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Between Fantasy and Reality: Sexploitation, Fan Magazines, and William Rotsler's "Adults-Only" Career

ABSTRACT: Encouraged by crumbling censorship strictures, sexploitation fan magazines evince a symbiotic relationship between the adults-only film and publishing industries of the 1960s. Although largely sold for their nude photos, lurid publications like *Adam Film Quarterly* also critically commented on a transitional period in which men's unfulfilled erotic fantasies gradually gave way to more explicit evidence of sexual permissiveness, both onscreen and off.

KEYWORDS: sexploitation, fan magazines, censorship, men's magazines, pornography

Scholars have productively explored the fruitful synergies (and occasional conflicts) between American movies and fan magazines as professional industries, most notably during the emergence and predominance of the classical Hollywood studio era. The role of early and so-called golden-age magazines like *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen* in shaping the consumerist desires of their largely female readerships is a common refrain.[1] Far less attention, however, has been paid to the many professionally published fan magazines emerging during the poststudio era. Neither golden-age movie magazines nor amateur fanzines, these publications nevertheless served as important incarnations of US cinema culture as the 1960s decline of the Production Code Administration (PCA) heralded loosened restrictions on movie content and an increasingly fragmented viewing audience. During these transitional years, this fragmentation included the rise of "adults-only" films circulated through the expansion of independent distribution channels and exhibition venues, such as art theaters and grind houses. In particular, many post-1950s adult films were sexploitation pictures capitalizing on the increasingly permissible spectacle of gratuitous nudity and simulated sex and were largely aimed at a heterosexual male audience.

Although sexual attitudes had shifted over previous decades, the 1960s was, in Bill Osgerby's words, less a "sudden, revolutionary change to prevailing

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social norms" than "the culmination of longer processes of transformative *evolution*."[2] Sexual liberalization gained its seemingly "revolutionary" thrust through the decade's media-fueled articulation of sexuality to postwar capitalism, engendering a sexualized lifestyle consumerism whose celebration of a distinctly American "good life" undercut traditional sources of moral authority.[3] Arising in a climate where the overall US film industry attempted to combat falling ticket sales with more adult content, independently produced sexploitation films were important ingredients of this liberalization. The media explosion fueling public curiosity about sexual liberalization also included adults-only publications echoing and reporting on such changes; thus, the reciprocity between the adult film and publishing industries reveals how these films understood their own place in an important historical moment. By exploring how these magazines functioned as publicity for sexploitation films, we can better account for the era's increased making public of changing sexual attitudes.

Indeed, the sexploitation film's ideological ambivalence about sexual liberalization cannot be understood apart from the historical context that inspired not only its sociosexual dimensions but also its industrial impetus as spectacles made newly possible by screen content's ability to go further than ever before (but not yet "all the way"). Sexual liberalization is depicted in these films as a double-edged sword, with lip service paid to the responsible adult's modest use of greater outlets for erotic desire but more often emphasis on the unrestrained person's journey into moral corruption. As Elena Gorfinkel summarizes, sexploitation cinema "tempers . . . sexual display with rhetorical and narrative strategies of denial in a logic of what I call 'guilty expenditure': sex can be bought and sold, but only at a particular cost. In the structured ideological economy of sexploitation—and counter to sexual liberationist discourses of the time—sex is never 'free.'"[4]

In this essay, I similarly suggest that sexploitation's underlying tensions between scenes of titillation/freedom and punishment/limitation mirror the metafilmic tension evoked between the seen and the unseen as the decade's censorship restrictions on sexual representation dissolved. The ratio between increasingly permissible spectacle and the alluring tease of forbidden fruit shifted over the decade, with sexploitation's ideological ambivalence echoing the industrial ambivalence at play as formerly taboo spectacle became more common in art films and major Hollywood films alike. Yet, even as the independent filmmakers of low-budget sexploitation might implicitly capitalize on public interest in the lurid sexual content that increasingly found expression in films with higher cultural standing, this more widespread permissibility of screen content also jeopardized the very prohibitions that had allowed sexploitation to survive.

Gorfinkel further describes sexploitation's textual content as already distinctively reflexive because its "narratives were often *about* sex work and erotic labor. . . . The nude photographer's studio, the brothel, the escort agency, the vice dungeon—all become spaces for sexploitation to converse with itself about itself and thus to allegorize, through neighboring industrial models, its own production and consumption of sexual commodities."[5] Building upon this argument, I posit sexploitation fan magazines as an important *paratextual* component of this larger reflexivity, spurring readers' curiosity over the degree of fantasy versus reality that sexploitation films provided. That is, as sexploitation's textual tropes of obfuscation versus exposure both relied upon and teased contemporary cinema's larger legal relationship between the unseen and the seen, these texts and paratexts broached a related sociosexual tension between American society's unfulfilled fantasies and lived realities of sexual behavior during a highly mediated period of change. As one magazine pondered regarding a fictional film about the making of sexploitation films, "Since Gentlemen II Productions makes sexploitation pictures and *Casting Call* [1971] is one of them, they ought to know what goes on with the set and the company and the crew. But is this movie a Hollywood pipe dream or is it for real? Was it like turning the camera on a mirror for the 'Gentlemen'? Or is this a big put-on for us local yokels?"[6] Such rhetorical questions spoke to readers' implied interest in the indexicality of bodies engaged in erotic performances, reflecting what Linda Williams has called a larger shift from the culturally "obscene" to the "on/scene" via a cinematic "dialectic between revelation and concealment."[7] Overall, then, these publications represent a significant archive of discourse collectively tracing the sexploitation film's modularly rearrangeable attractions; its ideological incoherence about the desirability of a "sexual revolution" affecting all sectors of the film industry; and, perhaps most centrally, its shifting ambivalence between depicting (hetero-male) sexual fantasy and documenting what seemed like an increasingly sexualized contemporary reality.

Men's Magazines and the Birth of *Adam Film Quarterly*

The postwar boom in men's magazines has often been discussed as a hypermasculine reaction to the expanding consumer economy for increasingly affluent, white, heterosexual men who had recently returned from wartime military service but who experienced a corresponding "crisis of masculinity" associated with the supposedly feminizing effects of domestic consumerism.[8] Whereas the Depression-era roots of *Esquire* (premiering in 1933) meant that its images of cosmopolitan male luxury remained an idealized fantasy for most readers, the postwar readers of *Playboy* (founded in 1953) more likely had greater access to the means of conspicuous consumption—and thus, *Playboy* fostered

Fig. 1: Dopey men and topless women at a nudist camp in Herschell Gordon Lewis's formulaic nudie cutie *Goldilocks and the Three Bares* (1963)

stylish-but-naughty lifestyle fantasies of swinging bachelorhood as distinct from safe, middle-class domestic responsibility.[9]

Resembling *Playboy* centerfolds come to life, numerous "nudie cutie" sexploitation films were produced in the three years between Russ Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) and the premiere of the first sexploitation magazines. Pioneered by *Mr. Teas*, these relatively innocuous comedies often feature a bumbling male voyeur gazing at unclothed women but are free of any sexual contact between nude women and the male protagonists serving as less-than-ideal surrogates for the presumed male viewer (fig. 1). These films joined the wave of imported European art films—such as *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), *The Virgin Spring* (1960), and *Seven Daring Girls* (1960)—whose scenes of sex and violence were profiled in the earliest sexploitation slicks. Spurring the emergence of such magazines, the US Supreme Court's decision in *Roth v. United States* (1957) had redefined the legal boundaries of obscenity for printed material. Yet, while serious literary works more easily escaped obscenity statutes on taste-related grounds, forms perceived as culturally lower, like films and magazines, still faced intermittent legal threats. The titles of early adult film magazines, such as *Banned*,

Fig. 2: Full-page advertisement (featuring William Rotsler posed as male sophisticate) for Knight Publishing's line of anthologies reprinted from *Adam*, *Knight*, and *Cad* magazines. From *Adam Film Quarterly*, no. 8 (1969) (author's collection)

Barred, and *Daring Films & Books*, reflect such conflicts, while others, like *Adult Art Films* and *Art Films Review*, reflect more defensively euphemistic strategies.

Typical sexploitation magazines feature photo pictorials framed as previews and reviews of upcoming films or thematic compilations of images from multiple films. On-set reports about the making of adult films are a recurrent feature in some of the more prominent magazines, but these reports still tend to serve as little more than heavily illustrated come-ons for future cinematic fantasies. Since prolific photographers and magazine editors like William Rotsler, Marv Lincoln, and Titus Moody depended on producers for steady access to film sets and production stills, it is little surprise that negative criticism of the films themselves is kept to a minimum in their magazines. It would thus be inaccurate to describe these magazines as trade publications since they clearly address outsiders to the industry who were curious about the process of sexploitation's creation but apparently more invested in photos of nude bodies than in-depth coverage of distribution or exhibition practices.

Like the creators of the films their magazines covered, many of these adults-only publishers functioned under multiple pseudonyms, intermittently changing the names and addresses of their business operations to avoid legal harassment. And much like sexploitation companies, some of these publishers were fly-by-night operations that did not survive beyond several issues, whereas several others established more market longevity. The latter included Knight Publishing, New Link/Classic Publications, Cine-Arts, Sari Publishing, Orbit Publications, Dominion Publishing, and Seven Seventy Publishers, while Golden State News was a major distributor for multiple publishers.[10]

Subtitled "The Man's Home Companion," *Playboy* imitator *Adam* (launched in 1956) was Knight Publishing's major monthly periodical, although the company, run by former entertainment agents Bentley Morriss and Ralph Weinstock, also published men's magazines of lesser renown like *Knight*, *Cad*, and *Mankind* (fig. 2). One feature setting *Adam* apart from other men's magazines, however, was its inauguration of a regular sibling publication devoted specifically to cinema. Features on censorship and sexploitation movies had been regular offerings in *Adam*'s pages by the early 1960s and did not substantially decrease until after *Adam Film Quarterly* premiered in 1966. The latter was the creation of Rotsler, a prolific California-based abstract sculptor, cartoonist, and industrial filmmaker who had developed an interest in nude photography around 1958. He soon became one of the most active on-set still photographers in Los Angeles's burgeoning sexploitation market—a crucial task in creating publicity when some newspapers would not carry ads for low-budget adult films.[11] He had already photographed nude models for *Adam* by the early 1960s, but Morriss and Weinstock thought highly enough of his photo portfolio for *The*

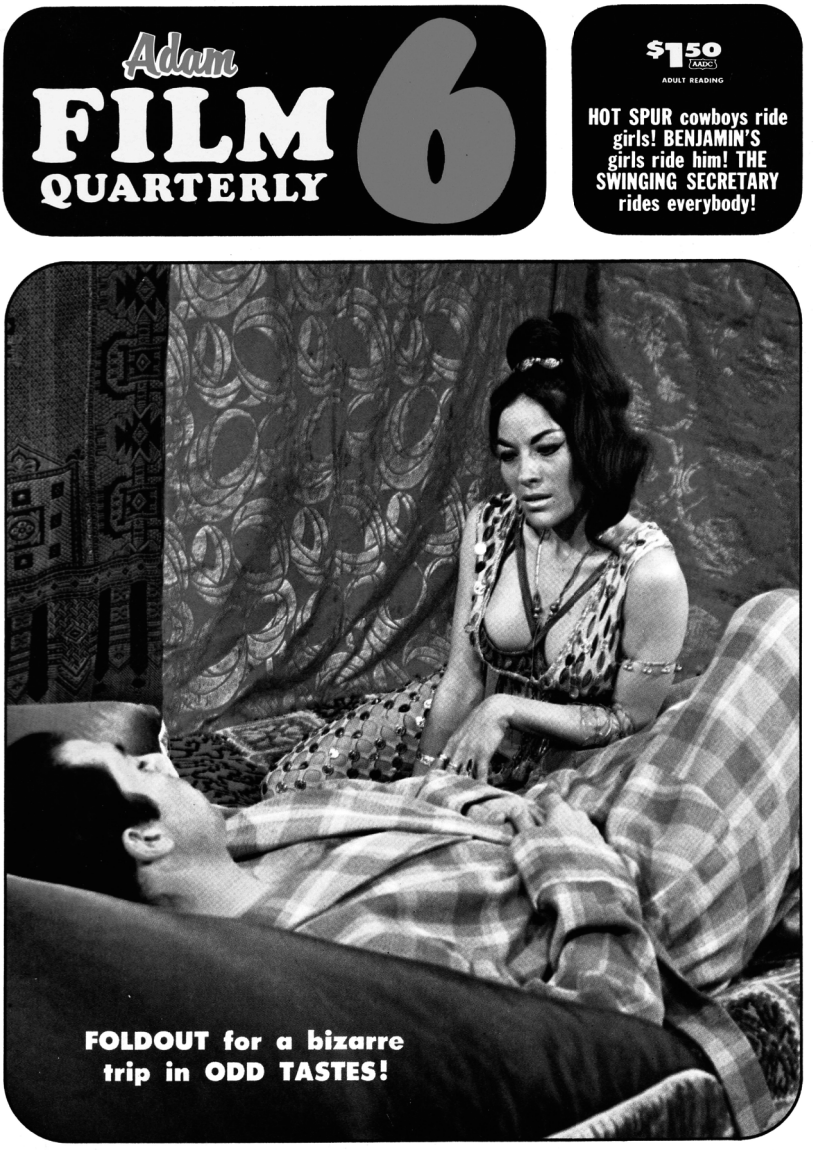

Fig. 3: Front cover of *Adam Film Quarterly*, no. 6 (1968), featuring a production still from *Odd Tastes* (author's collection)

Notorious Daughter of Fanny Hill (1966) to publish it as the first issue of *Adam Film Quarterly* (renamed *Adam Film World* in 1969).

Although several short-lived sexploitation magazines had appeared since 1963, the success of New Link/Classic Publications' *Wildest Films* (begun in 1965 by Marv Lincoln and Bill New) encouraged Morriss and Weinstock to enter the market. Unlike its competitors, however, *Adam Film Quarterly* (fig. 3) became the era's most critically substantive magazine on adult films, with the amount of written text going well beyond the facile regurgitation of pressbook content found in lesser magazines. Eventually outselling the magazine that spawned it, *Adam Film Quarterly/World* also differed from its competitors because Knight Publishing and its paperback publishing imprint Holloway House shared the same in-house distribution company, All America Distributors Corporation, which Morriss and Weinstock founded to handle their own product. By cutting out the middleman, they could increase their profits and thereby invest in commissioning more original, detailed articles like genre retrospectives and interviews.[12] Compared to its competitors, it thus represents an important missing link between middlebrow men's magazines like *Esquire* and *Playboy* and the explicit hard-core visuality of later men's magazines like *Hustler* (founded in 1974). Indeed, *Adam Film World* would eventually become one of the most prominent chroniclers of the adult film industry following the 1970s emergence of hard-core cinema although it was later overtaken by the trade journal *Adult Video News* (founded in 1983).

If *Adam Film Quarterly/World* represented the most critically developed end of the spectrum for sexploitation magazines (with New Link's *Wildest Films*, which featured some actual articles, existing somewhere in the middle), most sexploitation slicks offered little more editorial content than reworded plot synopses and gaudy captions beneath production stills. Much as the same films might be advertised years apart under different titles, it was common for stills from actual films to be recycled and recombined alongside a synopsis for a nonexistent film. Sexploitation's modular attractions easily drifted free of the films' corresponding narratives, opening their imaginative potential for further repurposing, much as stills were also used in illustrating supposed novelizations of nonexistent films. Ersatz film pictorials might even be assembled from photo sessions taken independently of any existing film production, thus providing an example of how sexploitation magazines' potential allure and profitability were not dependent upon the theatrical booking of actual films. The magazines *Unreleased Dynamic Films* and *Unreleased Blazing Films*, for instance, almost entirely consist of purported photos from nonexistent films. Similar strategies can be seen in their cinematic cousins like *Censored* (1965), *Banned* (1966), and *Mondo Oscenità* (1966), which all claimed to be compilations

more had been his idol and later a very dear friend. One of his favorite stories about Barrymore was how the late actor's body had been spirited away from the funeral parlor a few hours after his death by some of Flynn's drunken friends. They brought the nude body to Flynn's house and sat it upright in a chair with a smoking cigarette in his mouth. Flynn arrived home, saw the body and fled screaming. He used to say that he did not think that "that was the proper way to say good-bye to John."

His life paralleled Barrymore's in the respect that Barrymore, too, had become a drunk and dissipated before his death. "Perhaps that was why my performance was so good," analyzed Flynn. "Then came *Roots of Heaven* ('58), another one for Darryl, in which I played another drunken bum. This was what people had believed I was and accepted me. Maybe these roles were right for me. I was a natural . . . Anyway, all the world loves a comeback."

The magazines began talking about him again. Hollywood is more like its old self, they said, "Flynn's In Again." His very last project was a self-produced, self-written, self-starred piece of drivel called *Cuban Rebel Girl*. His 17-year-old protegee, Bevery Aadland, tried to act the role of a young American girl in love with one of the mercenaries helping Castro. Flynn seemed bored and tired.

In October, 1959, while lounging about a Vancouver doctor's apartment with bikini-clad Beverly, the classic pains of a coronary spread through his body and down his arms and legs. He was well acquainted with the symptoms for he had suffered them twice before. Shortly after insisting that "Hell, dying's not so much," he lay down and died.

ALTHOUGH FLYNN made a temporary comeback, he died unregenerate, still branded apparently with the mark of the unanswerable question of his self-identity. All that he learned from sampling more of life that the law allows seems to be distilled in the words he once wrote in a diary: "You can love every instant of living and still want to be dead."

Yet at the end of his autobiography, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, he pulls himself together, steps back into the only role he was ever able to play, and with a sly twinkle confesses that his wicked, wicked ways have left him with one deep and painful regret: "I never learned to play the piano." ★

Fig. 4: Representative advertisements for nude photos, small-gauge film loops, sex novelties, and other male-targeted paraphernalia, from the back pages of *Adam Film Quarterly*, no. 7 (1968) (author's collection)

of sexploitation footage already deemed "obscene" by censors, but which actually consist of fragments either shot specifically for these films or compiled from elsewhere.[13] Furthermore, sexploitation magazines rarely presented specific information about where actual adults-only films were theatrically screened, so the images themselves—modular elements of attraction that, like the cinematic scenes they captured, could be flexibly recombined—would apparently suffice for many readers. An appendix in one publication, for example, lists several theaters in major cities that screened the films discussed in its pages, and readers might occasionally be invited to write editors for details about theatrical play dates, but these sources of practical information about theatrical bookings were fairly exceptional.[14] One adults-only paperback from 1970 does suggest that "often, scenes in the magazines are the 'rough' edited version of the movie, and many fans have been known to complain of this to the theater managers"—although the veracity of this claim is rather questionable, given the plethora of fabrications throughout the book.[15]

Importantly, then, sexploitation magazines' role in promoting the actual films was secondary to the publications' primary role (as epitomized by the most editorially threadbare or wholly fabricated titles) as skin magazines that might as well be covering any other (counter)cultural trend conducive to nude photography. This also suggests the magazines' wider distribution at newsstands beyond the urban areas where sexploitation films regularly played—although the mail-order sale of 8mm sexploitation excerpts would have somewhat mitigated this limited theatrical distribution. Advertisements in these magazines (fig. 4) tout mail-order products like 8mm nudist, stag, and bondage films; various sexual aids; and other adults-only books, photo sets, and magazines.[16] In other words, these magazines primarily catered to the sexual fantasies of male readers (whether single or married) who may or may not have regularly consumed sexploitation films but were still assumed somewhat familiar with the existence of such films. A film like *Mail Order Confidential* (1968), for example, could promote itself as "The story behind the ADS in THOSE MAGAZINES," presuming the would-be consumer's familiarity with sexploitation's cinematic and periodical forms, even if said magazines were purchased for the images alone.

Despite the frequent mention of "art theaters" in these magazines, then, access to sexploitation content was often more explicitly associated with home consumption than theatrical viewing. A *Knight* article on *The Aqua-Nudes* (1964), for example, features an "Editor's Note: We don't know how soon the AQUA-NUDES will screen at your local theatre—but we have been advised that some of the livelier sequences from the film are available in 8mm and 16mm for home projection from ELGIN FILMS, P.O. Box. . . ."[17] Ads for Diamond Films offered 100–foot 8mm selections and 35mm slide sets from the early nudies *Daughter of*

Fig. 5: Full-page advertisement for 8mm loops and 35mm slides from a sexploitation film billed as "too 'unusual' . . . so we felt it would be better if we sold it directly to the home!" From *Adult Movies Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (1969) (author's collection)

the Sun (1962) and *Bell, Bare, and Beautiful* (1963). Another ad (fig. 5) states, "We started out to make a feature film, but . . . well, it was just too 'unusual' . . . so we felt it would be better if we sold it directly to the home" in 200-foot excerpts. As this ad hints, the interplay between theatrical and home viewing opportunities even capitalized on the illicit repute of (then-illegal) 8mm hard-core stag films, much as publicity for *The Sexploiters* (1965) misleadingly claimed that the 35mm feature contained footage originally shot in 8mm.

In any case, the sale of small-gauge sexploitation excerpts and photos helped accentuate the form's underlying tease by deferring the viewer's desire to see more of the feature-length film in question, particularly if access to theatrical feature versions was limited in some locales. Like the nudie cutie's male protagonist, then, the sexploitation magazine reader might want to experience something that had become erotically visible on public screens for the first time, but these advertised/exposed pleasures could only remain tantalizing given the "immense—but not *too* immense—disparity and desire between spectator/reader and star/text" endemic to fan magazines.[18] This included a disparity between the ostensible shortcomings of domestic viewing in relation to theatrical consumption. Meanwhile, rewarding readers' requests for more photos of a specific actor, film, or theme was a common means of encouraging active fan participation in these publications (fig. 6) and thereby gauging interest in what might prove profitable in future films/issues. Thus, for many readers, feature-length sexploitation films might also constitute the unseen object teased as a locus of unfulfilled sexual fantasy if the theatrical experience itself was locally unavailable.

The (Film) World According To *Adam*

However much the euphemism *art film* may have been applied to early sexploitation films, these magazines still implied that most US nudie cuties were inferior to foreign imports. "Perhaps the day will come when American film-makers will make a more substantial use of the 'Nudie-Cutie' form," *Adam* observed. "The French, the Italians, the Japanese and the Germans have already proven their grasp of the medium."[19] As *Adam* noted in 1963, about thirty nudie cuties were currently in production, of which all the American offerings were comedies. This was a generic strategy that, as Eric Schaefer argues, may have helped defensively displace their eroticism away from censorable limits, but at the risk of making the films seem "juvenile, if not downright infantile, in their approach to both humor and sexuality."[20] *Adam* suggested that they offered the "hilarity of the contrasting social lives of nudists vs. non-nudists," unlike an earlier generation of nudist camp films that offered little more than "that 'natural habitat' documentary technique with which Walt Disney might reveal lemmings on their

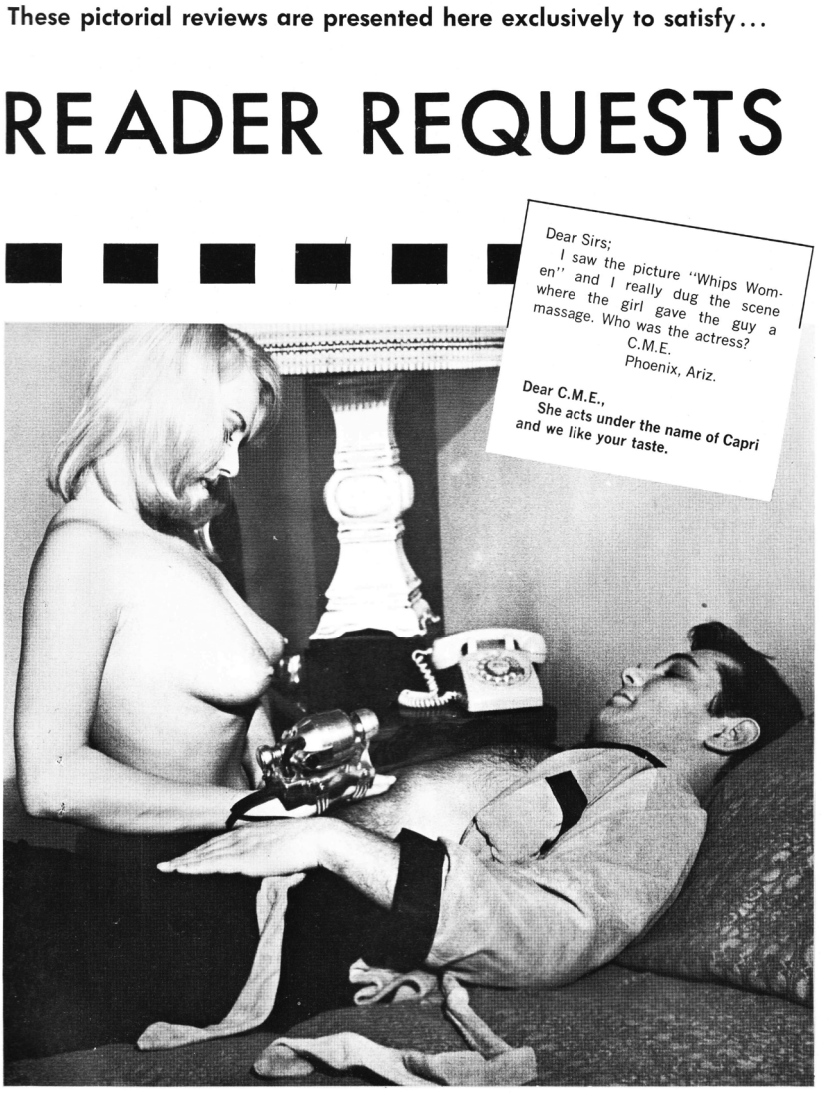

Fig. 6: First page of a multiphoto pictorial feature devoted to encouraging fan interaction by answering "Reader Requests"—here by offering additional production stills from *Whip's Women* (1967). From *Art Films Review* 2, no. 2 (1968) (author's collection)

annual march to the sea."[21] In this regard, if 1960s nudie cuties did not aspire to the (ersatz) educational sobriety of earlier nudist films, then delivering comic nudity with no pedagogical pretense meant they could at least aspire to social value as timely exemplars of contemporary sexual liberalization. Indeed, *Wildest Films* even ran a recurring "Camp Cinema" feature devoted to publishing and mocking stills from classical exploitation films of the 1930s and 1940s, further emphasizing the generational difference between older cinematic provocations and the hip, new screen freedoms signaled by sexploitation.

Many precedents for the PCA's erosion in the 1960s were actually established by the inclusion of previously censorable content in major-studio films or imported art films, since many low-budget sexploitation films did not seek a PCA seal of approval to begin with. However, nudie-cutie apologists touted the films' content as notable cultural advances from which even the cinematic mainstream might benefit. When a 1963 issue of *Adam* presented a list of the best recent nudies, for example, among them was *Surftide 77* (1962), which combined typical nudie-cutie laughs with a more complex detective story (à la television namesake *Surfside 6* [1960–62]) to become a "prototype of the kind of picture that turns the current flesh film fad into serious entertainment—opening the door, that is, to legitimate nude sequences in big-studio dramatic productions."[22] Premiering two years before Sidney Lumet's Holocaust-themed drama *The Pawnbroker* (1964) became the first major US film containing topless female nudity to be granted a PCA seal of approval, *Surftide 77* was thus championed by adult-film aficionados as a precursor of (hopefully) better things to come. Indeed, as *The Pawnbroker* would prove, nudity in the service of a serious dramatic narrative could seem increasingly permissible for adult audiences, even if that narrative dealt extensively with themes of degradation and brutality.

David Andrews argues that sexploitation had a "tendency to displace its [cultural] abjection" by differentiating itself from "lower" cultural forms like hard-core stag films, but even the more violent sexploitation variants emerging in the mid-1960s could point toward outside inspiration as sources of aesthetic aspiration. These films—variously dubbed "roughies" and "kinkies"—initially contained less nudity but compensated with scenes of violence as a narratively permissible form of bodily contact between the sexes. They also typically feature female protagonists whose sexual curiosity and flouting of monogamous domesticity results in peril. Sexual violence and violent sexuality thereby became misogynistically intertwined as erotic spectacle in these later films.[23] Sexploitation discourse in this prefeminist period often equated rape with sex (an *Adult Movies Illustrated* pictorial sports the screaming banner "Hottest Rape Scene Ever Filmed!"[24]), or casually described rape as more of a "fetish" for men

Figs. 7 & 8: Starkly monochromatic, tightly framed rape scenes from (left) Ingmar Bergman's European art film *The Virgin Spring* (1960) and (right) Lee Frost's American roughie *The Defilers* (1965)—both covered in the pages of *Adam Film Quarterly* for their sexual content

and a nuisance for women than a pathological crime on par with murder, as second-wave feminists would soon redefine it.[25]

Yet, the roughies' shockingly misogynistic violence against women could still be associated with an aspirational quality through these scenes' greater degree of narrative justification and an ethos of "realism" associated with the art films with which they often shared theaters and publicity strategies.[26] The stateside release of films like *The Virgin Spring* had recently introduced audiences to more realistic depictions of rape and degradation than generally associated with Hollywood productions, so scenes of sexual violence became a (temporary) marker of cultural distinction from the cinematic mainstream (figs. 7 and 8). Still, when narratives about the breaking of former sexual constraints often result in dire consequences for roughie/kinkie protagonists, it is difficult not to see these consequences as echoes of the metatextual opportunities and constraints facing filmmakers and audiences within the decade's expanding sexual economy. That is, like the films' protagonists, sexploitation's filmmakers and fans were caught between wanting to see/do more onscreen and trying to avoid moral/legal punishment for transgressing socially accepted

boundaries—particularly during a period when the expansion of adult content in both major-studio and art films sent mixed signals about how far films would be allowed to go without incurring the wrath of censor boards.

By the late 1960s, sexploitation magazines referred to nudie cuties as passé relics, though these older films still intermittently appeared as second features in some theaters. *Art Films Review*, for example, noted in 1968 that several revived nudies "cannot be classed along with the general run of Adult Movies presently playing. They are a throwback to the old 'Nudi-cuties.' . . . If you like heavy sex and violence we do not suggest you catch this double billing."[27] By comparison, handheld cinematography and monochromatic palettes accentuated the roughies/kinkies' far darker tone and brutality, since the outdated use of monochrome cinematography after the 1950s could alternately connote "Hollywood or Europe, glamour or seediness, realism or aestheticism, poverty or affectation, archival evidence or clever stylization."[28] These traits made them seem like a different species of adult-oriented film than both the mainstream Hollywood drama and nudie cutie, yet one whose narrative impetus crept closer to the major-studio picture than the threadbare nudie-cutie plot. As Rotsler noted in the 1966 premiere issue of *Adam Film Quarterly*, these "sex 'n' violence pictures have a little less nudity and a *hellava* lot more sex. Rape is an almost certain event in any of these. Whipping, spanking, and/or torture of some sort

is a must." Yet, despite these violent tropes, he optimistically predicted the eventual convergence of sexploitation and major-studio films: nudies needed to provide viewers with Hollywood-style narratives and empathetically developed characters, not just skin, while major Hollywood films needed more exploitable elements than color and widescreen to compete with television.[29]

The years 1965 to 1966 saw the sexploitation film markedly diversifying in combination with the success of spicier European imports like *I, a Woman* (1965), *Blow-Up* (1966), and *Persona* (1966) accelerating reader interest in an adults-only cinematic marketplace previously glutted with nudie cuties. With its landmark decision in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964), the Supreme Court had established community standards for obscenity at the national level, which gave far more sexual freedom to producers and distributors—at least until 1973's *Miller v. California* decision returned these standards to local jurisdictions.[30] Accordingly, after its premiere issue, *Adam Film Quarterly* was devoted to not just sexploitation but also imported art films, major-studio productions featuring nudity or simulated sex, and even underground cinema. Early issues featured sexploitation films by Russ Meyer, Stephen C. Apostolof, and Barry Mahon; Dean Martin's Matt Helm spy movies; Japanese pink films; European art films by Luchino Visconti, Luis Buñuel, and Roger Vadim; counterculture-themed teenpics like *The Love-Ins* (1967) and *The Trip* (1967); and major-studio prestige productions promoted for their adult content, like *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and even Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968).

The inclusion of implied nudity or simulated sex—particularly as captured in publishable production stills—remained the key factor uniting and collapsing cultural hierarchies within the same pictorial layouts. For example, a caption notes that Warner Bros.' Norman Mailer adaptation *An American Dream* (1966) "has exactly four things going for it: nude scenes by Janet Leigh, Eleanor Parker and Susan Denberg and a fantastic performance by Miss Parker that very well may earn her an Oscar for best supporting actress."[31] Stills of Denberg in various states of undress constitute the pictorial's primary images, while a full-length feature on *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) devotes nearly as much description to bit player Joy Harmon (featured in "the sexiest car wash ever filmed") as to Paul Newman's starring performance.[32] This logic found *Adam Film Quarterly* pondering "[w]hether Ingmar Bergman is a true artist or merely a crass pornographer capitalizing on sex and sadism for his own profit"; meanwhile, Rotsler in the same issue championed the underground cinema movement for creating "sexy and beautiful" films that "*say* . . . important things" as a visible part of broader social changes in sexual mores, "along with the teeny-boppers, the Pill, dirty words in books and comments about whether there *are* any 'dirty' words or not."[33]

Fig. 9: Covers of frequent *Adam* contributor Leo Guild's heavily illustrated novelization (published by Knight Publishing's paperback fiction imprint, Holloway House) of the sexploitation comedy *Starlet!* (1969), a film that depicts its own real-life production company, Entertainment Ventures Inc., as one of the major Hollywood studios—and even used the old Monogram studio lot as a shooting location (author's collection)

Whereas studio-era Hollywood fan magazines "retained some element of independence from the Hollywood studios" because their editorial offices were located in New York or Chicago,[34] most sexploitation magazines were based in the Los Angeles area. Since American sexploitation films were primarily produced in either New York or Los Angeles, the magazines' on-set pictorials and profiles of female actors were heavily biased toward covering the Los Angeles industry hub—although this did not mean omitting more generic photo spreads for films produced in New York, Europe, and so on. Hence, in the pages of *Adam Film Quarterly*, "Hollywood" more accurately serves as a literal geographical location than a metonym for the major studios. Much as sexploitation's lurid content confused the boundaries between imported art films and their own independent status, then, these films could seemingly aspire to greater cultural standing by similarly blurring the boundaries

between themselves and major-studio films geographically produced in the Hollywood area (fig. 9).

Yet, this indirect aspirational association was primarily possible once major-studio films of the mid-to-late 1960s began incorporating the nude scenes and implied sexuality that constituted *Adam Film Quarterly*'s raison d'être—and thus began simultaneously endangering the sexploitation film's once-profitable distinctions from the cinematic mainstream. Therefore, despite the hints of inspiration/aspiration that mainstream Hollywood's gradual move toward more adult content might indirectly provide for low-budget independents, sexploitation filmmakers still needed to push the boundaries of permissibility to differentiate themselves and thereby remain viable. Consequently, even as a potential convergence of subject matter across different sectors of the film industry might signal opportunities for wider audience interest, mid-1960s sexploitation producers made their films more violent and/or kinky to avoid becoming unable to compete with the majors' gradual encroachment on lurid sexual spectacle.

Modular Attractions and Critical Appeals

Fan-magazine pictorials effectively taught consumers what to desire from these specialized films by reflexively foregrounding sexploitation's common themes and visual tropes. This was especially true of pictorials compiling photos from multiple films under specific themes (e.g., costumes, party scenes). This is not to say, however, that these recontextualizations of particular images under a given theme always represented the cited films accurately, particularly if many readers might have far more exposure to adults-only films through a magazine's pages than in theaters. Indeed, the editors of less polished sexploitation magazines like *Art Films Review* even admitted to rarely seeing the films under review: "We cannot speak for those of you who see the pictures. We can only speak from the background of seeing hundreds of stills crossing our desks extolling the sexuality of this picture or that one."[35] *Adult Movies Illustrated*'s bondage-themed compilation pictorial "The Rope and the Flesh," for instance, features films from across the roughie/kinkie years but also includes "[p]roof that bondage scenes aren't limited to sexploitation films" by including a photo of a woman bound to a moving lumber saw in the family-friendly *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965).[36] These inclusions suggest that male readers' (and editors') erotic imaginations could be readily spurred toward certain fantasy scenarios, especially in the absence of countervailing evidence that might emerge from seeing the films themselves.

Golden-age movie digest magazines like *Screen Stories* generated film-related flights of fancy through a similar "concatenation of stills, other photos, and text, brought together under the primary relay text of the motion picture."[37]

Yet, since sexploitation films may have been less theatrically available than the classical Hollywood narratives covered in movie digest magazines, the disproportionate ratio of images to written text in sexploitation magazines could all the more enable readers' enflamed imaginations to make creative significations well beyond a given film's actual plot. An *Adult Movies Illustrated* pictorial for *My Brother's Wife* (1966) exemplifies this unpredictable concatenation: a collage of uncaptioned stills dominates each page, with the scant amount of plot synopsis leaving readers to discern what might be happening in each image. The subservience of plot to images is reinforced by the final two pages being printed out of order—rendering the synopsis incoherent by describing the protagonist killing herself but later still alive on the final page.[38] These types of ambiguity—purposeful or not—played upon sexploitation's central tension between exposure and obfuscation, providing space for erotic flights of fantasy even as they still proffered some indexical evidence of performed sexual behavior.

With roughies/kinkies introducing greater narrative dimension and more diverse sexual practices to the sexploitation film, their common modular attractions might be easily rearranged in episodic fashion from one film to the next, regularizing a variety of sexual tastes of potential interest to various (hetero-male) viewers. These strategies are implicitly acknowledged in sexploitation magazines, as when one notes that a film ending in simulated sex scenes could hypothetically continue indefinitely with new combinations: "For example, what happens if the guys suddenly split from the girls or vice versa. There is always enough room for another motion picture to be written around the whole next episode, which might not be a bad idea."[39] Sexploitation magazine pictorials emphasized this modular quality, as when the 1965 premiere issue of *Wildest Films* invited readers to write in with nominees for a recurring "Wildest Scenes of the Month" pictorial, with each selected scene themed around categories like "spanking," "rape," "dope," and "strip." Even as sex scenes grew lengthier in late-1960s soft-core films, *Adam Film Quarterly* noted, "In sex-exploitation films of this type, the main story line won't hold interest for the voyeur-filmgoer who patronizes them. So the quick-thinking producers added subplots that result in blunt sexual encounters of mothers, daughters and boyfriends."[40]

Rotsler delineated the sex film's common modular attractions as "the Obligatory Orgy, the Mandatory Swinging Scene, the Inevitable Lesbian Scene, the Optional Rape, the busty and the petite, the chase and the orgasm. Mix together and jump back! Another film is on the way!"[41] Yet, as much as such modules may have drawn inspiration from the censorial boundaries pushed by more reputable films, the persistently imbalanced ratio between sexploitation's limited narratives and modular attractions remained a point of critical contention. Hence, if combining violence and sexuality could no longer differentiate

sexploitation from art films or major-studio films (and might also alienate a growing mixed-gender market), then drastically upping the proportion of sexual numbers to nonsexual narrative scenes might prove a means of market differentiation—even at the risk of complicating the films' aspirational aesthetic connotations. As fellow travelers with the sexploitation industry, the partisan commentary found in *Adam Film Quarterly* and its kin might gently point out the flaws in these films but more often ascribes culpability to general tendencies in the field than to particular filmmakers. In ignoring or excusing aesthetic shortcomings, they recall the puff pieces found in studio-era Hollywood fan magazines—yet, unlike promotional coverage of technically polished Hollywood products, they also reveal a somewhat more reflexive dissatisfaction with the sexploitation film's endemic deficiencies as erotic content became more widespread on 1960s movie screens.

According to these magazines, narrative justification, originality, and emotional nuance are important aspirational qualities for generating eroticism from moments of spectacle, even if many independent sex films fall short of such achievements. Discussing *Motel Confidential* (1968), for example, one reviewer says, "We found the scene, though quite candid, to be an interesting one, primarily from the shading of emotions given by the director. . . . Unfortunately this quality is lacking in too many pictures in the adult market today."[42] Likewise, the clichéd dialogue in Barry Mahon's *Hot Skin and Cold Cash* (1965) supposedly spoils the picture's erotic mood and detracts from a decent story: "In all honesty," it "would be a better film had it been made as a silent screen effort back in the Twenties."[43] Nevertheless, reviewers themselves might espouse ambivalence over the ratio of spectacle to narrative, well aware of the primary reason these films had an audience: "We personally feel that rather than a mish-mash of sex, thrown wherever it might logically fit into the story, the average person would like to see his sex with a bit more originality to it," says one reviewer, who then immediately privileges modularity by deeming a "good story" to be less about plausible or distinctive storytelling than the necessity "that every girl who appears in the picture must have her turn in the sack at least once."[44]

Critical appeals to timeliness, realism, and education might also help excuse apparent aesthetic deficits, as when Mahon's *The Warm, Warm Bed* (1968) is praised for telling the "truth" about wife-swapping and suburban prostitution that readers would have already encountered in contemporary newspaper reports. "In a frank analysis of the picture one could spend much time commenting on the production values and acting that is [*sic*] lost in limbo," the reviewer says. "But to criticize such points, points apparent in most of the pictures currently available on the adult market, would be taking the easy way out." Rather, "the Barry Mahon name" makes the film worth seeing because of his supposed

knack for exposing the harsh truths of a changing society.[45] Likewise, *The Game People Play* (1967) is deemed "not just another nudie film that emphasizes the showing of naked bodies for the sake of sex alone. . . . [The director] shows through the series of events that if one is content sexually[,] other problems will work themselves out. This is a picture that combines the visual with the emotional, and answers problems everyone is bound to face sooner or later."[46] A film's shortcomings could thereby be excused if the film had a potentially informative message—much as Rotsler claimed that adult films, by depicting diverse sexual practices and contemporary liberalized attitudes, could not help being educational in spite of themselves.[47] Yet, these magazines also acknowledge that the films can be ideologically incoherent in their attitudes toward sexual liberalization. As a review of *The Swingers* (1968) concludes,

> It might be interesting to speculate just what the moral of this morality story is: Could it be that honeymoons in Hollywood are out for the boondock dwellers? Or is it that if you make out with strangers you should first check their credentials to see if they are wearing underwear underneath the furs? What about the fact that a marriage on the rocks after a few drinks on the rocks wasn't made to last anyway? These new films are hard to puzzle out![48]

The magazines' subordination of critical commentary to lurid photographic layouts heightened this ideological ambivalence and thus reinforced the disproportionate emphasis on sexual spectacle that intentionally separated the low-budget sexploitation film from the mainstream Hollywood product to which it so often qualitatively paled and from which it would increasingly face competition by late 1960s. *Art Films Review* aptly captured this conundrum: "Certainly, as in practically all pictures on the adult theatre market today, there are production shortcoming[s], some bad lighting, etc. Nor can we get over[ly] enthused about the acting abilities of some of the girls and guys who appear. These shortcomings, though, are becoming a standard thing in this business. The budget will only stretch so far and until the number of theatres showing the product enables the producers to up their budgets, we will be faced with such problems."[49]

Sex films would only become more artistic once audiences demanded higher-quality product, Rotsler likewise predicted—but the artistic cream could only rise in conjunction with market expansion to more theaters and larger profits for reinvesting in production values. Yet, demanding better quality paradoxically meant viewers must not simply criticize sex films for their obvious budgetary shortfalls or scant narratives, since standing critically "above" the films would merely defuse their underlying erotic appeals (for Rotsler, the true

measure of a sex film's quality).[50] In foregrounding these modular attractions, sexploitation magazine layouts (including Rotsler's own) gladly supplied such appeals, often at the expense of more rigorous criticism. Indeed, it was tellingly defensive for the most substantial film criticism in *Adam Film Quarterly/World* to be focused on the history of Hollywood stars/genres, censorship standards, or on-set profiles about making adult films—with far less detailed criticism devoted to the respective aesthetic qualities of finished sexploitation films themselves.

The magazine's stewardship under Rotsler during the late 1960s and early 1970s is also notable in this regard, since his career as an artist, filmmaker, and author treated the world of sexploitation cinema as both a prominent source of reportage and an outlet for pseudonymous creativity. As a sexploitation writer/director/editor and occasional actor, he made approximately twenty-six feature films (and innumerable 8mm mail-order shorts), many for Boxoffice International Pictures producer-distributor Harry Novak. Several of his notable directorial efforts include *Agony of Love* (1966), *The Girl with the Hungry Eyes* (1967), *Mantis in Lace* (1968), and *Street of a Thousand Pleasures* (1972). Encouraged by regular *Adam* contributor Harlan Ellison, Rotsler also moved into writing science fiction in 1969. He had been a contributor of cartoons to amateur science-fiction fanzines since 1944 and would eventually win five Hugo Awards for his fan art before his 1997 death.[51] Although his reputation as a satirist requires that his reportage about the sexploitation world be taken with a large grain of salt with regard to its veracity, this very potential for unreliability is indicative of the lurid films and magazines he produced. As elaborated below, his frequent contributions to *Adam Film Quarterly* epitomize the tensions between sexual documentation and sexual fantasy endemic to these films, making him an exemplary figure in "fictioning" the era's changing sexual mores—especially as the excessive fantasies of 1960s sexploitation gradually gave way to the practical realities of 1970s sexual experimentation.

By the late 1960s, scenes of fairly explicit simulated sex could dominate sexploitation narratives, making the legal boundary of soft-core versus hard-core content one of the only remaining lines separating sexploitation from its cultural others. As Eric Schaefer explains, producers of 35mm sexploitation films formed the Adult Film Association of America (AFAA) as a trade group for combating censorship restrictions but largely as a last-ditch means of legally differentiating themselves from the increasing number of 16mm hard-core producers emerging after *Mona: The Virgin Nymph* (1970), the first theatrically released hard-core feature. Meanwhile, the MPAA bristled at public confusion between X-rated films produced by major studios and sex films with self-applied X ratings, especially after many major newspapers responded to the controversy

by banning ads for X-rated pictures in 1969. Although sexploitation magazines were an additional source of publicity in spite of the newspaper ban, their predominantly male readership meant the ban could still detrimentally affect the profitability of not only sexploitation's growing couples' market but also Hollywood's move into culturally legitimate X-rated films like *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). While the MPAA had no difficulty denouncing hard-core producers for misappropriating the noncopyrighted X rating as a signifier of smut, Schaefer observes that the AFAA found itself in the more difficult situation of advocating against screen censorship but still trying to denigrate the cheaper 16mm films encroaching on their business.[52]

By decade's end, the roughie *The Animal* (1968) could be described in *Adam Film Quarterly* as "tak[ing] magnificent advantage of the new freedom won in the courts" by "explor[ing] the nudity of the girls with almost as much fervor as that shown by the tortured [male] protagonist—all in a very unnerving experience." Yet, despite this implied identification between the reader/viewer and a sadistic voyeur, the magazine ruminated on future implications in less-than-alarmist terms. It was

> only one of many [films] moving toward that ultimate day when there will be no restrictions of any kind imposed by censorship. The only restrictions will be those of the story and plot. If there are any doubts on the matter, all one needs to do is look back at the last twenty years or so of nudie films to realize that we have been moving ever closer to free expression. And we venture to say that it won't spell the end of morality; probably nothing more catastrophic will happen than members of the audience leaving the theatre at the end of the film and heading for a nearby bar for a beer. The exploitation filmmakers will have the troubles then, because they [will] seem to have reached the end of the line separating erotica from pornography.[53]

AFAA president David F. Friedman had long argued against the advent of hard core since it would allegedly destroy sexploitation's tension between the seen and the unseen, rendering tantalizing erotic fantasies into the boring, clinically documented realities of human anatomy. Conversely, hard-core actor Mary Rexroth deemed sexploitation's bait-and-switch tactics to be less "moral" than hard core's open display of the bodily "truth" that patrons had paid to glimpse.[54] Although sexploitation's alternating scenes of titillation/freedom and punishment/limitation once offered a moralistic echo of the metafilmic tension between cinema's on/scene and obscene, the formerly "obscene" realm of hard-core cinema could increasingly reverse this moralism once filmmakers

and viewers were no longer subject to legal punishment for crossing the hard-core line.

Yet, despite such nascent forms, *Adam Film World* continued giving prominent attention to soft-core sexploitation films into the early 1970s. The newspaper advertising ban may have meant that "[p]roducers either worked to cut their films back to a solid R-rating or pushed headlong into the increasingly ghettoized production of hard core,"[55] but if the magazine was largely an extension of the sexploitation industry, it is no surprise that its prior enthusiasm about relaxing censorship standards had grown more mixed with the rise of legalized hard core. Meanwhile, other independent companies found ways to develop mild sexploitation content within R-rated standards, such as the early-1970s teen-oriented output from New World Pictures and Crown International Pictures.

Eventually, each issue reviewed fewer films overall and devoted more pages to Rotsler's pseudonymous reports on his personal experiences in the adult film industry. It was not until the June 1974 issue that *Adam Film World* belatedly featured articles on *Mona* and Linda Lovelace, despite the *Deep Throat* (1972) star's monumental rise to fame two years earlier.[56] Like the larger adult-film industry, then, magazines once specializing in sexploitation had to either begin specializing in R-rated films or jump into the hard-core market. In starting to cover the hard-core feature film in far more detail than simply generic terms, *Adam Film World* followed the latter course, bridging the gap between an earlier generation of adults-only movie magazines and the images of hard-core film stars appearing in later porn magazines. Meanwhile, Knight Publishing was increasingly using a bifurcated strategy: its men's magazines would continue to target a primarily white, middle-class readership (with the exception of black-themed magazine *Players*), while Holloway House's paperback line specialized in black pulp writers whose novels became enormously popular with a young, black readership during Black Power's peak years.[57]

"Fictioning" the Sexual Revolution

In effect, the 1970s R-rated sexploitation teenpic was still more sexually explicit than nudie cuties had been, but that content also seemed increasingly defanged in comparison with its hard-core cousins. The 1960s sexploitation film had thrived upon an evolving tension between sexual fantasy and sexual documentation, with the force of unfulfilled, hyperbolic fantasies arguably the more important factor in priming viewer demand for what was yet to come as censorship eroded. By the 1970s, however, this equation had reversed, and adult viewers' ability to easily see the supposed "truths" of unsimulated sexuality—the logical endpoint just beyond the sexploitation film's asymptotic tease—meant

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Fig. 10: William Rotsler and an unidentified model in an August 1974 *Knight* magazine advertisement for sibling magazine *Swingers World* (author's collection)

the veil of fantasy seemed increasingly flimsy. From now on, the screened reality of bodies penetrating each other carried greater persuasive force than soft core's inherently unfulfilled intimations. By the same token, the relative mildness of R-rated sexploitation seemed to cast it into a register of fantasy which, because largely targeted to a youth audience, could seem all the more naïve and insufficiently stimulating compared to adults-only hard core. Small wonder, then, that, despite the plethora of R-rated sexploitation films released in the 1970s, so few of them would be profiled in *Adam Film World*, despite the growing shortage of more explicit soft-core films.[58]

Furthermore, uncensored sexual reality outweighed the force of fantasy, both onscreen and off, during a decade that saw far more promiscuous sexual practices than in the 1960s, as attested by a burst of research on the rise of swinging and other alternative lifestyles.[59] Although it had been a lurid sexploitation theme since the mid-1960s, swinging as a real-life practice became more common in the 1970s, as indicated when men's magazines like *Adam* and *Knight* began printing their "Club Adam" and "Knight Club" directories of swinger personal ads. Rotsler was at the forefront of these changes—whether writing a regular sex/relationship column in *Knight*, or prominently pictured in a subscription ad for sibling magazine *Swingers World* (fig. 10)—since his experience within the sexploitation industry made him a prominent commentator on the screen's explicit sexual realism. This is not to presume, of course, that more readers of such magazines were now necessarily engaging in sexual practices that had earlier seemed more likely confined to the realm of fantasy, but that the increased avenues for sexual expression previously teased in 1960s sexploitation films were hypothetically becoming more openly accessible in real life.

Already one of the most frequent contributors to *Adam Film Quarterly*, Rotsler had parlayed his films *The Enormous Midnight* (1968) and *House of Pain and Pleasure* (1969) into prominent pictorials in several Knight Publishing magazines by the time he effectively became *Adam Film World*'s uncredited managing editor in 1972. By that time, the publication increasingly showed signs of becoming Rotsler's one-man show. Rotsler's name and his many pseudonyms (e.g., "Shannon Carse," "Cord Heller," "Clay McCord," "Philip Dakota") began dominating each issue's contents, as revealed when many of his articles and interviews were reprinted under his own name in his 1973 Penthouse/Ballantine book *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, one of the first mass-market paperbacks about sex films not specifically designed for sale at adults-only bookstores. Given his experience in many aspects of the industry, Rotsler knowledgably published (self-)interviews with these pseudonymous crew members, alongside interviews with other adult film personnel. By 1975, Edward S. Sullivan was

credited as *Adam Film World*'s editor, with Rotsler still onboard as a contributing editor amid a raft of new contributors and a new subscription policy, suggesting the latter's tenure as head writer/editor was over.

Yet, despite Rotsler's extensive use of pseudonyms to populate a sort of imaginary world of contributors within *Adam Film World*, his articles also shed light on the profilmic facts of labor within the adult film industry. He repeatedly declared that adult films were more likely reflections of male producers/viewers' fantasies about sexual liberalization than accurate depictions of lived reality:

> The sexual myths these films promote are easy sex, sex without strings, sensuality abounding, free sex, orgies galore, beautiful nude girls who will do anything, crazy laides [*sic*] who will couple with anyone. And so on. There are elements of truth in all these "fantasies" but by depicting the extremes or the unusual as the "norm" they are promoting a sexual myth. I've done it myself in over two dozen features.[60]

> Whether the films are "simulation" or hard-core porno, they depict a world that bears only a superficial resemblance to life. . . . But the image they put forth of women—the raving sex lover, the seducer of men, the rape-victim-that-becomes-aroused, the live-it-up whoopee girls—is a fantasy image that many men have of women. Thankfully, women are more complex than that, for they would quickly bore us if they were so simplistic.[61]

For Rotsler, then, the excessive fantasies these films constructed and catered to were still rooted in the alleged psychic lives of actual male readers/viewers, but some small kernels of "truth" might persist behind these lascivious images—as evidenced by his own swinging lifestyle. That is, he might reassure readers that adult films were largely fictional, but his own sexually privileged place within that industry was a first-person reminder to readers that real life had indeed become less censored by the permissive 1970s. He testified, for example, that actual "balling" (later edited out) sometimes occurred while shooting simulated sex scenes; that girl-girl scenes allowed women to sexually experiment under the guise of acting; and that the younger countercultural generation did not regularly attend sex films because they were already living the "liberated" lifestyle obliquely reflected onscreen.[62] Whether or not these details were actually true, Rotsler's overall testimony—whether due to his actual insider information or a credit to his writing skills in both fiction and nonfiction—certainly contains far more in-depth content and less prurient sensationalism than the average paperback exposé of the adult film market.

Fig. 11: Poster for Rotsler's film *The Girl with Hungry Eyes* (1967), one of several pictures he produced for Boxoffice International Pictures, costarring Rotsler himself (inset in lower-right corner) under his frequent pseudonym "Shannon Carse"

Not unlike the classical Hollywood fan magazines discussed by Marsha Orgeron, sexploitation fan magazines thus "urged readers to think themselves worthy of participating" in that sexually liberalized culture, "[e]ven when playing on their reader's insecurities, often by evoking the disparity between readers' ordinary lives and celebrities' extraordinary lives."[63] Yet, Elena Gorfinkel notes that, unlike Hollywood's glamorous celebrities, "the ordinariness of sexploitation's amateur female actors without question provided a more vérité object of male sexual fantasy, literally proffering the girl next door, the office girl, or the shop girl."[64] A disparity might indeed exist between the fantastically exaggerated sexual exploits in these films and the likelihood of enacting such scenes in one's own life, but obstacles to participation in the adult film world were not wholly insurmountable. In addition to articles about how to make sex films, for instance, Rotsler also published practical advice about "How to Become a Porn Star," including how to find an agent and producers (e.g., contact information for the Mitchell Brothers); what to expect for a pay scale and working conditions; and what types of intercourse would be expected and how to perform them for the camera.[65] Regardless of how reliable or tongue-in-cheek this reportage actually was, the potential accessibility of breaking into adult film work became a new element of fantasy fueled by these magazines, but one rooted less in the earlier decade's thick veneer of impossible fulfillment than the tantalizing (if still remote) possibility of real-life attainability.

Indeed, Rotsler's life behind and before the camera bespoke a blurring of fantasy and reality that might seem increasingly within reach for 1970s readers already invested in the alternative sexual lifestyles evidenced by these magazines' directories of personal ads. Many of the same authorial pseudonyms from his articles were found in the credits of his films (fig. 11) and would even become the names of his filmic characters—as when he played a sex film director named Shannon Carse in *Shannon's Women* (1969). He recalled, "99% of the credits were pseudonyms. On the 'lesser' productions, I'd direct as Shannon Carse and if I acted, I'd be Barney Boone. If I acted in a Rotsler-directed film, I'd be Shannon Carse."[66] "*The House of Pain and Pleasure* was shot by director William Rotsler for Bolo [P]roductions in his own 'kinky' home," reported an *Adam Film Quarterly* pictorial, while 16mm footage originally shot during nude photo sessions in his backyard "harem tent" (fig. 12) was eventually cobbled together to form *Street of a Thousand Pleasures*.[67] As he explained to an interviewer, "I love to create fantasies[;] that's my whole trip, to make a fantasy. My house is a fantasy. I am heavy into science fiction but it's not an escape from reality[;] it's more like an enhancement of reality."[68] Hence, whereas 1960s sexploitation films invoked lurid fantasies themselves for their raison d'etre, fantasy could serve as an "enhancement of reality" upon the rise of a 1970s swinging subculture

Fig. 12: 16mm home-movie footage of Rotsler and his model/actor friends, filmed by Rotsler and his associates in his backyard "harem tent," and eventually combined with 35mm linking scenes to form his feature-length *Street of a Thousand Pleasures* (1972)

that seemingly transcended the once-less-surmountable divide between adult cinema's spectator and spectacle.

Although Rotsler would describe his men's magazine reportage as little more than "creative typing" compared to the true *writing* represented by his sci-fi stories, I would argue that his later fiction career is suggestive of his earlier work on sexploitation magazines. Whether writing original novels and short stories or work-for-hire like paperback spin-offs of existing media properties, he sought to locate multiple texts within the boundaries of specific intertextual universes.[69] In like manner, Rotsler's many pseudonyms and intertwined roles within the adults-only film and publishing industries constitute a sort of intertexual universe which, through his largely single-authored *Adam Film World* issues, reflected wider sociosexual changes while still being very much a product of his creative design. That is, as much as he reported on actual people, films, and industrial shifts, adult cinema's inextricability from at least some degree of erotic fantasy—particularly around the on-set production context as an ambiguous nexus point for indexical images of bodies performing erotic

Fig. 13: Rotsler (a.k.a. "Shannon Carse") hams it up as the Prince of Verona (opposite Dee Lockwood as Juliet) in Peter Perry's *The Secret Sex Lives of Romeo and Juliet* (1969), a bawdy comedy whose stagey, dress-up qualities prefigure Rotsler's emerging interests in fan-cultural cosplay

desire—meant that he was helping effectively "fiction" the sexual revolution's contours through his magazine work. As someone who would also develop subculturally heralded "rules" for fan convention cosplay (e.g., "Don't go to bed with anyone crazier than yourself"), it is little surprise that his life and work so deftly performed the part of the swinging sexploitation character made flesh (fig. 13).

As with the aforementioned examples of sexploitation magazines inventing nonexistent films, there had already been precedents for playing upon the imaginative potential of such modular attractions by the time Rotsler's cast of pseudonymous characters crowded into *Adam Film World* during the span of his primary authorship from 1972 to 1975. His sense of humor and interest in sci-fi are easily discerned in an uncredited 1968 pictorial for the nonexistent film *Astral Trip* (fig. 14), the supposed story of drug-addled, "nude college students . . . shot into a love-out in space!" Unlike its cheaper competitors, *Adam Film Quarterly/World* rarely tried to pass off fake films as the real deal, which makes *Astral Trip* all the more notable as a short, illustrated humor piece disguised as an actual film preview.[70] Yet, whereas *Astral Trip* is a self-reflexive jab at the silliness of sexploitation narratives (see that same year's *Space Thing* [1968]), Rotsler would intersperse more serious bits of short fiction into his later reportage. His 1972 piece "Pornographer's Diary," for example, is written as a series of journal entries about a director's sexual involvement with a masochistic woman who

Fig. 14: Photos from uncredited *Astral Trip* review-pictorial (likely attributable to Rotsler) in *Adam Film Quarterly*, no. 4 (1968), depicting supposed scenes from the nonexistent sci-fi sexploitation film (author's collection)

auditioned for a hard-core SM film. Illustrated with repurposed stills from the roughie *Linda and Abilene* (1969), the article is not explicitly signaled as fiction, especially given its resemblance to the practically recounted (but perhaps similarly unreliable) details of adult filmmaking provided elsewhere in Rotsler's reportage.[71] His role, then, as both a sexploitation creator and fan par excellence effectively transformed the magazine into a personal outlet for a sort of sexploitation fan fiction. We can thus see sexploitation's underlying tension between fantasy and reality creating space for one author to fictionally expand the contours of an intertextual universe, even during a period when the realities of sexual liberalization may have increasingly seemed within the average reader's reach.

By the mid-1970s, hard-core adult cinema had become an established part of the cultural landscape, so the earlier ability for magazines to pass off photo sets as legally "banned" or "obscene" films of their own invention was increasingly difficult. Unlike the fabrication of fake films that only existed in the realm of fantasy, Rotsler encouraged fans to actively participate in shaping an emerging adult film canon, even without getting in front of a camera. His capsule reviews and evaluative ratings of "All-time Favorite Porno Film Hits" appeared in *Adam Film World* in 1975, becoming a monthly "Erotic Film Checklist" column urging readers to become more qualitatively critical and thereby increase demand for better product. Readers were not only encouraged to clip and save the column, but also to help overcome the vagaries of adult film distribution by writing directly to Rotsler with production credits and critical remarks on films they had seen playing somewhere in the United States.[72]

Unlike the 1960s sexploitation magazines' indifference about whether readers could actually view their profiled films in theaters, inviting this active fan participation not only demonstrated how the 1970s had become a time when the reality of access to liberalized sexuality now seemed to outweigh fantasy, but it was also a "making real" of select films through their canonization as notable or important works. These canonization processes were further extended in 1976 when *Adam Film World* began annually awarding its "X-Caliber Awards" according to readers' votes. By this point, the magazine was also reporting on the rise of video for overcoming the dearth of hard-core features released to the 8mm and 16mm home market. "The Videosex Scene" began as a recurring feature in May 1980, the first column detailing how to use camcorders for shooting one's own homemade porn.[73] Heralding the impending end of a market for theatrically released sex films stretching back to the distant nudie cutie, the loop between erotic fantasy and lived reality had, for some readers, finally been closed.

Notes

1. Notable examples include Kathryn Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Marsha Orgeron, "Making *It* in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 4 (2003): 76–97; Marsha Orgeron, "'You Are Invited to Participate': Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine," *Journal of Film and Video* 61, no. 3 (2009): 3–23; and Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011).
2. Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth, and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (New York: Berg, 2001), 162 (italics in original).
3. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, Playboy *and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 157.
4. Elena Gorfinkel, "The Body's Failed Labor: Performance Work in Sexploitation Cinema," *Framework* 53, no. 1 (2012): 84.
5. Ibid., 86–87.
6. "*Casting Call*," *Adam Film World*, April 1971, 15.
7. Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.
8. See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor, 1983); Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*; and Fraterrigo, Playboy *and the Making*.
9. Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of* Playboy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 80–81.
10. Also see Tom Brinkmann, *Bad Mags: The Strangest, Sleaziest, Most Unusual Periodicals Ever Published!,* vol. 1 (London: Headpress, 2008). For magazines that do not provide a given issue's publication month, I have substituted the volume and issue number for reference purposes.
11. William Rotsler, "Notes of a Sex Film Photographer," *Knight*, October 1970, 16, 18–20.
12. Kinohi Nishikawa, "Reading the Street: Iceberg Slim, Donald Goines, and the Rise of Black Pulp Fiction" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2010), 47.
13. Elena Gorfinkel, "'Indecent Desires': Sexploitation Cinema, 1960s Film Culture, and the Adult Film Audience" (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 44.
14. *The Erotic Screen: A Probing Study of Sex in the Adult Cinema* (Los Angeles: Private Collectors, 1969), 237.
15. Roger Blake, *The Porno Movies* (Cleveland: Century Books, 1970), 207.
16. On the mail-order sale of adult films, also see Eric Schaefer, "Plain Brown Wrapper: Adult Films for the Home Market, 1930–1969," in *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method*, ed. Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 201–26.
17. Paul Smith, "*The Aqua-Nudes*," *Knight*, July 1964, 84.
18. Orgeron, "Making *It* in Hollywood," 79.

19. Bill New, "*Notte Erotique*," *Adam*, July 1965, 60.

20. Thomas Dove, "How to Make a Nude Movie," *Adam* 7, no. 6 (1963): 12, 15; and Eric Schaefer, "Pandering to the 'Goon Trade': Framing the Sexploitation Audience through Advertising," in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 23.

21. Joseph Carbondale, "Those Naughty Nudes," *Adam* 8, no. 5 (1964): 13. On these earlier films, see Eric Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), chap. 8.

22. Dove, "How to Make a Nude Movie," 17; and Ron Vogel and Bill New, "*Surftide 77*," *Adam* 6, no. 7 (1962): 65 (quoted).

23. David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 53–54, 60, quotation on 60.

24. "*Mundo Depravados*," *Adult Movies Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (1969): n.p.

25. William Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema* (New York: Penthouse/Ballantine, 1973), 132–33.

26. Mark Betz, "Art, Exploitation, Underground," in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, ed. Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lázaro Reboll, Julian Stringer, and Andy Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 202–22.

27. "*Playgirls International*," *Adult Movies Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (1969): n.p.; *The Erotic Screen*, 227, 236; and "*Pussycats Paradise*," *Art Films Review* 2, no. 2 (1968): n.p. (quoted).

28. James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 193.

29. William Rotsler, *Adam Film Quarterly*, July 1966, 56 (italics in original).

30. See Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

31. "*An American Dream*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, June 1967, 14.

32. Pat Ballen, "*Cool Hand Luke*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, November 1967, 34, 37.

33. Frank Thistle, "Ingmar Bergman: Cinema Sultan of the Sex Shockers," *Adam Film Quarterly*, November 1967, 81; and William Rotsler, "There's a New Kind of Film: The Underground Movement," *Adam Film Quarterly*, November 1967, 55, 68 (italics in original).

34. Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 9.

35. "*Island Love-In*," *Art Films Review* 2, no. 2 (1968): n.p.

36. "The Rope and the Flesh," *Adult Movies Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (1969): n.p.

37. Adrienne L. McLean, "'New Films in Story Form': Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003): 12, 14, quotation on 12.

38. "*My Brother's Wife*," *Adult Movies Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (1969): n.p.

39. "*Island Love-In*," n.p.

40. "*The Muthers*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, February 1969, 29.

41. William Rotsler, "How to Make a Sex Film," *Adam Film World*, October 1972, 66.

42. "*Motel Confidential*," *Art Films Review* 2, no. 2 (1968): n.p.

43. "*Hot Skin and Cold Cash*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, April 1968, 13.

44. "*Island Love-In*," n.p.

45. "*The Warm, Warm Bed*," *Art Films Review* 2, no. 2 (1968): n.p.

46. "*The Game People Play*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, November 1967, 42.

47. Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, 48–49.

48. "*The Swingers*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, September 1968, 35.

49. "*The Playpen Girls*," *Art Films Review* 2, no. 2 (1968): n.p.

50. Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, 4, 14, 50, 58–61, 68, 245.

51. Biographical sources include David Hine, "Bill Rotsler: King of the Pornos," *Adam Special Report #8: The Erotic Photographers*, November 1971, 4–19; "*Vertex* Interviews William Rotsler," by Terry Carr and Stephanie Bernstein, *Vertex: The Magazine of Science Fiction*, October 1974, 36–38; "An Interview with Bill Rotsler," by James Van Hise, *Enterprise*, June 1984, 19, 21; "William Rotsler's Women," interview by Bill Warren, *Psychotronic Video*, Summer 1994, 65–66; and William Rotsler to Bill Bowers, 7 July 1997, The William Rotsler Virtual Museum, accessed April 8, 2013, http://williamrotsler.com/letters/rotslerbentlance.pdf.

52. Eric Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature," *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 3 (2002): 18–21; and Schaefer, "Pandering to the 'Goon Trade,'" 36–41.

53. "*The Animal*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, July 1968, 17, 20.

54. Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, 179–81; and Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 45–46, 106.

55. Schaefer, "Pandering to the 'Goon Trade,'" 41.

56. James Woodman, "Linda Lovelace," *Adam Film World*, June 1974, 12–13, 82; and Nelson Wayman, "*Mona*," *Adam Film World*, June 1974, 26–27.

57. See Nishikawa, "Reading the Street"; and Justin Gifford, *Pimping Fictions: African American Crime Literature and the Untold Story of Black Pulp Publishing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

58. See Gregory A. Waller, "An Annotated Filmography of R-Rated Sexploitation Films Released during the 1970s," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 9, no. 2 (1981): 98–112.

59. Fraterrigo, Playboy *and the Making*, 157; and Roger H. Rubin, "Alternative Lifestyles Revisited, or Whatever Happened to Swingers, Group Marriages, and Communes?" *Journal of Family Issues* 22, no. 6 (2001): 720.

60. Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, 191.

61. Philip Dakota, "Any Place, Any Time, Any Way," *Adam Film World*, October 1973, 39–41.

62. Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, 51, 169, 194–95; and Rotsler, "Notes of a Sex Film Photographer," 16, 19–20, 80.

63. Orgeron, "'You Are Invited to Participate,'" 4.

64. Gorfinkel, "The Body's Failed Labor," 84.

65. Rotsler, "How to Make a Sex Film"; and Cord Heller, "How to Be a Porn Star, Part 1," *Adam Film World*, December 1975, 8–11, 76.

66. "William Rotsler's Women," 67.

67. "*The House of Pain and Pleasure*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, February 1969, 7 (quoted); Rotsler to Bowers; and "William Rotsler's Women," 69.

68. Hine, "Bill Rotsler," 17.

69. "*Vertex* Interviews William Rotsler," 37–38; and "An Interview with Bill Rotsler," 15–18, 21. Also see Randall D. Larson, *Films into Books: An Analytical Bibliography of Film Novelizations, Movie and TV Tie-Ins* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 3, 562.

70. "*Astral Trip*," *Adam Film Quarterly*, April 1968, 96–99.

71. Cord Heller, "Pornographer's Diary," *Adam Film World*, October 1972, 80–83, 98–99.

72. William Rotsler, "All-Time Favorite Porno Film Hits," *Adam Film World*, December 1975, 68–71, 88–90.

73. Norman Bates, "The Videosex Scene: Shooting Your Own," *Adam Film World*, May 1980, 22–25.