
Hardcore Style, Queer Heteroeroticism, and *After Dark*

ABSTRACT During the early to mid-1970s, when feature-length hardcore films became a popular cultural phenomenon in the United States, hardcore came to designate more than just a genre or an industry—it became a ubiquitous mode of performance, an ethos, and a style. This article explores how hardcore as a style was taken up by the popular gay-marketed entertainment magazine *After Dark*. Through a close descriptive analysis of three photo spreads from 1975–76, it illuminates how female, gay male, and otherwise non-straight-identifying performers participated in a hardcore stylistic that, paradoxically, worked to shape queer elaborations of heteroeroticism. Within these vital images of singers, dancers, models, and performance artists, created at the height of hardcore’s new-found cultural influence, performances of female-male coupling and group-centered socio-sexual activity both worked with and moved to dissolve normative heterosexist configurations of sex and gender. **KEYWORDS** *After Dark*, hardcore, pornography, porno-chic, queer

In the 1970s, sex-themed magazines graced coffee tables, couchside magazine racks, and bathroom ledges across the United States. As hardcore porn films filled theaters with patrons eager to see newly legalized forms of explicit material, the first major porn stars, directors, and production and distribution companies were established. Through many kinds of magazines, from art, entertainment, and music magazines such as *Interview* and *Rolling Stone* to porn magazines such as *Hustler* and *Blueboy*, newsstands and bookstores across the country participated in and popularized hardcore as a new kind of image and a new kind of persona.¹ Hardcore sexuality was not only about the performance and visualization of certain kinds of sex acts—like fucking, sucking, and coming—but, as amplified through films, books, magazines, and stage performances of all sorts, just as much an outlook, an ethos, and a style. Hardcore sexuality was not just something people did; it was also a mode of performance and enactment people styled and elaborated themselves within and through.

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This article explores hardcore style as manifest in the entertainment magazine *After Dark* circa 1975–76: a peak period for both feature-length hardcore film production as well as numerous high-profile attempts to censor and persecute hardcore porn actors, directors, theaters, and patrons.² *After Dark* has a unique place in the history of magazines. A gay-marketed entertainment publication that did not reference itself as explicitly gay or explicitly sex-themed, it operated as a site for some of the most interesting, creative, and experimental approaches to hardcore-informed representations of sex, gender, and style, often articulated through images of women and men shown together. The cover image of the July 1972 issue stands as an excellent example of its approach. Gay hardcore star Cal Culver (soon to rename himself Casey Donovan) is shown walking arm in arm with model Laine Carlos, the latter in a body-hugging metal-studded bikini, and the former in a cock-accentuating white bathing suit with long white shoulder straps and an open, chest-framing front, like a hybrid leotard-jockstrap (fig. 1). The image is stridently sexual in its celebratory, body-worshipping syntax and platforms the burgeoning gay porn industry even as it fashions it in relation to a hetero-erotic pairing.

After Dark offered innovative elaborations of sexual style and erotic practice that encouraged readers to think about sex and gender in critically exhilarating, counter-normative ways. In particular it featured women and men, most often gay men, working together as photographic subjects and interviewees in versions of male-female coupling that performed heterosexuality while at the same time modeling and articulating queer revisionings of heterosexual practice—what I refer to here as queer heteroeroticism. Before looking closely at three photo spreads from *After Dark* as case studies, it will prove useful to consider the historical and cultural parameters of hardcore as it became a stylistic register for performers and practitioners of a wide variety to draw on in the mid-1970s United States.

There is no one watershed moment in which hardcore porn became a clearly identifiable industry and genre—rather, it gained traction through a succession of events. Starting in the mid- to late 1960s, a small cluster of filmmakers, photographers, magazines, and book publishers began testing the limits of censorship (not only the law but also the policy of film developers, who would regularly confiscate and supposedly discard materials they considered obscene). Filmmakers such as Peter de Rome and Wakefield Poole began making their own “amateur” films featuring explicit representations of male-male desire and showing them to lovers and friends.³ By 1970 filmmakers and photographers like James Bidgood, Richard Fontaine, Bob Mizer, and Pat Rocco were selling,



FIGURE 1. Gay porn actor Cal Culver and model Laine Carlos as a hetero-erotic pairing on the cover of the July 1972 issue of *After Dark*.

and occasionally screening, 16mm and 8mm films with full-frontal nudity and close-up shots of penises in varying degrees of tumescence.

An aboveground sexual media culture invested in making widespread, accessible, and popular images of explicit sexual representation began to coalesce with a string of films and publications in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Films such as

Andy Warhol's *Blue Movie* (1969), also released as an illustrated book by Groove Press in 1970, and Donald Crane's *Casey* (1971), an early film starring Cal Culver (not quite yet a hardcore star); newspapers such as *Screw* and *Gay*, both produced by Al Goldstein and Jim Buckley; and magazines such as *Physique Pictorial* and *Penthouse* all began circulating more direct, less coded images of sexual action and interaction. In major cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, new kinds of censorship-challenging imagery began to proliferate on the shelves and screens that made up the rapidly expanding world of adult bookstores, movie theaters, sex clubs, and gay bathhouses.

The work of filmmakers such as Gerard Damiano, Peter de Rome, Tom DeSimone, Fred Halsted, and Alexander de Renzy, producers and distributors such as Bob Alvarez and Louis Peraino, and theater owners such as Shan Sayles and Jim and Artie Mitchell formed the basis for a hardcore industry proper—an industry that by the mid-1970s encompassed a relatively reliable circuit of theater chains (such as the Park or the variously named Sherpix-owned theaters across the United States) and product management infrastructures sustaining a lucrative marketplace. Famously, what the success of Poole's *Boys in the Sand* (1971) did in the gay context, Damiano's *Deep Throat* (1972) did on a wider and more mainstream scale, bringing in thousands of viewers across the United States with its hardcore rendering of male-female sexual encounter.⁴ Amplifying its visibility, *Deep Throat* was at the center of a landmark obscenity case in New York, which it lost in March 1973. However, in his opinion, presiding judge Joel J. Tyler treated the public to a virtual enshrining of hardcore vernacular, declaring the necessity to ban “gymnastics, gyrations, bobbing, trundling, surging, ebb and flowing, ed-dying, moaning, groaning and sighing” in film.⁵

Just months after the New York ban of *Deep Throat*, the most impactful ushering of hardcore porn into public discourse came with the June 1973 decision on the Supreme Court case *Miller v. California*, which has defined obscenity law to this day. The case created a test that deemed a piece of media legally obscene if it met key criteria in the three arenas of “community standards,” “offensive” presentations of “excretory functions,” and the “literary, artistic, political, or scientific value of the work.” This more robust delineation of the obscene resulted in an astronomical increase in prosecutions for obscenity and the shutting down of many theaters across the United States.⁶ At the same time, the publicity around these cases worked to promote hardcore material via coverage in print and television news outlets, connecting it to pressing cultural and

political questions of free speech and sexual morality. Even when hardcore was prohibited, it was nonetheless “in the air” in towns, cities, and even remote rural locales.

As the industry developed, a star system came into play. Hardcore was quickly coming to recalibrate sex-focused cultural production, placing an image of active sexual performance at the forefront. Audiences and reviewers alike were interested in how the first-ever porn movie stars, such as Marilyn Chambers, Casey Donovan, Fred Halsted, Harry Reems, and Georgina Spelvin, deployed their distinct styles of performing hardcore sex and eroticism in the context of feature-length hardcore cinema.

By 1973 or so, the term “porno chic” had begun to circulate to describe how hardcore cinema had grown into a popular cultural phenomenon—a rich terrain of sex-focused cultural production with a heavy investment in the elaboration of hardcore sexuality that would not have been possible ten years earlier.⁷ Hardcore had become a culturally portable, intermedial idea referenced, explored, and elaborated upon in magazines, newspapers, novels, popular nonfiction books, plays, and music. This popular sex media included paperbacks such as 1973’s “illustrated” *Contemporary Erotic Cinema: A Guide to the Revolution in Movie Making* by William Rotsler, the man who coined “XXX.” Released by Penthouse/Ballantine Books in a pocket edition, the cover proclaimed that “films charged with enthusiasm for erotic events are now attracting mixed audiences who freely discuss ‘Deep Throat’ and ‘Last Tango in Paris.’”⁸ Likewise, Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito’s 1975 *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* mixed essays and historical accounts with interviews with hardcore actors and directors, gay and straight.⁹ Even the very “legitimate” work of the 1970 Presidential Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, a study commissioned by the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, was released by pulp/sex media powerhouse Greenleaf Classics under the title *The Illustrated Presidential Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*. On the back cover was a statement from a commission member that porn had perhaps become an “unconscious scapegoat” best left alone.¹⁰ Books of many kinds, even when touted as anti-porn, played a major role in bringing a more legible and recognizable image of hardcore sexuality into focus.

One of the more inventive iterations of the hardcore boom involved sex musicals such as *Let My People Come* (1974) and Marilyn Chambers’s stage debut in *Le Bellybutton* (1976) (billed as a “sextical”), the former bringing the stars and tropes that defined hardcore sex imagery to the stage and the record store

(*Let My People Come* was released as an LP by Libra Records in 1974) (figs. 2, 3). Likewise, mass-produced explicit magazines and newspapers were increasingly echoing and expanding upon the kinds of explicit sexual action popular in hardcore movies, refashioning them according to the dictates of their respective readerships. By the mid-1970s the tropes and styles of feature-length hardcore film had expanded into a vast terrain of cultural production, making hardcore sexuality a vital fulcrum point for the theorizing, practicing, and mediation of new socio-sexual forms.

This coalescence of hardcore as popular style was synonymous with what Linda Williams calls “on/scenity,” referring to “the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies and pleasures that have been heretofore designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene.”¹¹ By the mid-1970s hardcore had become a ubiquitous stylistic register for bringing things on/scene and expressed a sense of devotion to the explicit. Not unlike the use of “hard” in the then-new radio format hard rock, the “hard” in “hardcore”



FIGURE 2. Performers from the “sextical” *Le Bellybutton*, 1976. Courtesy the Museum of the City of New York.

**A
SEXUAL
MUSICAL**



**let my
people come**

MUSIC & LYRICS BY EARL WILSON, JR.

SCHED. & PRICES TUES., WED., THURS., 7:30; SUN 3 & 7:30-\$8.50, \$7.50, \$6.50, \$5.50, FRI., & SAT., 7:30 & 10:15-\$9.50, \$8.50, \$7.50, \$6.50. PHONE AND MAIL ORDERS ACCEPTED. Encl. self-addressed, stamped envelope & make check or M.O payable to LIBRA CO., P.O. Box 712, Cooper Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10003. TICKETS ALSO [AT TICKETRON. Phone Res: 473-7270/473-3570. Bank Americard & Master Charge by phone only: 757-6768 (Service Charge 50¢ per tkt). For Group Sales Call 354-1032.

VILLAGE GATE
BLEECKER & THOMPSON STS.

FIGURE 3. Advertisement for *Let Me People Come* from *After Dark*, July 1975, 11.

designated a mix of commitment and audacity: to be “real,” “full on,” “dedicated,” and “going all the way” with something. It also meant a transvaluation of taste registers in which terms such as “raunchy,” “lewd,” and “obscene,” recently operating as negative or derogatory, were repurposed and posited as virtues. As with the slightly later 1982 Prince song “Little Red Corvette,” in which he sings of a body that “oughta be in jail ’cause it is . . . on the verge of bein’ obscene,” hardcore became a popular way of referring to a certain kind of sexual outlook or even dynamic of sexual recognition, in which the bold and explicit encourages a strong, visceral experience of sexuality—most often a version of sexuality structured around the intensity of seeing desirable things not always on view.

If hardcore characterized a particular attitude toward sex, however, it would be a mistake to see hardcore expression as completely distinct or a break from the past. As Williams notes, hardcore porn of the 1970s was not the initiation of a new genre that should be understood against or apart from other kinds of porn. It was the injection of tried-and-true illicit porn tropes into the mainstream marketplace. While appearing more explicit when compared to the aboveground sex-themed media that preceded it or was sold alongside it (namely, exploitation films or magazines of nude models posing), it actually incorporated the codes and conventions that defined these various forms of sex media. As Williams puts it, porn genres such as “stag, beaver, and exploitation,” regularly historicized as pre-hardcore genres that disappeared with the rise of hardcore, in fact “merged into the new feature length hard-core porno complete with sound, color and hour long narrative.”¹² The languid poses of the pinup or the allusive homoeroticism of hetero-coded masculine men comprising much physique film and photography did not pass into obsolescence but became part of the visual “frenzy” that was hardcore.¹³ In hardcore, multiple porn codes and conventions were applied within new kinds of material. Hardcore in this way was a phenomenon that extended far beyond what is often generically ascribed to the label. As a new kind of aboveground and commercially lucrative stylistic register, hardcore organized bodies, acts, settings, fashions, and locations into a new regime that pulsed with a sense of experimentation, revision, and possibility, not infrequently queerly advancing new and perhaps previously unknown possibilities for the movement beyond normative, traditional paradigms of sex and gender.

QUEER HARDCORE, QUEER HETEROEROTICISM

Recent work in queer studies has been prosperous in continuing to complicate, pursue, and flesh out the paradigms of queerness robustly explored in the work of scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Alexander Doty, and Jonathan Dollimore

from the early 1990s on—works that posit queer as a highly mobile, anti-identitarian interpretive framework for making legible ideas, practices, and traditions that exceed or are anterior to dominant cultural norms structured around essentialist constructions that position homo/hetero or gay/straight as natural, taken-for-granted identity categories capable of denoting the truth of stable sexual orientations.¹⁴ Recent work by scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Nick Davis, Jack Halberstam, Scott Herring, Elizabeth Freeman, Quinlan Miller, and Damon R. Young, among several others, has persisted with the question of how category-defying instances of nonnormative gender and sexuality may work to disrupt the sociopolitical pervasiveness of heterosexist and cisgender ways of seeing, and has directed this inquiry across a vast terrain of thought, from phenomenology and film theory to trans* studies and feminist studies.¹⁵ In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ahmed offers a particularly salient application of queer via a return to the term's earlier meanings, "to bend" or "to twist." Arguing for queer as a process of refusing straight, linear lines of thought and action in social terms, she explains:

Queer gatherings are lines that gather—on the face, or as bodies . . . to form new patterns and new ways of making sense. The question becomes not so much what is a queer orientation, but how are we oriented towards queer moments when objects slip. Do we retain our hold of these objects by bringing them back "in line"? Or do we let them go, allowing them to acquire new shapes and directions . . . allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world.¹⁶

This queer as refusal of a logistic of straightening is similarly articulated in Nick Davis's work on cinema, in which he examines certain films (outside of the purview of "gay and lesbian" films) that are "queer insofar as they take open-ended variation as their guiding premise . . . [and] work against normative models of sexuality and their social, political and epistemic buttresses."¹⁷ Davis, working alongside scholars such as Matthew Tinkcom and John David Rhodes, has laid the ground for queer historiographic considerations of films, many of which predate such a use of the term "queer," in an effort to elucidate how films across many periods and contexts may, as Davis puts it, contain "theor[ies] of desire in their own right."¹⁸

Hardcore in the 1970s was an important site for these kinds of queer formulations—for theorizing nonnormative desire. That is, work that invited the recognition of moments of queer slippage ("when things fall away from the straight") or familiar conventions that are reassembled into "open-ended

variation” was key to what much hardcore, gay *and* straight, brought on/scene. While straight hardcore is often approached as hetero-affirmative cinema (or, conversely, rarely explored as queer), some of the most widely patronized hardcore films of the 1970s contain moments that “slip” very far from straight. The 1973 box-office hit *The Devil in Miss Jones*, for instance, concludes with a scene of double penetration that holds on the image of two actors’ (Mark Stevens and Levi Richards) penises ostensibly rubbing against one another as they enter the vagina and anus of the protagonist, Justine Jones (Georgina Spelvin), only inches apart. Jones calls out, “Slowly, can you feel your cocks together; can you feel it in each other?” Likewise, gay hardcore films like Wakefield Poole’s *Bijou* (1972) and Joe Gage’s *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* (1977) feature important female roles, even presenting women as participants in gay sex.¹⁹ These are not fringe examples, but material from some of the most widely seen theatrically screened porn films that played and replayed in cinemas throughout the 1970s and 1980s and, as such, were integral to the consolidation of hardcore as a genre and a style.

While magazines were arguably more sharply divided along gay and straight lines, some magazines, like the straight *Cheri* (launched 1976), moved toward queerer content, exploring areas such as intergenerational sex and female-male penetration. Other examples include an array of magazines that, while not necessarily hardcore proper (they didn’t include—or *appear* to include, anyway—images of oral or penetrative sex) employed a hardcore style and ethos, where a “frenzy of the visible” was fostered through the creative representation of bodies and sexual performance.²⁰

In an effort to make recognizable the “new shapes and directions” that were brought into being in the mid-1970s, as hardcore ascended to the level of a popular style and sexual ethos, it is helpful to bring a term into play that will elucidate formations that might otherwise be obscured by dominant historical discourse and the reductive shorthand of gay and straight as sweeping identity categories that serve it. I offer the term “queer heteroeroticism” to describe moments in both hardcore and hardcore-inspired sex media of the 1970s where signs, markers, and conventions to do with heterosexual/heterosexist porn imagery are undeniably present and important yet at the same time paradoxically brought into question, slipping away from an affirmation of configurations animated through imbricated oppositions such as male/female, active/passive, straight/gay, and biological/performative.²¹ Hardcore presentations of straightness sometimes inspired styles of sexual presentation that also purposefully and ironically slipped from naturalizing presentations of sex and gender toward a playful erotics of queer forms of desire elaborated via the disavowal of more

conventionally phallogocentric hardcore iterations of straightness. Queer heteroeroticism is a performance style and type of mediation that takes biological sex difference as a starting point only to complicate, dissolve, and erotically melt the normative values of those very distinctions. It elects and sponsors opposite-sex coupling as sites for the reconfiguration of nonnormative sex and gender practice in eroticizing terms.

In the 1970s, women and gay men were coming to assume a new position in social and political discourse as well as within the figurative imaginaries of cultural production. With both feminist and gay liberation movement politics circulating as large-scale popular frameworks for rethinking the relations between gender, sex, and class, many women and gay men were increasingly recognizing themselves and becoming recognizable within the framework Damon Young has called the “liberal sexual subject,” a position that promotes the idea of a “democracy of queer sex . . . in which autonomous sexual subjects contract to come together in the mutual pursuit of pleasure.”²² More discursive and utopian than realized in any straightforward sense, such a subject position was manifest in images of women and gay men that stood as challenges or counterpoints to the normative domains of the domestic, the family, and the male-centered workplace.²³ In her groundbreaking 1975 article “The Traffic in Women,” proto-queer theorist Gayle Rubin set out her hopes that these two dual movements might tap into their intersecting relations: “The aim of the feminist and gay revolts is to dismantle the apparatus of sexual enforcement.” She elaborated that “a thoroughgoing feminist revolution would liberate more than women. It would liberate forms of sexual expression, and it would liberate human personality from the straightjacket of gender.”²⁴ While such a liberation has yet to unfold, and the viability of such an overturn within our current socioeconomic order is highly debatable, it is nonetheless valuable to explore how media forms of the mid-1970s, and hardcore-inspired print media in particular, operated as a vital testing ground where women and queer men worked and played together toward elaborating new, essentialism-dissolving “forms of sexual expression.”

AFTER DARK IN HARDCORE’S NEW WAVE

By the mid-1970s numerous production companies, both large and corporate and small and “basement run,” began expanding the porn marketplace with dozens upon dozens of magazines. Some of these, such as *Blueboy* (1974–2007), *In Touch* (1973–2005), *Mandate* (1975–2009), and *Numbers* (launched 1978), updated the postwar physique model/pinup format by shifting focus to more sensualist erotic-romantic photographs of fully nude men (think man with a tan,

feathered hair, and tube socks on a sun-dappled sofa) and combining them with explicit porn stories. Also popular were collections of photo stills and on-set photographs from hardcore porn films by companies such as Colt and Falcon. With titles like *Colt Men*, *Manpower*, and *The Falcon File*, these magazines worked, not unlike Hollywood fan magazines, to engage fans and build star images for actors affiliated with particular porn studios—often within a particular aesthetic (Colt, for instance, specialized in beefy jocks and cowboy types). One-off, less-name-brand magazines also proliferated, often without crediting any particular film production company as a means to avoid persecution. These not only drew images from photo shoots and hardcore film shoots, but also emulated hardcore-film-style scenarios featuring no actual penetrative or oral sex, but only (as far as the eye could tell) imitations of it. Hundreds of these magazines amply stocked the shelves of adult bookstores in the 1970s with titles like *The Jock Book* (1976), which promised a “frenzy” of “175 throbbing photos”; *Hung Roommates* (1970s); *Studs at Sea* (1970s), featuring porn star Jack Wrangler; and *Hot Rods* (1979).

One magazine, *After Dark*, occupied a unique place in this wave of hardcore. As with magazines like the straight *Hustler*, *After Dark* was able to secure street newsstand and magazine rack space because it did not feature penetrative sex, and because it resembled mainstream lifestyle magazines, with a cover organized around journalistic hook lines for stories (the “purely” hardcore magazines often featured little more than titles and a caption). However, unlike *Hustler*, it did not feature full-frontal nudity and was devoted to extensive coverage of cultural events of gay interest in major cities across the United States. In fact, referring to *After Dark* as simply a “hardcore magazine” would be a misnomer, since even though it focused on a sexualist framing of model and interview subjects, it was always full of non-sex-related content. At the same time, as with the straight *Cheri*, it regularly featured hardcore-inspired images in which models and interviewees were photographed as part of a *mise-en-scène* of sexual scenarios and acts. In fact, two issues even gave the cover over to erotic photographs of gay porn star Casey Donovan. So while the magazine was by no means purely a hardcore product (if such a thing existed), it nonetheless relied upon a vivid engagement with hardcore style—that is, with the gestures and bodily positions, acts and forms, of couple and group interaction that are constitutive of what hardcore brings on/scene.

Further nuancing the magazine’s straddling of hardcore style, gay interest, and entertainment coverage was the way in which it refrained from any kind of direct, simple participation in the discourse of outness or the politics of gay identity (which is not to say that it wasn’t highly engaged with gay identity as

a paradigm of cultural consumption, patronage, and critique). As with magazines like *Films and Filming* and *Playgirl*, *After Dark* was marketed for a primary readership of male-desiring men, without directly or “openly” situating itself as a gay periodical. The magazine did not tend to directly engage in discussions of gay movement politics and rarely featured the word “gay.” With its “gay interest” material—from pinup-style photographs of naked male dancers, singers, actors, and models to its many interviews with gay icons both male and female—the magazine has been characterized by Dennis Altman as engaging in an “endless game of hide-and-seek, cloaking its quite obvious sympathies for the burgeoning gay rights movement behind seemingly impartial coverage of homoerotic dance and theatre.”²⁵

While this notion of the magazine as closeted may bear some truth—one could, at least theoretically, have read the magazine in public and argued that it was simply a popular entertainment rag—it would be a mistake to understand it only as camouflaged, shielding the reader from implication within a gay discourse of outness. Rather, *After Dark* must also be understood as a queer repository during gay times: the persistence of a tradition rather than a reaction against the rise of gay liberation discourse. Thus, its tendency to play down the term “gay” might be understood as a means of maintaining an openness to forms of postwar queer life and art that received less attention in gay print sources such as *The Advocate* and *Gay Sunshine*, both of which were decidedly more movement focused than *After Dark*.

In an effort to explore *After Dark* for what it made legible and visible, rather than what it concealed or kept from view, the following case studies set out to consider how the magazine utilized the solidly aboveground newsstand-friendly format of the “entertainment magazine” to stage theoretical, performatively exciting hardcore-styled images that elaborated queer ways of imagining and practicing desire. From this angle, the magazine may evidence an early important shift in regimes of sexual representation as well as the interpretive logics that underpin them. As Damon Young has noted of the move toward public sex culture in the 1960s and 1970s, this “period in which cinema makes sex public is one in which sexuality comes to be less organized by the dynamics of knowledge and secrecy . . . that organize the epistemology of the closet.”²⁶ Likewise, Nicholas de Villiers has argued that queer works, in particular by Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Andy Warhol, may refute, complicate, and strategically approach the closeted/out paradigm, taking up in the face of this now hegemonically imperative confessional mode (where lesbian and gay identities become required aspects of social citizenship in a straight-dominated society)

“queer strategies of opacity” as an “alternative strategy or tactic that is not linked to the interpretation of hidden depths, concealed meanings or neat oppositions between silence and speech.”²⁷ Accordingly, as an example of queer print media, *After Dark*’s investment in sexual expression and performance over the presentation of a stable identitarian position as exclusively gay fostered representational possibilities for emergent socio-sexual practice. In this way, it captured less readily legible and fixed kinds of coupling and groupings of sexual participants, leaving room for radical configurations such as queer forms of heterosexuality, or even gay male participation in queer forms of heteroeroticism.

How did *After Dark* capture certain constellations of queer life that other more committedly gay or straight publications may have passed over? From its inception in 1968 to its discontinuation in 1983, *After Dark* queerly sung out from newsstands with cover after cover of what would later come to be called gay icons.²⁸ The two image types most frequently gracing its cover might be characterized as the male “babe” or cover guy (a parallel of sorts to the *Playboy* cover girl) and the diva. Existing writing on the magazine frames it as driven by homoerotic male-centered imagery, but well more than half of any given issue might be devoted to interviews with, writings by, and photographs of women, or women and men together.²⁹

With its distinctive braiding of women, gay men, homoerotic imagery, art, entertainment, and, increasingly, pornographic imagery, *After Dark* was deeply indebted to a style of production in which diverse sexual cultures were amplified through a 1970s idiom of entertainment—that is, a version of entertainment that situated labors such as stage performance, writing and publishing, modeling, and interview giving as a sphere of collective, often gay-inclusive participation. *After Dark* put models of nonnormative socio-sexual participation on the coffee tables of people who could, and in many instances did, join in the same culture being advertised. Whether at movie theaters, cabarets, or bathhouses (like the St. Marks Baths, where Bette Midler regularly performed), the lives and life models showcased in the magazine were taken up in off-Broadway theaters, discos, and sex clubs where people participated in the same ideas poetically embodied in the queer work of these cultural producers.

In its most ideal form, *After Dark* promoted a kaleidoscopic and uni-social arrangement, driven less by a dualistic logic of crossover production and more by a layering of many possible styles and forms of action. While this may have been aimed primarily at gay men and a small—yet highly valued—readership of women interested in queer entertainment culture, the following exploration of

specific images from the magazine and beyond will help to chart out how it figured these positionalities in a manner that exceeded conventional ways of thinking about these groups. Just as male-desiring women and gay men were addressed by the magazine, it also was expressive of a utopic perspective that sought to alter the terms of what these populations might do with and among one another as agents of living out in the world more generally.

This spirit of self-invention and social world-making did not, however, just spring from the magazine's philosophical commitments. It was informed by the changing marketplace as it adapted to the mass-market inclusion of hardcore imagery. By the mid-1970s, as older skin magazines began adapting to the images on offer in hardcore movies and newer magazines were introduced in connection with this market, *After Dark* was faced with the question of how to maintain relevance to its abundant readership of three hundred thousand in the face of an expanded market of new skin magazines that featured full nudity, erections, and explicit images of sexual interaction. How would *After Dark* keep from withering on the vine in the emergent context of glossy gay hardcore?

DANA GILLESPIE'S HARDCORE SIGHT

The July 1975 issue illustrates the direction the magazine would move in as it faced hardcore's growing ubiquity. The cover, showcasing musician-actress-model Dana Gillespie, maintains a sort of playfully queer approach to heterosexual activity while also taking up a generically recognizable hardcore image register (fig. 4). A long shot ushers her on/scene, as she is shown standing atop a bed of crumpled blue satin sheets, buttocks extended out, clasping the shoulders of a bare-assed blond man in a baseball jersey clinging to her, his face and neck nestled in her breasts. The cover identifies Gillespie as a "Mainman RCA" recording artist and her cover partner as "Number 14," matching the number on the back of his jersey.

This enactment of male-female coupling seems to want to ignite spectatorial relations spanning male-desiring male, female-desiring male, and male-desiring female readerships, but it was not just a pansexual anomaly made possible by an incongruent moment in which queer entertainment collided with hardcore. Rather, it worked as one node in a larger circuitry of hardcore-inspired performance that was key to Gillespie's work across stage, LP, cover artwork, and promotional materials. Take, for instance, an advertisement for the same album promoted by her cover story in *After Dark*, the 1974 release *Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle*, or the similar imagery used



FIGURE 4. Dana Gillespie and “Number 14” share a hardcore embrace on the cover of *After Dark*, July 1975.

for the back of this album (figs. 5, 6). The RCA advertisement sustains the hardcore syntax of the *After Dark* cover, suggesting anal receptivity as Gillespie bends down to pick up a cat, buttocks stretched up and outward.

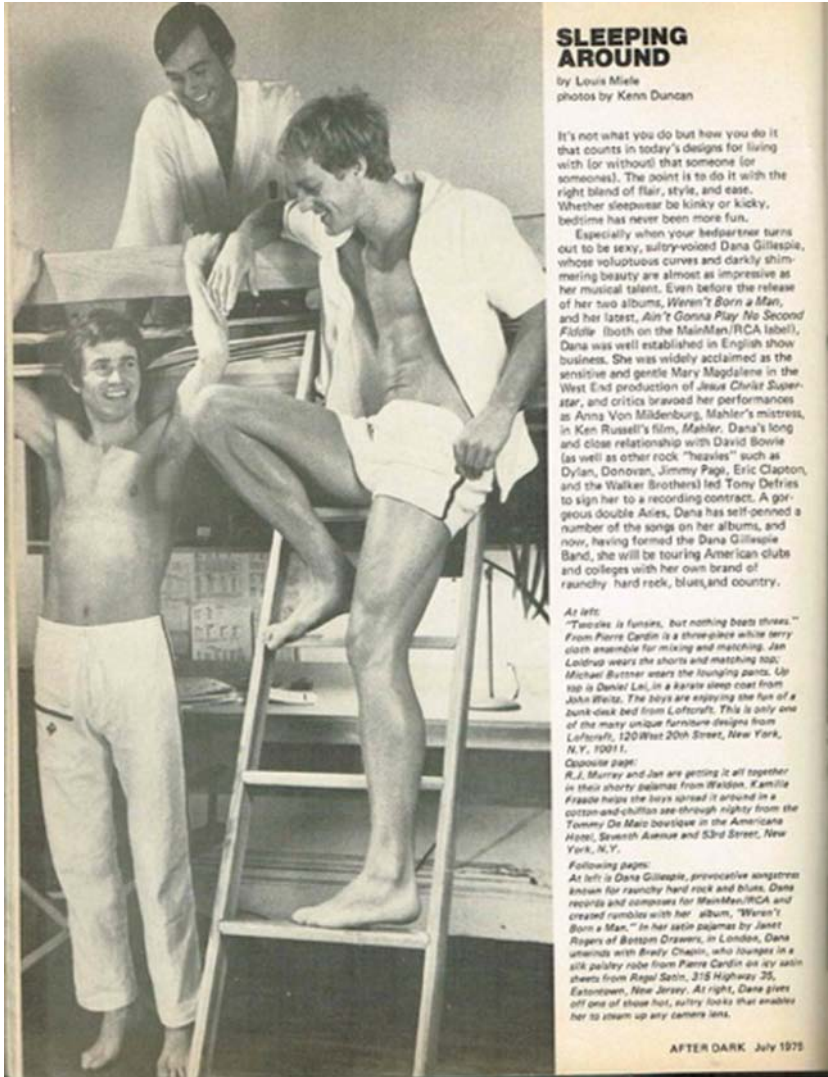
In these images, Gillespie’s performance explicitly suggests specific hardcore acts. Yet her direct gaze toward the camera is also different here from iterations



FIGURES 5, 6. Advertisement (from *After Dark*, January 1976, back cover) and album artwork (from Dana Gillespie's LP *Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle*, 1974) emphasize the performance of anal receptivity.

of sexuality in pre-hardcore imagery in that it foregrounds female looking as an active part of sexual doing. As Elena Gorfinkel has noted, this kind of shift toward the elaboration of female agency can be traced through the changing representation of women in late-1960s sexploitation films. Through her analysis of the 1968 film *Office Love-in*, *White Collar Style*, Gorfinkel emphasizes that as “part of [the] changing tide of sexploitation’s ideology, erotic looking in the film operates to facilitate sexual activity, to authorize its enactment.”³⁰

This motif is amplified within *After Dark* as a joint project where what is authorized, in part, is a sort of gay-straight alliance around endeavors of erotic looking. In fact, the Gillespie article itself starts with a direct challenge to earlier, camouflaged physique photography that avoided the act of men looking at men with an almost full-page image of three partially dressed men arranged around and on a bunk bed, two of them gazing directly at another, and one who is using the rail of the top bunk as a pull-up device (fig. 7). Next to this image is the headline for the story, which in thick, black, bold letters reads: “SLEEPING AROUND.” Two pages on, a picture of Gillespie lying on the bed with a man sprawled out, robe open to give a full view of his chest and legs, is captioned,



SLEEPING AROUND

by Louis Miele
photos by Kenn Duncan

It's not what you do but how you do it that counts in today's designs for living with (or without) that someone (or someone(s)). The point is to do it with the right blend of flair, style, and ease. Whether sleepwear be kinky or kicky, bedtime has never been more fun.

Especially when your bedpartner turns out to be sexy, sultry-voiced Dana Gillespie, whose voluptuous curves and darkly shimmering beauty are almost as impressive as her musical talent. Even before the release of her two albums, *Weren't Born a Man*, and her latest, *Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle* (both on the MainMan/RCA label), Dana was well established in English show business. She was widely acclaimed as the sensitive and gentle Mary Magdalene in the West End production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and critics lauded her performances as Anna Von Mildenburg, Mahler's mistress, in Ken Russell's film, *Mahler*. Dana's long and close relationship with David Bowie (as well as other rock "heavies" such as Dylan, Donovan, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, and the Walker Brothers) led Tommy Deliris to sign her to a recording contract. A gorgeous double A-side, Dana has self-penned a number of the songs on her albums, and now, having formed the Dana Gillespie Band, she will be touring American clubs and colleges with her own brand of raunchy hard rock, blues, and country.

At left: "Two-piece is funsize, but nothing beats three." From Pierre Cardin is a three-piece white terry cloth ensemble for mixing and matching. Jan Lofstrom wears the shorts and matching top. Michael Butcher wears the lounge pants. Up top is Danke! Lal, in a karate sleep coat from John White. The boys are enjoying the fun of a bunk-bed set from Lofstrom's. This is only one of the many unique furniture designs from Lofstrom, 120 West 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

Opposite page: R.J. Murray and Jan are getting it all together in their shorty pajamas from Madison. Kamille Frazee helps the boys spread it around in a cotton-and-chiffon see-through nightie from the Tommy De Maio boutique in the Americana Hotel, Seventh Avenue and 53rd Street, New York, N.Y.

Following page: At left is Dana Gillespie, provocative songstress known for raunchy hard rock and blues. Dana records and composes for MainMan/RCA and created rambles with her album, "Weren't Born a Man." In her satin pajamas by Janet Rogers of Boston Drawers, in London, Dana unwinds with Brady Chapin, who lounges in a silk paisley robe from Pierre Cardin in his satin shorts from Regal Suits, 315 Highway 35, Eatontown, New Jersey. At right, Dana gives off one of those hot, sultry looks that enables her to steam up any camera lens.

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FIGURE 7. Male-male gazing in pajamas. *After Dark*, July 1975, 56.

“At left is Dana Gillespie, provocative songstress known for raunchy hard rock and blues. . . . Dana unwinds with Brady Chapin, who lounges in a silk paisley robe.” Throughout, Gillespie and her male counterparts are presented as a sort of bonded tribe of hardcore associates, with Gillespie positioned as the facilitating agent of hardcore’s queer sexual potentialities. Importantly, this is not just part of the magazine’s production of sexual life, but part of a larger project of

image making and sexual authoring that formed the core of Gillespie's work during this period, in which the lyrics of her songs played a central role.

Through magazine articles, advertisements, album artwork, song style, and lyrical content, Gillespie and her collaborators crafted a world of performative queer raunch. And it was at the level of her lyrics, as part of a queer erotic poetics, that she most fully elaborated the benefits of bringing hardcore, queer, and/or antinormative sentiment into dynamic play, resulting in a kind of feminist sexual activation that insisted on the use of queer sexual tropes conventional to cultures of male-male desire. Most notably, Gillespie riffed on notions of freedom that were generative of sexual arousal in ways that enthusiastically perverted normative gender protocols. In "Dizzy Heights" (1974), for instance, a song that celebrates the erotic drama of her sexual encounter with a man, she opens with a refreshing recalibration of gender signification:

He's a carnival queen, do you know what I mean, have you seen him?
He'll take you up to dizzy heights
He's a rock and roll lady who can drive you crazy, have you seen him?

In "Tail to Wag" (1974) she recalibrates normative relations between hard and soft, singing, "I love it when he's hard on me because he's got a loving hand." In the Johanna Hill-written "Wanderlust" (1974) she sings of an insatiable hunger for sex that manifests in cruising the streets for men: "There's a hunter in my blood, don't know if I can stop the flood, got to wander, got to see what I can see."

A dominant concept threaded through Gillespie's song work is that sex and gender are scopical. Her songs refute the notion that seeing can be detached from other erotic activities, and from touching in particular. When her "carnival queen" takes her to dizzy heights, this is not just about being the recipient of his erotic mastery, but more located in the protagonist's ability to recognize and to encourage others to recognize sexual possibility through seeing (again, just as cruising works). Sexual recognition collapses into a sort of autoerotic sex act of its own. How do you know a "rock and roll lady" when "you see him?" In a sense, the answer to this question is all over Gillespie's work. Clothes, gesture, embodiment, sexual activity, and style are, in this world, all forms of queer raunch where figurative polarities of hard and soft, man and woman, giver and receiver are paired and repaired in a multitude of exciting ways, widening the pantheon of hardcore sex acts to include polymorphously perverse rotations of queer positioning and repositioning.

In this world, seeing and touching work to guide each other, a notion most strongly brought to life in the song “Eternal Showman” (1974), in which she (ostensibly occupying the position of showman) declares, “Touch and see, that’s the way to be free, really free-ee-ee.” She later asks, “Have you been him?” The literal act of seeing, and seeing as a figurative experience of psychosocial recognition or realization, are blended together, resulting in a landscape where seeing sets becoming in motion. “Being” the eternal showman—expressively putting yourself on show—facilitates, indeed *authorizes* recognition for others in a domain in which to show oneself opens the door to becoming someone else and losing the dictates of subjective certainty.

The *After Dark* photo series extends the sensibility of Gillespie’s lyrics by foregrounding images that inspire collective participation in enactments of sight and touch. This is most strongly embodied in a full-page image that, like the cover, shows Gillespie posed on a bed, only this time surrounded by four naked men (fig. 8). Gillespie looks straight on, addressing the camera as a sort of sexual tigress, lording over the cluster of male admirers who reach toward her and grasp from below. The caption reads: “Dana shows us that when out with boys, only the barest essentials are necessary. Here she grabs the gang’s attention in black stockings, garter belt, and satin boudoir ensemble.”³¹

Yoking together rhetorics of gay liberation and hardcore sexuality, the description of being “out with boys” in “only the barest essentials” works to signal a feeling of camaraderie achieved through the enactment of sexual publicity. This is further amplified by the way several of the pictured boys are shown smiling and looking up at Gillespie with expressions more evocative of adoration and appreciation than longing or sexual hunger. Within this queer mise-en-scène, Gillespie’s expression as a male-desiring female is placed alongside an image that invites homoerotic spectatorship, with the majority of skin given over to the “gang” of young men. The resulting image is at once homo- and heteroerotically configured, while also troubling the distinctions between the two. For an exclusively male-male desiring viewer, the image works as homoerotic (the men are not shown as sexually engaged, though they are naked and in close enough proximity to be highly suggestive of male-male sexual contact). For a male-desiring female, the image may provide an erotic scenario of female-centric/male abundant group sexual experience, and/or show a woman as an erotic participant in what is possibly a gay male sexual context. In this last regard, it is important to consider that women and gay men did, and do, have sexual experiences with one another and, in this light, the image may embody a view of heteroeroticism of opposite-sex couplings—that is inclusive of, or even



FIGURE 8. Collective queer hetero-erotics. *After Dark*, July 1975, 61.

paradoxically situated within, a gay male context. It leaves open for consideration the fact that women and gay men may also take up queerly inspired formations of heteroeroticism. Such intersections are resonant with Gillespie's performance project at large, which advocates for a participatory culture of raunch wherein multiple forms of self, coupled, and group recognition slide up against one another in unexpected ways. Gillespie's expressive work extended

across a variety of media forms—record, interview, magazine spread—as a means of cultivating and sustaining images of hardcore eroticism that were not only inclusive, but approached the possibilities of inclusivity with imagination.

CHITA RIVERA AND THE BONDS OF RAUNCH

While Gillespie appeared as part of a somewhat fantastical and glam-theatrical *mise-en-scène*, the performances of other women featured in *After Dark* tended to draw more closely on hardcore-informed stylistics of queer nightlife and queer cultural production circa the mid-1970s. The December 1975 issue of *After Dark* devoted six pages to another performer, Chita Rivera, who at the time was enjoying success playing Velma Kelly in the first-ever run of Bob Fosse's musical *Chicago*. *Chicago* worked, not unlike more exclusively sex-themed "sex musicals," as a vehicle for bringing hardcore modalities on/scene. It made avid use of a hardcore raunch aesthetic, of which Rivera's Velma was a central part. Dancers—men and women alike—were at times dressed in little more than women's underwear, and Fosse's choreography heavily featured bumping, grinding, and gyrating.

The *After Dark* piece extended the hardcore shadings of Chita's performance in *Chicago* via photo spread and interview; it also more closely situated Rivera as part of a context of queer labor. This important example of queer work is of critical historical value in exploring how major production contexts linked to straight male producers like Fosse fostered queer networks of labor within them and, importantly, worked to differentiate their productions *as queer*. The recovery of this history bears an important weight, as many of the people associated with these productions—a number of whom have passed away from HIV/AIDS—have never been adequately recognized for their work *as* queer laborers. Not unlike the earlier MGM movie musicals that, as explored by Matthew Tinkcom, used queer codification to imbue the product with discernibly "homosexual" sensibilities, *Chicago* pivoted on the performance work of multiple gay male dancers, choreographers, costume designers, set designers, and hairdressers, and profited from the many ways in which their labors worked to mark the expressive capacities of the production.³²

Unlike the case of the MGM musical, however, queer labor by the mid-1970s was operating in complex ways as new possibilities arose connected to gay liberation and the growth of a gay commercial sector. The work of male-desiring men in particular both opened up a product to straight audiences interested in the potential cultural capital of a gay aesthetic sensibility while also

working to address more minor, but not necessarily un-lucrative, gay audiences. While this operated through all kinds of media, print—with its ability to work with greater immediacy through a vital base of both short-term and long-term advertising partners—had a privileged place in this moment of cultural and financial experimentation.

This distinction between products marked by a gay sensibility but ostensibly open for business to heterosexual audiences and products made to function in an easily locatable mass marketplace of gay cultural production is an important one. It resulted in, for a time at least, the organization of labor networks that could ironically work as both mass and minor. While the closet *may* work as a metaphor for the operations of queer connotation in MGM musicals from the 1940s and 1950s, a more suitable metaphor here might be the backstage. In this context, we can see *After Dark* and its “showbiz” focus working to give the reader—via interview, fashion shoot, and general arts coverage—a sort of access point to a vernacular repository of queer backstage life, making available the otherwise undisclosed (which is not the same as closeted) goings-on of queer cultural experience.

Any notion of *After Dark* as reactionary or resisting outness falls apart upon exploration of its contents. Not only does the coverage of this high point in the career of Rivera show her as part of a context of hardcore-informed gay male sexual expression, it regularly references and discusses her place within this expressive culture. The article makes a case for Rivera’s chops, placing her within a pantheon of gay icons and spaces of queer performance, reporting that, years ago, she began “discovering the new cabaret circuit of New York, those intimate gay-oriented night spots which recalled for [her], the days of the Bon Soir and the Blue Angel, of Barbara Streisand and Kay Ballard.” Likewise, Rivera shares her own feelings about her place in “homosexual” contexts, explaining, “Love it? Yes I do. Need it? You bet. . . . I tell you without those boys”—correction, “*men*, the arts would be in lots of trouble. These guys want to be entertained, they’re open for loving, and the joyous energy and enthusiasm they radiate is fabulous.”³³

The magazine’s coverage of Rivera intensifies this sentiment of gay appreciation with images that place her as the centerpiece of a whole constellation of gay cultural activities. At a day shoot in the “private” Galaxy 21 disco, Rivera is shown bumping and grinding with dancers Chris Chadman, Cameron Mason, and Clive Clerk. The article affectionately describes Chadman as “one of Chita’s sidekicks in her nightclub act,” *Chita Plus Two*, and also as a colleague who “shares the stage with her in *Chicago*.” Mason and Clerk, it is explained, are

“spellbinding” performers in *A Chorus Line*—also running on Broadway at this time. Framing each with playful queer innuendo, the article situates them on/scene within urban New York gay male culture, explaining that Mason, who hails “from Arizona and is relatively new to New York,” enjoys the “splendors of Central Park,” while Clerk “dabbles with paints and has his first one-man show in the works.”³⁴ These relatively short descriptions pack it in for queer readers, placing Mason within the queer characterizing trope of the dewy-eyed boy who’s new in town, but bringing this into the fold of hardcore sexuality by simultaneously punching up the “splendors” to be found in the cruising ground that is Central Park. Likewise, the quick nod to Clerk’s “one-man show” highlights a performance that is absent women, that, when coupled with the article’s images—several showing Clerk posed or dancing shirtless and one showing him in a T-shirt that reads “No Parking, Active Driveway”—suggests forms of male-centered entertainment and contact.

Within the fashion shoot, however, male-male desire is explicitly imbricated within and as part of a *mise-en-scène* of queer hardcore-tinged performance that, first, offers images of male-female pairing and, second, disrupts normative understandings of male-female pairing through choreography, gesture, and performance styles that amplify a syntax of association over and above one of sexual unification and heterosexual correspondence. For instance, the article opens with a series of three images that work to foreground the participants as individual agents of sexual activity joined together in acts of hardcore display (fig. 9). In the first, behind Chita we see Clive raised on a platform wearing a form-fitting T-shirt and white pants that showcase his physique and bulging genitalia. Chita, dressed in a black sequined “two-piece playsuit,” bends over with her buttocks jutting receptively toward Clark’s crotch, the image performatively suggestive of anal sex. This notion is furthered in the two adjacent images of Chadman and Mason modeling form-fitting T-shirts that, a caption tells us, can be used to “get the message across” and can be purchased from the store “Loveshirts Limited.”

The remaining images of the fashion spread are group pictures that make use of the individual-collective melding encouraged by disco dancing, though continued in a hardcore register. A full-page group shot of all four performers shows the now-shirtless men gathered into an erotic configuration, with Chadman’s arms placed around the shoulders of Mason and Clerk—all three shirtless and in form-fitting jeans, flexing, with Mason and Clerk giving the camera hard stares. Positioned in front of them—a sort of mascot of queer desire—Rivera appears dressed only in a pair of overalls, her own impressive

**FASHION:
RAZZLING AND
DAZZLING AND
ALL THAT JAZZ**

by Louis Miele
photos by Kenn Duncan

Boogie, hustle, hoot and holler—the gang's all here!

The places of the moment are the underground private clubs that have sprung up throughout Gotham and become meccas of music and gay madness. Those in the know go and disco their derrières off until dawn's early light. Fresh fruit and juices are the only refreshments served in these dens for these "naturally high" crowds. If there is an offer of Coke, it's usually to sniff—not slurp.

For such occasions, dressing down with elegance is the order of the day. A message to someone across a crowded dance floor can be sent by means of a tee shirt as well as by the eyes. The shirts carry messages ranging from sexual preferences and fetishes to favorite shows. The variety available is virtually limitless. As the evening wears on and the music gets hotter, so does the atmosphere, and stripping to the waist adds to the pagan-like festivities.

The romp pictured on these pages took place at the Galaxy 21, 256 West 23rd Street, a multi-level private disco that offers several trippy rooms dispensing visual and audio experiences of the mind-blowing sort.

Add to all this the volatile and talented Chita Rivera, who has been shaking up New York this year, first with her whiz of a nightclub act and currently with her dazzling cavorting and terpsichorean art in the sassy and sexy hit musical *Chicago*.

Wherever Chita is, the boys follow.

Below left: Chita Rivera, in a sequined two-piece playsuit with hood, dances up a storm with Clive Clerk, who is wearing a signature tee shirt from *Bandolera, Ltd.*, 767 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y.

Below: Chris Chadman (top) and Cameron Mason (bottom) get the message across with tee shirts from *Loveshirts, Ltd.*, 12 West 31st Street, New York, N.Y., and available at *Lord and Taylor* in New York and at *Ah Men* in Los Angeles.

Opposite page: Cameron, Chris, and Clive gather around Chita while she shows off her *Ultraseude* overalls. The men's imported slacks and belts are from *Bobby Dazzler*, that elegant boutique at 1450 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. Miss Rivera's entire wardrobe is by *Halston* and available at *Halston Limited*, 33 East 68th Street, New York, N.Y. Her wigs are from *Enny of Italy*, 671 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y.



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FIGURE 9. Chita Rivera and Clive Clerk take up hardcore positions and the erotic messaging of "playsuits" and "Loveshirts." *After Dark*, December 1975, 62.

muscles also showcased as she poses (fig. 10). The following two pages similarly combine images of all-male bumping and grinding with images of Rivera and the men. Captions make clear the commercial endeavor of what might be called hardcore apparel via information on where to purchase the "Tit Top shirts" worn by the men. The largest photograph in this sequence features Rivera and



FIGURE 10. Chita Rivera at the helm of her hard-staring army of lovers. *After Dark*, December 1975, 63.

Chadman within a space clearly designed for lounging and sexual activity; the two pose in front of massive Eastern-themed pillows in a silver canopied “pad” area (fig. 11). The tone of the spread communicates the sense that they are erotic playmates—associates in their combined interests in men and sex.

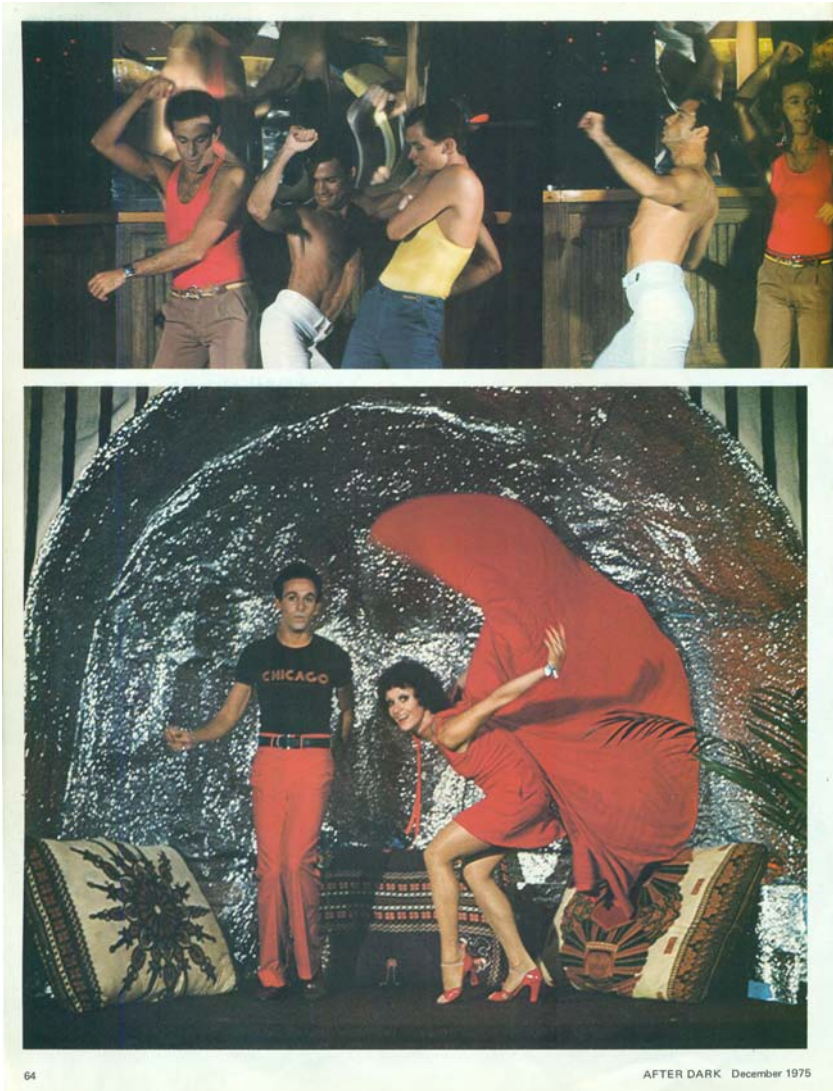


FIGURE 11. Chita Rivera presides over a mise-en-scène of eros and play at New York's Galaxy 21 disco. *After Dark*, December 1975, 64.

Following the fashion shoot, a full-page photo of Rivera, despite showing less skin than some of the others, is arguably the most evocative in terms of hardcore sexuality. She stands with her hand placed confidently, if butchly, at her hip. Her lips shine with wet-looking red lipstick, and she stares directly at the camera with her head tilted to the side, her gait and expression suggestive of the act

of sizing someone up: a sexual stare down (fig. 12). As a full-page pinup-style centerpiece of the spread, the photograph clinches the theme of sexual agency that has sustained throughout. Operating as an emblem of hardcore female action—particularly active looking—Rivera’s erotic authority is signaled as part of a hardcore modality in which assertive, though also readily receptive, displays



LOVELY CHITA, THEATER-MADE

by Patrick Pacheco

"I don't get by easily with this mug of mine, since I'm not one of those sweet-faced women. I even look funny when I'm ill," chides an effervescent and very healthy-looking Chita Rivera. "I've got to smile to look good—so that people can say, 'Oh, look, she's happy!'" At this self-deprecating dig, Chita lets go with peals of laughter, the breezy laughter that frequently punctuates a brief interview held in her cubbyhole of a dressing room at the 46th Street Theatre between matinee and evening performances of *Chicago*.

Chita has much to smile about these days. With co-star Gwen Verdon, she shares thunderous ovations for her performance as Velma Kelly, the sassy spitfire in the Bob Fosse-directed hit musical. Prior to the show's opening last June, she stormed Manhattan's Grand Finale and Los Angeles' Studio One with *Chita Plus Two*, a nightclub act that generated rave notices and capacity audiences. Also, offers from throughout the world are coming in to secure the talents of this Latin whirlwind dervish once her commitment to *Chicago* is fulfilled. In short, it's the year of the Chita, a heady and happy time for the veteran star of such shows as *West Side Story*, *Bye Bye, Birdie*, *Bajour*, and *Sweet Charity*.

Judging by the obvious relish with which she talks about her nightclub act, it is easy to perceive that it's her pet delight. "It was the kind of feeling we had the night that *West Side Story* opened," remarks Chita, recalling the opening of *Chita Plus Two*, directed by Ron Field and including ace dancers Tony Stevens and Chris Chadman. "Here we were doing this act, loving it, and all of a sudden everybody went 'Yea!' I just looked out at all those wonderful, smiling faces, and I said to myself, 'Well, hello!'" Chita mirthfully sings that last word, a favorite catchall phrase she uses to emphasize her feelings.

Included in the cheering audiences during the Grand Finale engagement were Liza Minnelli and Jack Haley, Jr., who insisted on presenting Chita at Studio One. There was such a demand for tables that the likes of Truman Capote and other "biggies" were turned away at the door. When I remind Chita of this, she beams, nudges me softly with her knee, and whispers, "Didn't you just love it? I kept asking myself, 'What is going on here?'" And she laughs again, but the laughter here is self-effacing, the pinprick that bursts the balloon lest she get too carried away.

The perfect chemistry that created the act began to take shape when Fosse's sudden illness imposed a hiatus on the rehearsals for *Chicago*. Even before that, however, Chita, recently returned from a seven-year stay in California, was discovering the new cabaret circuit in New York, those intimate

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FIGURE 12. Chita Rivera sizing up, staring down. *After Dark*, December 1975, 66.

of sexual performance are also transparently rendered as a form of queer labor. This is partly to do with how hardcore allows for enactments of female agency not standard in other modes of sexual representation, but also to do with the way the magazine draws attention to the work of queer male labor—hairdressers, photographers, writers—working in the service of the queer vernacular project that is *After Dark*. Image construction is not hidden here, but directly presented to the reader (the article describes, for example, Rocco Morabito, “a good-looking, curly haired fellow who is Chita’s dresser, secretary, confidante, and close friend [who] comes to the room to signal the end of the interview”).

Threaded throughout the text and images is a sense of queer bondedness between men and women and men and men. *After Dark* invites readers to partake in a backstage world, here elaborated through the space of a private disco made publicly visible in the pages of the magazine, where women and men may share in the interwoven labors of crafting and enacting hardcore style. Akin to what Gorfinkel has described in the related context of the late 1960s, early 1970s erotic film festival, in this scenario “sexuality rather than identity could be explored.”³⁵ Accordingly, the world we are presented with turns on the queer expression of formulations of desire that may simultaneously merge elements such as active and passive, giving and receiving, taking and sharing. Elements that elsewhere may be organized in distinctly heteronormative ways here become elements of alliance in the figuring of a nightlife tableaux that corresponds little to traditionalist models of male-female coupling.

QUEER HETEROEROTICISM, RE STYLES AND THE TUBES

The next issue of the magazine (January 1976) was its first to showcase full-frontal nudity. An eight-page article on the San Francisco sex-themed rock ‘n’ roll band the Tubes included an extensive photo spread placing various members of the band in an erotic mise-en-scène, with several full-page photographs featuring Re Styles, a singer and dancer who regularly performed with the band onstage. *After Dark* highlights aspects of the Tubes’ performance work that, fittingly for the magazine, offers another instance of queer heteroeroticism. While the Tubes appear to stay within the bounds of a male-centered rock ‘n’ roll image, with song lyrics seemingly focused on the hetero-centric trope of horny men pursuing hot women, *After Dark* emphasizes the way in which their work couples men and women only to pervert this coupling through a constant displacement of gender and sex difference. Thus, with the Tubes and Re Styles, the trope of heterosexual opposites is subsumed by a hardcore mode in which men and women alike position

themselves as pleasure-drenched subordinates united not in opposite attraction, but in a shared pursuit of hardcore enactment.

One full-page image shows Styles and her partner and band mate Prairie Prince as part of an SM tableaux, with Styles, upright, holding a leash that connects to a dog collar on Prince, crouched below on all fours (fig. 13). Styles is



FIGURE 13. Re Styles and Prairie Prince enact a multiplication of female looking and the restriction of male sight. *After Dark*, January 1976, 31.

covered only by feathers over her breasts, a sash hung low around her waist, and an ornately beaded necklace and metal belt. Prince is clad in a studded leather vest, jockstrap, gloves, and eye covering. While they both face directly forward, we are only able to see Styles's eyes, as she directs a sultry look at the camera. Behind them are three airbrushed eyes, with eye shadow, mascara, and dark painted lines of eyebrow pencil. A caption reads, "Dominating Diva Re Styles and her Pet, Prairie Prince are captured in this surreal portrait by photographer Michael Zagaris."³⁶

While the image features a male-female coupling, everything about it routes away from the drama of heterosexual union, instead eroticizing the relation between looking, feeling, and knowing to queer effect. That is, the incorporation of multiple eyes, coupled with the image of Prince unable to see and covered in SM gear, creates an erotic scenario where Styles and Prince are first and foremost aligned as participant agents in this sexual scenario. These practitioners of SM enact a ritual dependent on an important set of relations between knowing and not knowing, where Prince awaits the uncertain—or at least unforeseen—pleasure that he knows enacting submission will bring. This dynamic is amplified through the figure of female looking via the eyes on the wall. Again, the direct, active looking and sexual sight of women presides. It seems to suggest that as Prince relinquishes his privilege to see, a sort of aggregated power of female seeing builds.

The following page features a full-frontal image of bandmates Prince and Michael Cotton wearing nothing but form-fitting shirts with airbrushed images of tubes on them, kneeling on the ground (fig. 14). Styles's head is on Cotton's leg, appearing directly between the two men as if linking them, her hair slicked back, wide-open eyes looking straight at the camera. Whereas Prince and Cotton both give serious looks of sexual hunger—their heads tilted slightly down for a "come hither" effect—Styles's gaze appears relaxed and not particularly sexually engaged. Despite the presence of Prairie's penis taking up a good deal of the left foreground, the image carries a strong sense of androgyny, all three having similarly slicked-back hair fashioned in the same short style. Moreover, Prince's lack of erection combined with his appearance of sexual urgency suggests a kind of sexuality whose excitement is, ironically, perhaps not genitally driven.

Nonnormative pairings of staple hardcore elements such as heavily gendered representations of nudity and acts of sexual looking are central to the band's expression of queer heteroeroticism. Key here is the way the Tubes exhibit male-female pairings as part of a joint expression in a hardcore sexuality that demotes the importance of biological sex, just as it converts it to fetish. The Tubes

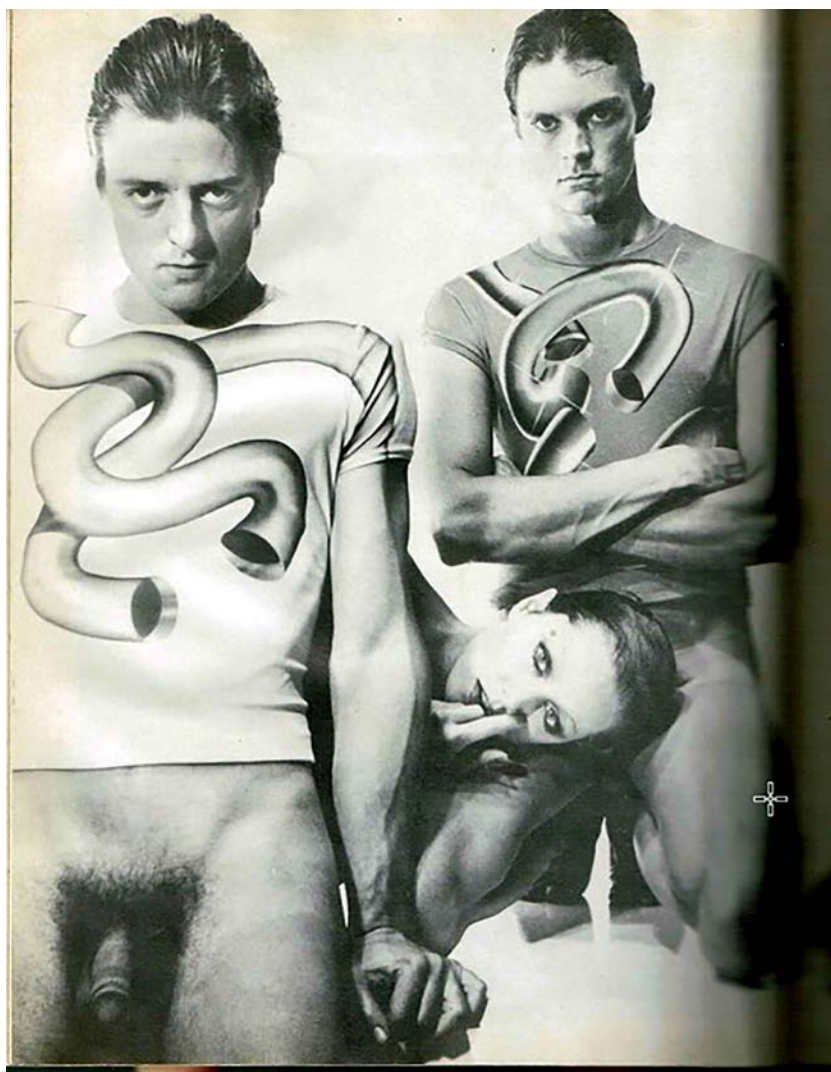


FIGURE 14. Prairie Prince (left) and Michael Cotton (right) of the Tubes present and demote a vision of biological sex. *After Dark*, January 1976, 32.

advocate for forms of erotic experience not only beyond traditional forms of male-female sexual desiring, but beyond forms of orientation altogether. As bandmates Bill Spooner and Michael Cotton explain in the interview that accompanies the photographs, “We don’t get off—there is no reason to get off at all. Fags better get with it. We’re beyond sexuals.”³⁷

Fundamental to their resistance to stable signs of sexuality is the portrayal of hetero pairings that seem to work less as couplings than as erotic partnerships. In another full-page photograph of Prince and Styles, for instance, the two wear identical berets with nopal cactus designs on them. Save for Prince's fitted shirt, they are otherwise both nude (fig. 15). Her arms around Prince, Styles leans



FIGURE 15. Re Styles and Prairie Prince emphasize hats over gender. *After Dark*, January 1976, 35.

forward for a kiss, and in the lower half of the frame their pelvises are at a distance. The photograph reads as a freezing of hardcore action, each body kept separate enough for the viewer to take in their individual poses. The absurd hats distract attention from the gendering of the image. The photograph ultimately suggests hardcore performance as possibly a kind of biologically desexualizing play, where male and female operate as joint performative devices of erotic theater. This jointness of their endeavor, wherein sexual differentiation appears both present and subordinate to stylistic and erotic playfulness, brings to mind what Parker Tyler has referred to as “aspiring” to a “homosexual condition” in which sexual difference, while present, is rendered unnecessary in the face of “erotic ecstasy,” where distinctions between “subject and object, lover and loved, penis-giver and penis taker become, simply, of little value.”³⁸ Here, in the sameness of eroto-stylistic play, heterosexuality does not so much dissolve as become part of queer theatrics where heterosexuality itself can be both present and irrelevant.

CONCLUSION

The mid-1970s marked the high point in the adoption of hardcore iconography in queer print publications and the film and stage cultures they showcased. While women continued to be a part of *After Dark*, representations of women and men together that operated as part of a hardcore-driven queer mise-en-scène started to wane as the magazine industry shifted focus toward pinups of individual, fully erect men, more directly mirroring straight skin magazines like *Playboy* and *Hustler*. Rather than engage with erotic images of those working in sex-focused, or even just sex-interested, corners of entertainment culture, the newer crop of magazines such as *Blueboy*, *In Touch for Men*, *Numbers*, and *Clothesdick* tended to draw on men working exclusively as porn models and/or actors in porn films. Whereas earlier examples—from paperbacks and promotional materials to the coverage of queer star alliances of music, stage, and record—brought an aesthetics of hardcore performance into contact with a whole range of artistic endeavors, these competing magazines tended to regressively fall back toward the kind of individualist, bodybuilding, clone-ish imagery of the postwar physique magazine (albeit with the hardcore shift toward full-frontal, erection-focused images). Less culturally elaborated, this new breed of images centered on simple profiles and personal stats bolstered the sexual effectiveness of its use as device for masturbation, a trend that has persisted to this day.

Looking back to the queer print culture of *After Dark* during the height of hardcore's newfound popularity is a stark reminder of how coalitional projects,

even when commercially driven, may offer radical configurations of socio-sexuality not put on view elsewhere. Existing somewhere between the capturing of a cultural moment and the advancement of its possibilities, for a time these venues of mass-cultural production fostered queer forms of contact and expression that both cleaved to images of same-sex desire and exceeded individualist configurations of it. Amplifying intersubjective alliances between male-desiring men and male-desiring women at a moment when both of these positions were gaining a newly assured sense of assertion and agency, this corner of production demonstrates how popular and even highly commercial modes of sexual performance may enable vital forms of collectively driven queer expression. ■

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NOTES

1. For examples of non-porn-magazine engagement with hardcore performers see John Lombardi, “Marilyn Chambers: The Ivory Goddess Hits Las Vegas” (cover story), *Rolling Stone* May 8, 1975, 38–42; Mary Bingle, “At Home with Porn Star Harry Reems,” *Viva: An International Magazine for Women*, October 1975, 64–65.

2. For a comprehensive history of obscenity trials against (primarily) straight porn makers, theater owners, and production and distribution companies see Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore: How the Struggle over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2002). For accounts of raids and trials against gay porn practitioners in the 1960s and 1970s see Jeffrey Escoffier, *Bigger Than Life: The History of Gay Porn Cinema from Beefcake to Hardcore* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2009).

3. De Rome used the clever tactic of sandwiching his erotic content on the film strip between banal home-movie-style footage as a means of evading the censorship of his local Kodak developer, who tended to only check the start and end. De Rome’s anticensorship practices are explored in Ryan Powell, *Coming Together: The Cinematic Invention of Gay Male Life, 1945–1979* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 97–104.

4. On the mass audience success of *Deep Throat* see Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 99–100. On the breakthrough success of *Boys in the Sand* see Escoffier, *Bigger Than Life*, 101–3.

5. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 263.

6. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 263.

7. "Porno-chic" was first invoked in Ralph Blumenthal, "Porno Chic: 'Hardcore' Grows Fashionable and Very Profitable," *New York Times Magazine*, January 21, 1973, 28.
8. William Rotsler, *Contemporary Erotic Cinema: A Guide to the Revolution in Movie Making* (New York: Penthouse/Ballantine, 1973), cover.
9. Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* (New York: Signet, 1975).
10. Earl Kemp, *The Illustrated Presidential Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* (San Diego: Greenleaf Classics, 1970), back cover.
11. Linda Williams, ed., "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction," in *Porn Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.
12. Williams, *Hard Core*, 97.
13. Williams uses the term "frenzy of the visible" to describe hardcore's visualization of an "out-of-control confession of pleasure." Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* 50.
14. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
15. See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Nick Davis, *The Desiring Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Quinlan Miller, *Camp TV: Trans Gender Queer Sitcom History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Damon R. Young, *Making Sex Public and Other Cinematic Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
16. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161, 171–72.
17. Davis, *The Desiring Image*, 8.
18. Davis, *The Desiring Image*, 6. See also Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capitol, Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); John David Rhodes, "Fassbinder's Work: Style, Sirk, and Queer Labor," in *Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, ed. Brigitte Peucker (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 181–203.
19. For a discussion of women in these gay hardcore films see Ryan Powell, "Bijou," *Porn Studies* 4, no. 3 (2017): 280–88; Ryan Powell, "Queer Interstates: Cultural Geography and Social Contact in *Kansas City Trucking Co.* and *El Paso Wrecking Corp.*," in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, ed. Mary L. Gray, Brian J. Gilley, and Colin R. Johnson (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 181–202.
20. See Linda Williams, "Pre-History: The 'Frenzy of the Visible,'" in *Hard Core*, 34–57.

21. While I am applying the term “queer heteroeroticism” here in a hardcore porn context, it may certainly be extended to any number of other contexts, particularly those in which women and gay men have labored together to develop eroticizing performances of heterosexuality. The work of Madonna and her many gay male colleagues is certainly one area that comes to mind.

22. Young, *Making Sex Public and Other Cinematic Fantasies*, 6. Young specifies that this “is not in any simple sense a narrative of liberation in which women and queers, through the success of the respective emancipation movements, attain sexual equality and autonomy . . . [but] rather a narrative in which ideals of equality and autonomy . . . generate a complex and of contradictory set of imaginaries, with women and queers at their center” (6–7).

23. Young refers to these as primary elements of the “Republican social contract.” Young, *Making Sex Public and Other Cinematic Fantasies*, 4.

24. Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 47, 58, originally published in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 58.

25. Dennis Altman, “After Dark to Out: The Invention of the Teflon Magazine,” *Antioch Review* 54, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 175.

26. Young, *Making Sex Public and Other Cinematic Fantasies*, 14–15.

27. Nicholas de Villiers, *Opacity and The Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Bathes, and Warhol* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3–6.

28. On the development of the concept of gay icons see Richard Dyer, “The Idea of a Gay Icon,” in *Gay Icons*, ed. Richard Dyer and Sandi Toksvig (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2009), 12–23.

29. Altman, “After Dark to Out: The Invention of Teflon Magazine.”

30. Elena Gorfinkel, *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 189.

31. Louis Miele, “Sleeping Around,” *After Dark*, July 1975, 63.

32. Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, 35–71.

33. Patrick Pacheco, “Lovely Chita, Theater-Made,” *After Dark*, December 1975, 66–67.

34. Louis Miele, “Razzling and Dazzling and All That Jazz,” *After Dark*, December 1975, 65.

35. Elena Gorfinkel, “Wet Dreams: Erotic Film Festivals of the Early 1970s and the Utopian Public Sphere,” in *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*, ed. Eric Schaefer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 144–45.

36. Robert L. Weiner, “The Tubes Go Flat,” *After Dark*, January 1976, 30.

37. Weiner, “The Tubes Go Flat,” 34.

38. Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1992), 351.