (dir. Mac Ahlberg, 1966), *Vixen* (dir. Russ Meyer, 1968), and *Without a Stitch* (dir. Annelise Meineche, 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" ("Far Out" 1967, 13). The film broke into respectable venues early in its American run in 1966, when it played the Trans-Lux on Eighth Street in Manhattan (Corliss 1973, 23). 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 ("Metzger and Leighton" 1970, 4; "Valenti on 'Personal' Campaign" 1970, 4-5; "Valenti: Too Many" 1970; "Valenti's Personal" 1970, 4-5).

An established group of distributors and subdistributors served the hundreds of theaters playing sexploitation product, either regularly or occasionally. 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 International collectively released thirty-two pictures. In 1969, between 135 and 150 feature-length sexploitation pictures hit the circuit (Sampson 1971, 33). 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 (Distribpix Catalogue 1971). In addition, dozens of smaller companies issued a film or two per year.

Sexploitation films were produced and exhibited in 35 mm for \$15,000 to \$25,000, with "a fair number" coming in at \$40,000. While some were col-

bled together for as little as \$5,000 to \$10,000, a few of the more elaborate color productions made in 1969-70 cost more than \$100,000 (Sampson 1971, 32-34). 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 (40).

By 1970, the sexploitation industry began to fracture. 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 (Kaufman n.d.). But more important to the development of hard-core motion pictures, the industry was also cleaving along the lines of 16 mm and 35 mm production and exhibition.

Eager Beavers and Storefront Theaters

By 1923, 16 mm equipment was standardized and began to be marketed as an "amateur" gauge, in contrast to the 35 mm gauge for "professionals." From that point on, companies such as Kodak and Bell and Howell marketed the 16 mm gauge as a leisure product for middle- and upper-middle-class families (Zimmermann 1995, 17-31). 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 (Schaefer forthcoming). 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 16 mm 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 8 mm equipment became popular among amateurs and home-movie enthusiasts in the 1950s, 16 mm came to be considered a semiprofessional—but still a nontheatrical—gauge (Zimmermann 1995, 117-18).

Sixteen-millimeter adult films began to move out of the home and into

public exhibition at the beginning of 1967, the year the *San Francisco Examiner* advertised the first beaver films. The Roxie, a traditional theater with several hundred seats at Sixteenth Street and Valencia, had been serving up a steady stream of so-called 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 Third 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 that *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 16 mm equipment and featuring completely nude models. Beyond use of the 16 mm gauge, 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.

But differences between the art studies and the beavers existed as well. The women in the art studies were more quiescent, in keeping with the contemplative qualities of the nude (Nead 1992, 5–33.). By contrast, the women in the beaver films employed more overtly sexual gazes and movements: they licked their lips, ground 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." The increased sense of intimacy and spontaneity in the beaver films were part and parcel of the 16 mm gauge and the discourses of "naturalism" attached to it (1999, 312–14).

The shift in where 16 mm adult films were shown—from homes, arcades, and low-profile peep-show venues to theaters—occurred for several reasons. First, in the home market, 16 mm had been displaced by cheaper

8 mm and super-8 products. Those who made 16 mm adult movies were in search of a new market for their wares. Second, students in college film courses were using 16 mm equipment to make adult movies, both to earn extra money and to hone their filmmaking skills. Making 16 mm films with borrowed equipment in a field with no set ground rules was a realistic option for these students; making 35 mm 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 16 mm production remained 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 16 mm filmmakers and other low-end operators reason to push acceptable theatrical limits and make and show inexpensive beaver films.⁵

Initially, there was little incentive for sexploitation theaters equipped with 35 mm projection and a steady customer base to install 16 mm projectors to show plotless shorts. Indeed, the limited brightness of standard 16 mm projection made 16 mm hardly ideal for hardtops, and even less so 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 ("AFAA: Danger" 1970, 4). 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 hardtop 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 16 mm operation could be started for about \$3,000 (Kaufman n.d.). The most important and expensive piece of equipment was the 16 mm 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.⁶

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 with 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” (1969, 75). The five-dollar 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.⁷ Others offered discounts of a dollar or two for couples and senior citizens or free admission for women with escorts (“A Reader’s Review” 1973, 8). Lengthy hours of operation also helped make up for minimal seating capacity. Most storefronts were open by mid-morning 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 (Sampson 1971, 55).

The success of 16 mm adult films in San Francisco, and the fact that they remained 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

**ALL FEMALE !
ALL COLOR !
ALL ACTION !
ALL WAYS !**

**ONE WEEK
JUNE 25 thru JULY 1
THE HOTTEST SHOW IN TOWN
DIRECT FROM SAN FRANCISCO**

**WE SOCK IT TO YOU FOR 2
FULL HOURS IN BLUSHING COLOR**

**NOW SHOWING
WORLD
PREMIERE
ALL NEW GIRL SHOW**

**EXPERIMENTAL UNDERGROUND FILMS
ADULTS ONLY!**

CENTER THEATRE
4762 WHITTIER BLVD. 263-9631
BETWEEN EASTERN & ATLANTIC BLVD
CONTINUOUS FROM 10 A.M.
MIDNITE SHOW - EVERY FRI & SAT
LADIES ADMITTED FREE WITH ESCORT
PARKING AT REAR OF THEATRE

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

to the Cinematheque 16 was little more than an anonymous doorway under an awning (“A Reader’s Review” 1973, 8).

New York was somewhat slower to make the move into 16 mm. Regular cleanup 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 16 mm movies began to appear regularly in late 1969, and by early 1970, the beavers were firmly ensconced (“N.Y. Rivals” 1970, 4). The Commission on Obscenity and Pornography estimated that about three dozen 16 mm houses were in operation in New York City by mid-1970 (Sampson 1971, 55). One could see 16 mm films at the Avon on Seventh Avenue or the Circus Cinema on Broadway between Forty-seventh and Forty-eighth Streets. Rex and Chelly Wilson operated the Cameo and the Tivoli, as well as the Eros 1 and 2, which started with beaver shorts and moved into 16 mm features (Verrill 1970e, 3). 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 two-by-fours and Sheetrock ("Crackdown under Way" 1970, 4). The Mermaid Theater on Forty-second Street offered female beavers on one screen and male "beavers" on a second ("N.Y. Rivals" 1970, 4). Other major cities had at least five or six storefront operations, and even some small towns had one or two. In a 1970 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 (28).

Except for possible legal bills, the largest ongoing expense to operate storefront theaters came from 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 and Pornography, San Francisco exhibitor Les Natali claimed that there was no system of national distribution for 16 mm storefront films (Natali n.d.). 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 (Friedman 1996). Since sales often took place one on one, 16 mm producers—unlike sexploitation producers—did not have to provide posters, press books, 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. (Because they operated on the borderline of legality, there is no evidence of producers trying 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 (Natali n.d.; M&B Enterprises 1970).

Some exhibitors produced their own 16 mm films, and, after they had 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 Pro-

ductions, run by Arlene Elster and Lowell Pickett, produced films for the Sutter Cinema, also in San Francisco (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 16 mm 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 so-called split beavers and action beavers, by spring 1969, 16 mm theaters introduced a number of variations, including sound-on-film ("talking beavers"), 3-D, multiple screens, lesbian action, and male films.⁸ 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" (Paris Theater 1969). 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 16 mm format continued viability (Pink Kat 1969).⁹ 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?" (75).

Sixteen-Millimeter Features and Revolutionary Discourse

Audience boredom may have helped push 16 mm producers to move into features. But the 16 mm producers were compelled into a position of innovation to stay a step ahead of traditional 35 mm 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 16 mm outfits began to improve their technical qualities and incorporate story lines into their displays of genital explicitness (Rhys 1971, 55–56; "Porn and Popcorn," 1971, n.p.).¹⁰ The initial feature-length 16 mm 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 35 mm sexploitation market and the

What You've Been Waiting For!
Here comes Dodi, a smart young innocent
from the Midwest to the wild and wicked
big city. Working 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 in-
volved in and fearing that Dodi is upset,
Sandy offers to control her work while
Dodi is staying with her. Much to her
surprise, Dodi insists on leaving 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 some-
times "novel" and sometimes "outrageous," but
all in all, it leads to an orgasm of
immense entertainment pleasure.

RATED X



16mm FEATURE LENGTH FULL COLOR PICTURE

Running time, Approximately 60 minutes



ORDER FROM
MAE-JON
5420 Malibu Ave., Hollywood, Calif. 90028
(213) 466-6196



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

16 mm market began to meld. "There is a lack of 35 mm sexploitation product," she explained, "and the majors are producing general release films as hot as the old 35 mm sexploitations were. So now the 35 mm sexploitationers have to get hotter, the same as the 16 mm 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 16 mm films so they can have a continuous show every week." Although some exhibitors who had started with beaver loops were reluctant to change because they had a regular clientele, new 16 mm theaters tended to open with features (Rhys 1971, 56).¹¹

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 (Something Weird 1992).¹² The company initially made four 35 mm 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* (dir. Mort Shuman, 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, a general trajectory emerges as she seeks, and eventually finds, sexual satisfaction. *The Mind Blowers* (Harlan Renvok, 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 16 mm color features shot in California. Like the sexploitation films, these simulation features included a narrative, albeit a rather limited one. 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. At one point, 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 16 mm features apart from 35 mm sexploitation movies—both its own and those made by other companies—and aligned them with the beaver and other 16 mm 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 (Schaefer 1999, 76–95). Similar ar-

guments, albeit using somewhat different theoretical models, can be found in Williams's discussion of "narrative and number" in hard-core 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) (L. Williams 1999; Fischer 1992).¹³ Regardless of the terminology used, in each of these instances, we witness an oscillation between narrative exposition and instances of sexual display. The 16 mm 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 16 mm film served to stabilize production and enabled producers and exhibitors to differentiate their films more clearly 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 16 mm adult films rode the crest of a more general enthusiasm for 16 mm as a gauge. As Addison Verrill wrote in *Variety* in 1970, "Up to a year ago, 16 mm was considered a nontheatrical mode of exhibition, primarily geared to college film societies and private film libraries" (1970f, 18). The association of 16 mm 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' 16 mm 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" (Morthland 1973, 14).

The 16 mm 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 16 mm, was tied "the-

matically 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'" (1996, 53).¹⁴ Venues such as Cinema 16 and Anthology Film Archives cemented the link between 16 mm, 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 8 mm and 16 mm production, concluding, "Film to the filmmakers, that they may change the world" (1972, 2). Finally, Patricia Zimmermann has noted that 16 mm'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" (1995, 132). Indeed, the makers of 16 mm 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, could, in turn, lead to an "expanded consciousness" and social change (1970, 41). "The more I make love, the more I make revolution" (Peck 1985, 207)—that and similar slogans were common among the counterculture during the late 1960s.

The association between 16 mm film, alternatives to mainstream practice, and freer sexual expression and social change was not lost on many of those who made 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 (Murray 1971, 22–23).

Advertising continually made reference to the ways in which 16 mm sex films challenged the status quo.¹⁵ 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 and Pornography that when she worked with "seri-

ous" directors, "the feeling I get is a positive, artistic one" (Nawy 1971, 181). Whether as producers, talent, or viewers, individuals associated with 16 mm sex films were encouraged to think of their involvement as a countercultural act. The new, franker 16 mm movies marked the convergence of the revolution in film aesthetics and the sexual revolution.

The number of companies making 16 mm films for the adult market proliferated rapidly.¹⁶ This growth not only signaled the importance of 16 mm 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 16 mm 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 16 mm 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 35 mm sexploitation feature (Nawy 1971, 180; Rotsler 1973, 151). On the one hand, the lower budgets and amateur aesthetics of the 16 mm 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, had started by cranking out some twenty beaver loops per week (Verrill 1970a, 5). But the plotless loops began giving way to features. Harold Nawy, working for the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, 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]" (1971, 178).

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 (Murray 1971, 23). The Sutter's ads, with gentle drawings of men and women, lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 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 ("How Skin

3. A typical advertisement for San Francisco's Sutter Cinema stressed the narrative nature of their presentations as a way of attracting a more diverse audience. Collection of the author.

Flicks Hit" 1970, 28). 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'" ("Porn and Popcorn," 1971, n.p.). "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 lovebirds, who were cordoned off from the single men. She found that women were especially fond of movies like *The Runaway Virgin* (dir. Bill Osco, 1970), which had a strong emotional story line coupled with explicit action (R. Williams 1973, 9). 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 Hard-Core Features

David F. Friedman has identified the 16 mm simulation feature, which came to dominate storefront theaters, as the "missing link" between the sexploitation film and the hard-core feature (1998). Indeed, by 1970, the line be-

tween simulation and hard core was razor thin. When Marci of MJ Productions was asked to define hard core late in the year, she used as her criterion a single word: "insertion" (Rhys 1971, 57). At the time, MJ Productions did not qualify as hard core under Marci's definition. For instance, an MJ feature from 1970, *Model Hunters*, tells 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 that Kim has 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 16 mm simulation films and what would become hard-core features was the lack of camera angles or close-ups that validated penetration, be it genital, oral, or anal.⁷ 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" (*Mona* ad 1970).

One of, if not the, first hard-core sites in New York was the automated 16 mm Mini-Cinema at Seventh Avenue and Forty-ninth 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" (Verrill 1970c, 3). While *Electro Love* lacked the serious trappings the white-coaters used for protection in court, reporter Addison 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 hard-core features. In New York City, distributor priorities favoring 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 hard-core loops (1970a, 5). Within two months, six other sites had either opened or converted to a hard-core format (Verrill 1970d, 18).

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 hard-core 16 mm features began to outstrip the production of 16 mm simulation features. Indeed, they coexisted for months, if not for a couple of years. Saul Shiffrin, vice president of Sherpix, stated, "We believe that 'Pornography is Geography,' which means giving people what they want at the proper geographical locations" (Macdonough 1971, 20). This was particularly true in the 16 mm market. Storefront theaters showing 16 mm features quickly became recognized as places to see films that pushed the boundaries as far as they could go—be that simulation or hard core. Like their simulation counterparts, the plots of 16 mm hard-core 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" (Verrill 1970c, 3).

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 16 mm feature signaled a crisis in the adult film industry. The site where this divisiveness most clearly manifested itself 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 (Chernoff 1968). 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 (Byron 1968, 24; "Set Up New Trade" 1969, 1, 95; "Sexploitation Filmmakers" 1969, 8). But within a year, the sexploitation producers and exhibitors who made up the AFAA faced 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 35 mm sexploitation had made 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" ("Valenti on 'Personal' Campaign" 1970, 4).

At the same time, the AFAA was concerned about the 16 mm operators it referred to as "the heat artists," who went "too far" and were giving the exploitation industry a bad name ("Adult Film Group" 1970, 15). In November 1970, with the blessing of the city council, the New York City police began a crackdown on storefront theaters showing hard core. The Paree and the Capri on Seventh Avenue and the Avon 7 on Eighth Avenue had speakers ripped from walls and prints and projectors confiscated ("Crackdown under Way" 1970, 4; Verrill 1970d, 18). Some speculated that officials were hoping either to frighten exhibitors away from showing hard-core films or to put the adversary hearing rule to the test (Verrill 1970d, 18). If they succeeded in frightening anyone, it was AFAA members. Members feared that prosecution of 16 mm film exhibitors could expand to 35 mm sexploitation. Established producers and distributors also found their hand being forced by the explicitness of 16 mm films; they, along with exhibitors who had long played 35 mm 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 hard core had dropped their prices from \$5 to \$2 ("Cambist's Hessel" 1971, 7). 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 hard core. Other companies making 35 mm sexploitation, such as Donn Greer's Xerxes, jumped on the 16 mm bandwagon because of better profit ratios (Malone 1971, 54). When 16 mm theatrical features were shown in public halls, schools, and churches, they had been seen as a threat to exhibition in the mainstream industry (Shyler 196).¹⁸ Now the same pattern was replicated in the adult marketplace. The AFAA initially directed their objection to 16 mm 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" ("AFAA: Danger" 1970, 4). Then, at a meeting in New York in October 1970, the organization debated the status of 16 mm hard-core 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" (Verrill 1970f, 5). He described how 16 mm films could be made quickly and cheaply, putting them ahead of the 35 mm producers in "the sexual 'can you top this' game." Arguments were put forth that 16 mm producers should not be included in the organization because 16 mm was a nontheatrical gauge or because their product was "operating outside the law"—even though that question was still being argued in the courts. Many members of the AFAA found themselves in an untenable position: "While crying total freedom of the screen to protect their business, they would at the same time act as censors themselves and force the 16 mm people out of the game" (Verrill 1970f, 18). By the end of the meeting, the organization had voted to reaffirm its open-admission policy ("Old-Time N.Y." 1970, 5).

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 sexploitation that have not been booked by product-short major houses" and 16 mm fare ("Old-Time N.Y." 1970, 5). In the face of the 35 mm sexploitation shortage, and as more 16 mm features became available, including hard-core titles such

as *Caught in the Can* (1970), *The Coming Thing* (dir. David Reberg, 1970), *Journal of Love* (dir. Sybil Kidd, 1970), *The Nurses* (dir. Terry Sullivan, 1971), and *The School Girl* (dir. David Reberg, 1971), the choice to go hard-core was becoming an easier one. Joan of Mar-Jon explained that many 35 mm exhibitors were augmenting their situations with 16 mm outfits and that “a lot of 35 mm exhibitors have turned in their 35 mm projectors and converted completely to 16 mm. So, with more and more conversion, the 16 mm feature is a growing market” (Rhys 1971, 56).

The friction between the 35 mm stalwarts and the 16 mm newcomers re-emerged at the third annual AFAA meeting in Los Angeles in January 1971. The “generation gap” between the sexploitation producers and the revolutionary 16 mm 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 35 mm 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 16 mm, who are dedicated to total explicitness and attempt to present it artistically. (Privately, a veteran producer will admit he's only against 16 mm upstarts because they're ruining his business. In San Francisco, a 35 mm production that once might make as much as \$20,000 in two months can't even get a booking there.) (1971, n.p.)

Lowell Pickett accused the sexploitation producers of equating sex with violence and of being guilty of fraud. He claimed that the 16 mm 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* (dir. R. L. Frost, 1968). By focusing on generational conflict, Pickett mined the discourse of the counterculture to elucidate the differences between 16 mm and 35 mm films. Some producers expressed concern that 16 mm 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!” (qtd. in Thomas 1971, n.p.). Throughout the discussion, the sexploitation old guard pointedly described 16 mm product as the most problematic, not the white-coater or the porn documentaries that contained hard-core scenes but were usually distributed in 35 mm and may have played in their

own theaters. It was clear within the industry that by crossing the hard-core line, 16 mm films were driving innovation and change and that to remain viable, the 35 mm sexploitation producers would have to cross the line as well. While some of the major hard-core producers, notably the Mitchell Brothers, came from the ranks of 16 mm production, sexploitation stalwarts, such as Audubon, Distribpix, EVI, and Mitam, were pushed into making the switch to hard core. According to David F. Friedman, 50 percent of the AFAA membership was making hard core by 1974 (1998).

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 16 mm theaters will have assumed a more important role in the overall traffic of sexually oriented films” (1971, 57). They became, in fact, important and influential. The limited capital necessary to produce and exhibit 16 mm 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 16 mm. Not only were these 16 mm 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 were just setting out with 16 mm 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 emerging from sexploitation. Moreover, narrative helped to legitimize hard-core films by permitting exhibitors to mount arguments that hard core did not appeal solely to prurient interest but could have artistic merit or social importance. Despite fears that hard-core features could bring about increased censorship, many of the established sexploitation producers moved into hard-core features just as many 16 mm producers shifted to the professional 35 mm gauge.

The adult film industry has often been characterized as a monolithic, multimillion- (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 16 mm hard-core films. Finally, the above account should help us recognize that the hard-core feature developed as a reaction to conditions in the adult film marketplace, in addition to more obvious social conditions. The hard-core feature was certainly not a predetermined end.

The hard-core 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

My thanks to Linda Williams for her comments on this paper. Thanks also to David F. Friedman for talking with me about the AFAA and the period, to the staff at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, and to Mike Vraney and Lisa Petrucci of Something Weird Video for access to some of the materials used in the preparation of this article. As always, my largest debt is to Eithne Johnson for sharing her tremendous intelligence and insight.

- 1 Split beavers referred to shots of spread labia. Action beavers usually referred to autoerotic manipulation of the genitals, or manipulation by a partner. The hard-core loop involved male-female sexual intercourse.
- 2 While the white-coaters and porn documentaries have been seen as important stops on the road to hard-core features, it is becoming increasingly clear that from an industrial standpoint, they constitute a mere footnote. See my note 9.
- 3 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 hard-core feature from 1972 to the early 1980s, respectively. Turan and Zito include a chapter on 16 mm hard-core features, although they did not account for the generative role that the technology itself played in the development of the hard-core feature. Moreover, they did not discuss the 16 mm simulation feature, an important step in this development, as outlined below. In any case, both the Turan and Zito and Williams books serve as a reminder of just how difficult it is to write historical accounts of pornography.

4 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: the time from 1972, when *Deep Throat* was released, to the point when video came to dominate the production and distribution of hard-core 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 a thing of the past. See also Holliday (1999).

- 5 Unlike 35 mm films, 16 mm movies could be easily chopped up and used as loops in peep shows and booths.
- 6 In addition to the storefronts, 16 mm films turned up in bars and nightclubs in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and, presumably, other locales ("Storefront Boom" 1971). In 1969, the Famous Iron Horse Cinema Bar, on Eighth Street between Normandie and Western, offered "2 giant screens, 24 movies changes [sic] all the time." An ad 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?" (Famous Iron Horse ad 1969).
- 7 Membership fees enabled exhibitors to argue, if they were prosecuted, that their venues constituted private clubs, and not public places of amusement.
- 8 Gay films began to emerge "out of the closet and into the theaters" around 1967 as small-gauge mail-order "physique" films made the transition to theaters such as Los Angeles's Apollo Arts and Park Cinema and New York's Park-Miller. For more information, see Waugh 1996, especially 269–73.
- 9 White-coaters, such as *Man and Wife* (dir. Matt Cimber, 1969), *He and She* (dir. Matt Cimber, 1970), and *Black Is Beautiful* (1970) are generally cited as milestones in the development of the hard-core 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 sexploitation, and the hard-core feature as it would develop. White-coaters were most often released in 35 mm 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 they initially racked up sizable grosses. Although many of the films had long runs in some cities, the form itself had a short shelf life, offering nothing on which to create a base of regular customers. This also holds true to a large extent for the so-called porn documentaries such as *Pornography in Denmark: A New Approach* (dir. Alex DeRenzy, 1970).
- 10 In a 1970 interview with San Francisco porn entrepreneurs the Mitchell Broth-

- ers, one of them, Jim, discussed audience responses to the films shown at their theater, the O'Farrell: "Here's something interesting. Like, on this questionnaire we said, 'Would you rather see films in documentary or dramatic form?' Dramatic form, 98 %. Nobody wants to see documentary films." Asked about where they would go when people wearied of big-screen stag movies, his brother Art said, "I think story lines, better film techniques. You know, getting into the people, making it believable," to which Jim added, "character development." Although they were gravitating toward narrative, the Mitchells indicated at the time of the interview that they planned to stick to the production of shorter films ("The Making of a Movie" 1970, 19).
- 11 Unfortunately, the article identified Marci and Joan, the principals of MJ and Mar-Jon, only by their first names.
 - 12 Kariofilis has been identified through other records.
 - 13 For another take on the "cinema of attractions" in relation to pornography, see Lehman 1995–96.
 - 14 Suárez notes that the term *underground film* was applied to avant-garde filmmakers as early as 1962 (1996, 54–55). But by the late 1960s, the makers and exhibitors of 16 mm sex films had picked it up and exploited it. Advertising the film *Sophie*, the Gay Paree Theater in San Francisco referred to itself and other "sex exploitation" houses as "underground theaters" (*Sophie* ad 1969). 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.
 - 15 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'" (Peekarama ad 1970). 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" (*The Runaway Virgin* ad 1970).
 - 16 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, Jahk Productions, Janus II—Academy Productions, Jo-Jo Productions, MJ Productions, John Samuels Films Ltd., Topar Productions, and Xerxes. Distributors of 16 mm 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 35 mm, also did some 16 mm 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* (1976).

- 17 Marci's analysis was confirmed by porn director Clay McCord. According to McCord, "The *meat shot* is the only *real* difference, outside of fellatio and cunnilingus, between pornos and the simulated sex film" (Rotsler 1973, 151; emphasis original). What would come to be known as the money shot—the shot of an ejaculation, validating male sexual pleasure—was not even at issue in the early 1970s, since in the earliest hard-core features, it had not yet emerged as an unvarying convention.
- 18 The "problem" of competition from 16 mm exhibition extended back to at least the 1930s.

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Video Pornography, Visual Pleasure, and the Return of the Sublime

FRANKLIN MELENDEZ

* In postmodern theory, pornographic viewership has emerged as a central category, providing the model for a new, historically specific construction of pleasure: one that is purely visual and given over entirely to the consumption of commodity images.¹ However, precisely because it realizes postmodernity's logic, pornographic viewership also betrays postmodernism's greatest anxiety, or at least a crucial point of ambivalence, namely, the displacement of the real by the simulacral. This ambivalence underlies the work of Fredric Jameson, who construes the visual as "essentially pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination" (Jameson 1992, 1); and it emerges more dramatically (and ambiguously) in the critical work of Jean Baudrillard, which gives the pornographic the character of something resembling a postmodern epistemology. In *Simulations*, for instance, the effacement of the real unfolds as an allegory of looking enthralled by the hypnotic display of repeated bodies: "Like those twin sisters in a dirty picture: the charnel reality of their bodies is erased by the resemblance. How to invest your energies in one, when her beauty is immediately duplicated by the other? The regard can go only from one to the other; all vision is locked into this coming-and-going" (Baudrillard 1983, 144). For Baudrillard, this doubled beauty speaks to an image whose lurid appeal is inextricably linked to reproduction because the very indistinguishability of these bodies offers itself as the locus of visual pleasure.

Although the close association between the visual and the pornographic