

Anxiety and Desire in France's Gay Pornographic Film Boom, 1974–1983

DAN CALLWOOD

Queen Mary, University of London

IN SEPTEMBER 1975 THE COVER of the French society weekly *Paris Match* featured three bemused-looking nuns standing before an advertisement for the pornographic film *Julia et les hommes* (*Julia*), the image accompanied by the headline “La France Porno.” Inside, a (fully illustrated) special report agonized over the “wind that has come to sweep away old taboos.” According to the magazine, this wind originated in America, with Hugh Hefner and his photogenic entourage the prime culprits: “Eroticism and pornography are spreading, aided with the complicity of businessmen who intend to stimulate weak sectors of industry and with the blessing of intellectuals anxious to hasten the liberation of humanity.”¹ To the sensationalist journalists at *Paris Match*, pornography combined a number of fears floating in the French imagination in 1975, namely, economic uncertainty, American influence, and the specter of sexual liberation.

The phenomenon was hard to ignore; France experienced an explosion in the production of hardcore pornography in the mid-1970s.² At the opening of the decade, French companies produced around twenty-two erotic (or softcore) films per year; by 1978 the number of erotic and pornographic

¹ François Caviglioli, “La France Porno,” *Paris Match*, September 20, 1975, 38; *Julia et les hommes*, directed by Sigi Rothemund (1974; West Germany). Wherever possible, I have given the titles of films on their English-language release. Where these are not available, I have provided my own translation of the title.

² The line between pornography, erotica, and art house or even militant film can be fluid, but I will be discussing films in which the primary motive is to show the sex act on-screen—in many different varieties and scenarios. I follow Linda Williams in her definition of “hardcore” pornography as material (specifically film) that depicts explicit and unsimulated sex acts with the main aim of provoking arousal in their audience, a genre with an “almost visceral appeal to the body.” “Erotic” film is more ambiguous; although sexual in nature, it will not (normally) include explicit depictions of sex. See Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasures and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 5.

films produced reached over two hundred, not counting imported titles.³ French cinemas were not just screening heterosexual sex. The late 1970s marks the first time that pornography featuring homosexual sex could be legally imported, produced, and distributed in France, a phenomenon that went unnoticed by the moral crusaders at *Paris Match*. Gay pornography experienced its own boom, beginning in 1975 with the import of the American film *Good Hot Stuff* (*Histoires d'hommes* in the French market).⁴ Gay liberation has previously been understood as a phenomenon of changing political demands and organization, but through pornographic film we can better understand gay liberation as a broader commercial and cultural phenomenon.⁵ Furthermore, these films contribute to our understanding of gay men's responses to a changing political, legal, and moral landscape by the close of the 1970s.

The opening of the decade saw new forms of political activism being taken up by gay men and lesbians with a will to transform heterosexist society rather than be assimilated into it.⁶ This new political militancy contributed to a broader phenomenon of increasing public visibility of homosexuality. As in the United States and many other Western European nations, this process of gay liberation in France was characterized not only by new political organizations more radical than their forebears but also by a burgeoning gay commercial scene in France's urban centers.⁷ The decade between the relaxation of censorship in 1974 and the onset of the HIV-AIDS crisis constitutes a distinctive period in the development of gay sex on French screens. Despite this intertwining of gay politics and porn, the production and consumption of pornography remain a neglected window into the history of sexual liberation in the West.⁸ The history of homosexuality in

³ For a detailed catalog of French pornography and erotic films produced in the period, see Christophe Bier, *Dictionnaire des films français pornographiques et érotiques de long métrage en 16 et 35 mm* (Paris: Serious Publishing, 2011).

⁴ *Good Hot Stuff*, directed by Jack Deveau (1975; United States).

⁵ The conventional understanding of gay liberation as a predominantly political phenomenon arises from the fact that much of its historiography has been written by those personally involved in the radical political groupings that appeared in the early 1970s. This is as true for France as it is for other Western nations. For the French case, see Jacques Girard, *Le mouvement homosexuel en France 1945–1980* (Paris: Syros, 1981); Jean Le Bitoux, *Citoyen de seconde zone: Trente ans de lutte pour la reconnaissance de l'homosexualité en France* (Paris: Hachette, 2003).

⁶ Michael Sibalis, "Gay Liberation Comes to France: The Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR)," *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar* 1 (2005): 265–76.

⁷ For a history of the relationship between the new radical movement (such as the Homosexual Front for Revolutionary action, FHAR, 1971–73, or the Homosexual Liberation Groups, GLH, that followed) and their homophile predecessors, see Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 172–94.

⁸ A notable exception is the work of the film studies scholar Thomas Waugh, who examines the impact and importance of pornography in the American context up until the Stonewall

France is now emerging after a protracted and difficult birth, and printed erotic material has been integrated into this history, especially the “physique” magazines that marked a more discreet phase in the development of sexual subcultures in France.⁹ But early gay pornographic film remains marginalized. In his history of erotic and pornographic cinema in France, for instance, Jacques Zimmer lumps gay pornography together with “snuff” films as an example of depravity.¹⁰ Other work concentrates on the political and legal developments that led to the regulations for the X rating.¹¹ Work in film studies has been more inclusive of pornography, particularly in the ways in which explicit sex has been mobilized by activist filmmaking and more “serious” art house filmmakers and used in contemporary queer cinema, but that work is less concerned with pornography’s historical origins and contexts.¹² Lack of wider attention can also be attributed to the inaccessibility of many of the pornographic films produced in the period. Filmed on reels of 16 and 32 mm film and passed around specialist cinemas, the films are often in a poor state, and some have been lost entirely.¹³

While neglected by historians, contemporary French commentators appreciated the political importance of the new wave of pornographic cinema. The journalist and film critic Philippe de Mazières spotted pornography’s potential as a historical source: “We need to seriously ask ourselves whether in the coming century these films will be the best document on our times, since their mythological and ideological trappings are so unsophisticated, and their artistic production so careless that they speak about the reality of our century with a childlike spontaneity, which the ‘decent people’ of cinema hide behind all the artifice and seduction of art.”¹⁴ The most successful directors were certainly not as “careless” in their art as Mazières states, and they were able to confect new fantasy scenarios or to replicate fantasy on-screen collected from the masturbatory bric-a-brac of existing

uprising of 1969 in *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁹ Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 199–203.

¹⁰ Jacques Zimmer, *Histoires du cinéma X* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011), 261.

¹¹ Christophe Bier, *Censure-moi: L’histoire du classement X en France* (Paris: L’Esprit Frappeur, 2000); François Jouffa and Tony Crawley, *Entre deux censures: Le cinéma érotique de 1973 à 1976* (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 1989); René-Paul Leraton, *Gay Porn: Le film porno gay: Histoire, représentations et construction d’une sexualité* (Paris: H&O Éditions, 2002).

¹² Martine Boyer, *L’écran de l’amour: Cinéma, érotisme et pornographie 1960–1980* (Paris: Plon, 1990); Lisa Downing, “French Cinema’s New ‘Sexual Revolution’: Postmodern Porn and Troubled Genre,” *French Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 265–80; Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, 2nd ed. (Routledge: London, 2003), 210–15; Nick Rees-Roberts, *French Queer Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

¹³ I am grateful for the help and patience of the conservation specialists at France’s National Center for Cinema in Bois d’Arcy. Without them I would not have been able to find and view many of the pre-VHS films that now exist only on 16 and 32 mm film reels in various states of degradation. Some, fortunately, have been rereleased on DVD.

¹⁴ Philippe de Mazières, “La production X française,” in *Spécial man: L’homosexualité au cinéma*, ed. Philippe de Mazières (Paris: Univers Presses, 1979), 49.

imagery. This imagery bore the imprint of a period in which the emergence of liberation movements changed the politicization of homosexuality.

In the atmosphere of radical contestation that took hold after the events of May 1968, sexual fantasy took on a particular political charge, and the films produced in this period implicitly and explicitly engaged with the politics of liberation. Contemporary commentators widely recognized that pornography was a political form, but the content of its politics was a contentious issue. Supporters of sexual minorities recognized in pornography a potential ally. The psychoanalyst Félix Guattari emphasized the politics of depicting the sexual act on film: "There is not, on the one hand, political cinema and, on the other, erotic cinema. Cinema is political whatever the subject; every time it represents a man, a woman, a child, or an animal, it takes sides in a microstruggle of class that concerns the reproduction of models of desire."¹⁵ Guattari called this sort of cinema a "minor art," "an art that can be used in the service of people who constitute a minority. A major art is an art in the service of power."¹⁶ Guattari saw the act of depicting explicit homosexual sex as political in and of itself, regardless of the intention.

Others were much less confident of the political potential of pornography. The attitudes of contemporary gay liberation groups were particularly conflicted. Both France's earliest and most radical gay liberation group, the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Front for Homosexual Action, FHAR), formed in 1971, and the Groupes de Libération Homosexuelle (Homosexual Liberation Groups, GLH), which arose upon the FHAR's dissolution in 1973, had a fraught relationship with pornography. On the one hand, in their political rhetoric members of these groups tended to lump together pornography and the cinemas in which it was consumed and to condemn them both as part of the corrupting commercial "ghetto" in which homosexuals were confined by bourgeois society.¹⁷ In this ghetto of nightclubs, bars, and cinemas, people were free to view and experience the illicit delights of homosexuality as long as they were safely constrained by the limits of capitalist exchange. On the other hand, despite strong views on the corrupting influence of commercialized desire, commentary on the actual content of pornography was rare. In 1971 the FHAR published a short text discussing a cartoon by the artist Tom of Finland depicting two policemen looming provocatively over a sailor on a park bench. Tom of Finland (an alias of the Finnish artist Touko Laaksonen) had earned a wide international distribution by the 1970s through publication in the American homoerotic magazine *Physique Pictorial* and in his own *Kake* comics.¹⁸ Tom of Finland's pencil drawings depict hypermasculine

¹⁵ Félix Guattari, *La révolution moléculaire* (Fontenay-sous-bois: Éditions recherches, 1977), 224.

¹⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹⁷ Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 222–24.

¹⁸ Valentine Hooven, *Tom of Finland: His Life and Times* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 87–94.

men with exaggerated musculatures, typically clad in leather or in uniform, engaging in vigorous sex. His creations became emblematic of an era. The literary scholar Guy Snaith charts an increasing masculinization of gay men's bodies due to the influence of Tom of Finland's work while noting the problematic aspects of the cartoons, including the depiction of men in Nazi uniform.¹⁹ The FHAR's unsigned collective took Tom of Finland's art to task and concluded that his "ridiculous" imagery of uniformed men engaged in joyful sex was not a liberating sight but rather a fascist ruse: "[Fascist ideology] would like to make us believe that Nazism was a paradise for fags."²⁰ However, this antipathy toward the overt machoism of Tom of Finland's cartoons must not be mistaken for prudery. Elsewhere, the FHAR was alive to the provocative potential of sexual imagery and used it alongside the organization's texts. This tendency is especially evident in the explicit drawings, cartoons, photography, and collages included in the FHAR's 1973 collection of articles, *Trois milliards de pervers* (Three billion perverts), a collaboration with the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. This special issue of Guattari's journal *Recherches* was published at the end of the FHAR's life and shows a new willingness to use and manipulate pornography to the organization's own political ends, rather than condemn it outright. In it, another of Tom of Finland's cartoons illustrates a short, unsigned narrative text on cruising in the Jardins des Tuileries.²¹ The duplicated, overlapping image of a threesome of men clad in leather acts as an illustration of the branching desires of the orgy witnessed by the narrator while cruising in the park. For the FHAR, pornographic images could be a fascist ruse, but they could also be manipulated to express contemporary experience.

Collaboration with the FHAR on his journal landed Guattari in court on obscenity charges. Censorship, particularly of the press, hit gay liberation activists repeatedly in the 1970s.²² Yet while activists concentrated their meagre resources on combatting print censorship, the publication of newspapers and pamphlets being their main form of communication, legal change was taking place in the regulation of sex on-screen. The depiction of the homosexual act on film was made possible not by the agitation of radical groups such as the FHAR, which were more interested in socialist revolution than legal change, but through the liberal reforms of President Giscard d'Estaing. In the midseventies the French Fifth Republic was a society coming to terms with the political uncertainty caused by the interventions of new social movements that grew in the wake of May 1968 and economic uncertainty after the oil shocks of the 1970s ended thirty years of

¹⁹ Guy Snaith, "Corps dessinés, corps créés, signés 'Tom of Finland,'" *Itinéraires* 1 (2009): 108–28.

²⁰ FHAR, *Rapport contre la normalité* (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1971), 48.

²¹ FHAR, "Paris est une fête," *Recherches: Trois milliards de pervers. La grande encyclopédie des homosexualités* 12 (March 1973): 110–11.

²² Jean Le Bitoux, "The Construction of a Political and Media Presence: The Homosexual Liberation Groups in France 1975–8," *Journal of Homosexuality* 41, no. 3/4 (2001): 264.

postwar growth. In Jean-François Sirinelli's assessment, this was a historical phase "pregnant with future promise and progress but also pregnant with contradictions."²³ The boom in hardcore pornography bore the imprint of the promise of sexual liberation, but the commercial nature of pornography meant that it was implicated in critiques of a faltering consumer society. These political critiques did not stop numerous directors and businessmen taking advantage of the new market produced by legal reform, including Jean-Daniel Cadinot, one of France's most enduring and internationally famous gay porn directors. The new gay pornography that they produced drew not only upon the experience of gay men during a politically turbulent decade but also upon the historical context of French colonialism and the new dominance of the United States as a cultural reference for gay men. These pornographic films, legally depicting gay sex on film for the first time, have much to tell us about a precarious moment in France's social history—about anxieties over sexual liberation, commercialization, the influence of America, and racial and sexual difference. The production, consumption, and content of gay pornography illustrate the entanglements of commerce, sex, and politics during the "sexual liberation" of the 1970s.

"ADVANCED LIBERAL SOCIETY": CENSORSHIP AND THE X RATING

The legislative changes that made the legal production and distribution of all pornographic films in France possible began after Giscard d'Estaing's election in May 1974. In an attempt to break with the social conservatism of his predecessor, General Charles de Gaulle, Giscard announced a policy of *décrispation* (relaxation) with regard to social questions in order to create what Giscard called his new "advanced liberal society."²⁴ His early presidency was dominated by a flood of reform, particularly the legalization of abortion, legislation for no-fault divorce, and the lowering of the age of majority from twenty-one to eighteen.²⁵ Gay men benefited from this last reform, which also lowered the age of consent for homosexual sex to eighteen—a drop that seems minor until one notes that this hard-won change was not achieved in the United Kingdom until 1994. Giscard also attacked state censorship, and in his own survey of his early presidency, he celebrates the "abandonment of political censorship in the cinema."²⁶ Erotic cinema had been gaining in popularity in the last years of Georges Pompidou's presidency; films like 1974's erotic blockbuster *Emmanuelle* made a large impact on both

²³ Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les vingt décisives, 1965–1985: Le passé proche de notre avenir* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 41.

²⁴ Émile Chabal, "French Political Culture in the 1970s: Liberalism, Identity Politics and the Modest State," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 42 (2016): 252.

²⁵ Overview and analysis of these reforms, with Giscard's own commentary, can be found in Serge Bernstein and Jean-François Sirinelli, eds., *Les années Giscard: Les réformes de la société 1974–1981* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007).

²⁶ Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Démocratie française* (Paris: Fayard, 1976), 16.

the cinema-going public and the takings of theaters, becoming one of the highest-grossing films of the year in France.²⁷ Given this strong appetite for sex on-screen, and given the relative ease of reform in this area, Giscard made the easing of state censorship a priority. The new centrist minister of culture, Michel Guy, was thus allowed to override the decisions of the film ratings board at the National Center for Cinema (Centre National du Cinéma, CNC), whose Control Commission made recommendations for banning films on the grounds of explicit violence or sexual content. Guy made his reasoning for overriding the commission's decisions clear in a statement to the press: "All films must be released without exception. I don't acknowledge the right to forbid adult viewers the possibility to see the films they desire."²⁸

For a brief period between Giscard's election in May 1974 until the end of 1975, censorship was effectively lifted on pornographic films, although only informally at the will of the minister, rather than through legislation or institutional change. The filmmaker François Jouffa claims that the new regime was felt nearly immediately; while his erotic film *La bonzesse* (The broad) had been banned outright in February 1974, the ban was reconsidered almost immediately after the May election, and it was granted release on condition that profanities be removed from the soundtrack.²⁹ This relaxation, along with market appetite, stimulated the national industry while also leading to a sharp increase in the amount of pornography imported into France from America. The 1972 hit *Deep Throat* arrived in French theaters in 1975, for instance.³⁰ Pornography quickly became an important part of the film business. In September 1975 Pierre Viot, the director of the CNC, announced that in the first half of 1975, pornographic cinema brought in 25 percent of the industry's revenues—twice the amount earned in the comparable period in 1974.³¹ In his history of the 1970s, the historian Phillippe Chassaingne claims that these films were such a sensation that thousands of Spanish tourists made their way over the border just to see them and that new cinemas were opened in towns such as Perpignan to cater to the new demand.³² Listings for pornographic films began to appear in the mainstream press. The national daily *France-Soir* began including

²⁷ Edward Ousselin, "Entre deux régimes de censure: Le cinéma pornographique en France, 1974–1975," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 32 (Fall 2011): 154; *Emmanuelle*, directed by Just Jaeckin (1974; France: Studio Canal, 2008), DVD.

²⁸ Jean-Luc Douin, *Dictionnaire de la censure au cinéma* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 353.

²⁹ Jouffa and Crawley, *Entre deux censures*, 14; *La bonzesse*, directed by François Jouffa (1974; France).

³⁰ Ousselin, "Entre deux régimes," 154; *Deep Throat*, directed by Gerard Damiano (1975; United States: Momentum, 2005), DVD.

³¹ Jouffa and Crawley, *Entre deux censures*, 169.

³² Phillippe Chassaingne, *Les années 1970: Fin d'un monde et origine de la modernité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008), 93.

listings for films like *Exhibition*, “the first French hardcore.” The advertisement introduced the term “hardcore” to its readers as the “representation on-screen of unsimulated sexual acts.”³³ Another advertisement boasted of a film that was “hyperpornographic from the first to the last image.”³⁴ Predictably, this growth in the visibility of pornography in the public sphere drew condemnation from the Right, particularly the former minister of justice Jean Foyer, who saw pornography as evidence of modern moral corruption and wished to raise taxes on it even higher.³⁵ The Communist newspaper *L'Humanité Dimanche* reached the same ends by claiming that pornography was “the mercantile, senile and often hideous response to our society in crisis.”³⁶ This opposition from both Left and Right placed Giscard in the position of centrist liberal reformer.

However, successive financial crises threatened economic stability. France was rocked by the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979. After the second shock, Jean Fourastié coined the phrase “les Trente Glorieuses” (the Glorious Thirty) in his work on postwar economic growth in the three decades after the Second World War. There was much cause for celebration in the advances made in these years, but by naming and defining them, Fourastié was consigning them to the past, declaring that France was now entering “the end of the easy times.”³⁷ Coming to terms with this new society and taking it forward would be one of the defining political themes of the decade. A survey entitled “The French Facing Their Future,” conducted by the agency Sofres for the weekly Right-leaning news magazine *L'Express* at the close of 1974, found that 65 percent of those surveyed thought that 1975 would be a bad year for them and their family. Forty percent even believed there was a serious risk that rationing could be reintroduced.³⁸ A week later, the news magazine published a further survey showing that anxiety was swelling around prices and unemployment, though only 16 percent of respondents were fearful of a “degradation of moral values.”³⁹ The surveys show a growing realization that the growth and prosperity of the postwar years were transitory rather than permanent.

Against this uncertain economic backdrop, fiscal policy directly affected the legal regime governing pornography. A new film classification was introduced in December 1975—*classement X*, or the “X rating”—an adult-only rating similar in name and function to those already in force in Britain and

³³ “Exhibition” (advertisement), *France-Soir*, 7 October 1975, 18; *Exhibition*, directed by Jean-François Davy (1975; France: Lamoutarderi, 2008), DVD.

³⁴ “Furies porno” (advertisement), *France-Soir*, 7 October 1975, 18.

³⁵ Mathieu Trachman, *Le travail pornographique* (Paris: Éditions de la découverte, 2013), 26.

³⁶ Jouffa and Crawley, *Entre deux censures*, 169.

³⁷ Jean Fourastié, *Les Trente Glorieuses ou la révolution invisible* (Paris: Fayard, 1979), 255.

³⁸ Sofres-L'Express, “Les Français face à leur avenir,” *L'Express*, 2 December 1974, 80.

³⁹ Interopinion, “Le baromètre de la France,” *L'Express*, 9 December 1974, 74.

the United States.⁴⁰ Since all films had to pass before the CNC's ratings board to obtain permission for distribution, pornographic films were no longer explicitly banned, as they had been before 1975, but they were still controlled under a new ratings system. The key element underpinning this new legal regime was the high taxation on the revenues of X-rated films. An X rating forced distributors to pay a punitive tax of an extra 20 percent of ticket revenue, which was levied on top of the standard flat tax of 300,000 francs for each full-length film and 150,000 francs for short films. X-rated films would not be eligible for state support. Theoretically, this new regime applied to both pornographic films and films depicting explicit violence. But between 1976 and 1980 only three films were classified X for violence; the vast majority of X-rated films earned their rating for their sexual content.⁴¹ Furthermore, X-rated films could only be shown in licensed premises, spurring the growth of adult cinemas, which were mainly granted licenses when situated in red-light districts or on seedier streets, mainly near major rail stations.⁴² The government could now claim that censorship was more relaxed than before, as a film that would previously have been refused a distribution license (effectively a ban) was now given the X rating, although this confined the film to punitive taxation and a specialized and controlled circuit of distribution.

The new regulation of explicit film was not without its detractors in the industry. In an editorial that appeared immediately after the legal change, Jean-Louis Comolli, the editor of the leading film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, raged at the "fascist" nature of this new censorship: "Under the smile of 'advanced liberalism,' the grimace of fascism. . . . Nowadays we prefer economic censorship to the clear and direct ideological censorship of Vichy."⁴³ Comolli predicted that the production of pornographic films in France would be immediately strangled by punitive taxes. However, Comolli's prediction was proved wrong. Despite the taxes levied on X-rated films, new import duties on foreign films and the public's enduring appetite for pornography ensured the survival of the domestic industry.

THE BIRTH OF GAY PORN "MADE IN FRANCE"

Despite the changing legal situation, entrepreneurs were keen to take advantage of a potential new market. One of these businessmen was the filmmaker Norbert Terry. Born in Algeria in 1924, Terry achieved moderate success in the film industry, assisting in the making of Jacques Tati's *Playtime* in 1967, before going on to make low-budget heterosexual porn films, includ-

⁴⁰ For a history of the 1976 law, see Bier, *Censure-moi*.

⁴¹ Trachman, *Le travail pornographique*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴³ Jean-Louis Comolli, "Editorial: La censure libérale avancée," *Cahiers du cinéma*, January 1976, 5.

ing the oil crisis-themed *Couche-moi dans le sable et fais jaillir ton pétrole* (*Check My Oil, Baby!*, 1974).⁴⁴ A gay man, Terry was keenly aware of the market potential of films showing explicit homosexual sex. Following this instinct, he worked with another director, Jacques Scandelari (who made films under the name Marvin Merkins), to import *Good Hot Stuff* from the United States. Being the first to import a hardcore gay film into France paid off, and Terry claimed in an interview with the gay magazine *Gai Pied* that on its release in 1975 the film showed in six cinemas for a hundred days and earned a million francs in that time.⁴⁵ Cinemagoers watching *Good Hot Stuff* may have been surprised to find a documentary chronicling the history of the American studio Hand in Hand, showcasing its work in various “best-of” scenes. But in a changing legal climate, importing a pornographic documentary could have been a tactic to evade censorship in case explicit depiction of homosexual sex pushed the regime too far. Despite the quality of the film, for those such as the writer and activist René-Paul Leraton, watching gay pornography was a revelation. Just the image of naked men on-screen “allowed me to realize that this sexuality, my sexuality, had a rightful place in the wide world of sex, since it was represented.”⁴⁶

Terry's initial success convinced him that there was a market for gay pornography in France. As well as trading in imports, Terry expanded on skills he had developed by making erotic films and teamed up with Scandelari to produce gay pornography with the production companies Les films de la Troïka (Troïka Films) and Les films du vertbois (Greenwood Films). The first of these, *Hommes entre eux* (*Men between Themselves*), was released in July 1976 and featured a plot where legionnaires on leave romped in a château.⁴⁷ Other studios also appeared including Anne Marie Tensi's AMT Productions. Her studio is mainly known for the voluminous production of repetitive, poor-quality shorts.⁴⁸

A businessman first and foremost, Terry realized that money could be made in controlling the distribution of films with explicit homosexual content and in providing a space to watch them that was explicitly for gay men. Terry bought the cinema La Marotte in Paris's second arrondissement and Le Dragon on the Left Bank and converted them into cinemas that exclusively showed gay pornography (and some nonpornographic films depicting gay relationships and themes).⁴⁹ Le Dragon in particular became

⁴⁴ *Couche moi dans le sable et fais jaillir ton pétrole*, directed by Norbert Terry (1974; France).

⁴⁵ Philippe Bernier, “Norbert Terry,” *Gai Pied*, October 1979, 12.

⁴⁶ Leraton, *Gay Porn*, 12.

⁴⁷ *Hommes entre eux*, directed by Norbert Terry (1976; France).

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, little of Tensi's work survives, although much of it is cataloged by Bier. For a description of her work, see Bier, *Dictionnaire des films*, 137.

⁴⁹ While Le Dragon was the most famous, other Parisian cinemas that showed gay pornography were Le Hollywood Boulevard and Le TCB (both in the ninth). Of course, cinemas had long been sites of male-male sexual pleasure, and men did not need pornography to

one of the points of Paris's gay compass. Roland Barthes wrote about a visit in September 1979: "I must lose the habit of *calculating* pleasures (or distractions), I go back out and see the new porno film at *Le Dragon*: as always—and maybe even more so—lamentable. I hardly dare come on to the guy sitting next to me, though it is undoubtedly possible (idiotic fear of being rejected). Go down to the darkroom [cruising area]; I always regret that sordid episode afterwards since every time I experience such loneliness."⁵⁰ This melancholic account is quite typical of what D. A. Miller has called the "elegiac note accompanying all Barthes's late writing."⁵¹ Barthes's description of *Le Dragon* is a reminder that failure and loneliness were also elements of cruising. And these negative experiences contrast sharply with the simulated joy on-screen.

The legal restrictions of the X rating soon began to put cinemas such as *Le Dragon* at risk. To combat the law's financial constraints, Terry turned his business into an official private "association" in 1979: the Club Vidéo Gay. This, according to Mathieu Trachman, relied upon a clause of the 1901 law regulating not-for-profit organization in clubs and societies and was one of the many tactics used by pornographers to circumvent the 1976 law.⁵² By masquerading as a private club that arranged film screenings, Terry's cinemas could avoid paying taxes on tickets. These ticket sales and a thirty-franc membership fee financed the club. Terry was frank about his reasons for forming the association, a mixture of business sense and political activism: "We created the club in response to the government's pimping. When we receive 19 francs from the price of a ticket, we had to give 9.08 francs back to the government. Giving half of our takings to Giscard was absurd, to pay for the cops who would then come and raid the cinema."⁵³ The association's newsletter, *La lettre du vidéo-gay* (Video gay's letter),

take advantage of the anonymity and darkness cinemas afforded. The large Egyptian revival Louxor cinema in Barbès was one well-known example of a "cruising" cinema. The journalist and activist Guy Hocquenghem described the goings-on during a showing of *Jason and the Argonauts*: "Leaning against the wall near the entrance, the waiting men try to make the most of the weak blue light that filters through or the brief bursts of light from the door that bangs convulsively, to choose a partner in cinematic crime" (*Le gay voyage* [Paris: Albin Michel, 1980], 133).

⁵⁰ Roland Barthes, *Incidents*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (London: Seagull, 2010), 161.

⁵¹ D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 51.

⁵² Other tactics included submitting an edited version of a film to the CNC for approval and then playing the unedited version in theaters. Trachman, *Le travail pornographique*, 51.

⁵³ Interview with Terry in Jean-François Garsi, *Cinéma homosexuels* (Paris: Papyrus, 1981), 91. A report in *Gai Pied* about a raid on *Le Dragon* in early 1979 describes how two men were arrested for "gross indecency" (*outrage public à la pudeur*). After pleading guilty they were given fines of 500 francs and two-month suspended prison sentences, typical punishments for such a misdemeanor. "Brèves," *Gai Pied*, April 1979, 3. However, in his 1979 interview with *Gai Pied*, Terry claimed that the regularity of police raids on the club was necessary because of the high incidence of theft, presumably to make his clients feel safer. Bernier, "Norbert Terry," 12.

reported that some members had complained about the club model—that they preferred a discreet and easy visit rather than a subscription and the need to possess an incriminating membership card. But in 1980 Terry claimed that the club had nonetheless recruited thirty thousand members in the first nine months of its existence.⁵⁴ As well as access to the cinema, these new members could enjoy the club's small library, regular debates, and access to services like lawyers and sexual health doctors. Although the rudimentary newsletter was probably produced to make the Club Vidéo Gay appear like more of a club than it really was, it is noteworthy for the political viewpoint that Terry expressed in his editorials. He argued for achieving gay liberation by way of the porn cinema: "Just as important as law reform, is the change in attitudes, which needs more time, patience and thought. Those who are hesitant should come to the Club Vidéo Gay, relax, watch a good fuck on-screen, eye up their soulmate, or simply get away from the weight of heterosexual conformism."⁵⁵ Terry even funded a short-lived "homo news" series: fifteen news clips that played before each film. The first to be produced was an interview with the author Roger Peyrefitte, best known for his 1943 novel about love between boys in a boarding school, *Les amitiés particulières* (Particular friendships). It is doubtful if members paid much attention to Terry's political proclamations, but his business was certainly successful, eventually opening a branch on Paris's boulevard de Clichy and in Nice, Lyon, and Munich.⁵⁶ By the end of the 1980s, however, Terry's own pornographic output had declined, and his cinemas played more and more American imports.⁵⁷ Liberation by way of the bar, sex shop, and porn cinema had become a familiar feature of gay male life in 1980s France, and the operation of the Club Vidéo Gay serves to underline the blurred distinction between political and commercial activity during the heady early years of gay liberation.

DESIRE AND FEAR ON-SCREEN

To many French men, the United States represented the avant garde of both sexual and commercial culture. It is unsurprising, then, that one of the most prominent features of the pornography produced in the late 1970s and shown in Le Dragon was its depiction of the United States. Motivated by New York's Stonewall riots in June 1969, which became an international referent for radical gay liberation, members of France's nascent gay community became fixated on the possibilities and dangers of American freedom. The first pride parade in France took place in June 1977 and was held by the Parisian GLH in order to show solidarity with "our American friends" after the rise of Anita Bryant's anti-gay rights campaign. The

⁵⁴ Norbert Terry, "Editorial," *La lettre du vidéo-gay*, 9 September 1980, 4.

⁵⁵ Norbert Terry, "Editorial," *La lettre du vidéo-gay*, 2 February 1980, 2.

⁵⁶ "Club Vidéo Gay" (advertisement), *Samourai*, January 1983, 66.

⁵⁷ Bertrand Philbert, "Jean-Daniel Cadinot," *Samourai International*, February 1983, 31.

leaflet advertising the march read: “Anyta [*sic*] Bryant, spokesperson and perfect stereotype of the American woman, is campaigning with her Bible in her hand: a truly fascistic campaign that calls to mind the good old days of McCarthyism.”⁵⁸ Solidarity mixed seamlessly with anti-American sentiment; if French gay liberation militants looked on in awe at the scale of gay activism and communities in the United States, it was also a place filled with frightening Anita Bryant-type figures. Of course, America itself was and remains a diverse nation, and it was not contradictory to simultaneously hold these two visions of American politics. The historian Philippe Roger argues that a taste for American counterculture is anti-Americanism carried on by other means. French identification with American counterculture is thus “inseparably linked to the fact that it appeared dissenting or subversive within American culture.”⁵⁹ The attraction that many gay men felt to subversive elements in American gay subculture was therefore similar to Jean Genet’s attraction to the Black Panther party at the opening of the decade.⁶⁰

French pornography also engaged with American gay subcultures. Between 1976 and 1978 Norbert Terry funded the production of six films to be shot on location in New York City.⁶¹ These films featured a mixed French and American cast and often prominently featured the city in their titles (*New York City Inferno*, *New York after Midnight*, and *Eric à New York*), presumably to clearly advertise their fashionable contents.⁶²

One of the clearest expressions of the attitudes of French gay men toward America in the 1970s was *New York City Inferno*, directed by Jacques Scandelari in 1977 and released the following year. The film follows the story of Jérôme, who has landed in New York in order to find his partner, Paul, who, it transpires, has been swallowed up by the city’s hard sex scene.

⁵⁸ GLH-Paris, “La riposte à la répression de nos copines Américaines—la première manifestation homosexuelle autonome en France,” June 1977, box “GLH de France années 70,” Archives Mémoire des Sexualités, Marseille.

⁵⁹ Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 443.

⁶⁰ Robert Sandarg, “Jean Genet and the Black Panther Party,” *Journal of Black Studies* 16, no. 3 (1986): 269–82.

⁶¹ These six films were *À la recherche de Douglas*, directed by Nano Cecchini [François About] (1978; New York); *Eric à New York*, directed by Nano Cecchini [François About] (1978; New York); *Gay Casting*, directed by Nano Cecchini [François About] (1978; New York); *New York after Midnight*, directed by Jacques Scandelari (1978; New York); *New York City Inferno*, directed by Marvin Merkins [Jacques Scandelari] (1978; New York: Classic Bareback Film, 2007), DVD; *Un couple moderne*, directed by Marvin Merkins [Jacques Scandelari] (1978; New York).

⁶² Compare this homosexual erotic fixation on the United States with the overwhelmingly Franco-French titles of films produced for heterosexual consumption. Studios produced films featuring nuns, boarding school girls, chatelaines, and even eighteenth-century period pieces, the Marquis de Sade and other libertines being popular characters. See, for example, *Viols en cornettes*, directed by Olivier Mato [Olivier Mathot] (1983; France); *Pensionnaires très expertes*, directed by Jean Luret (1979; France); *La châtelaine*, directed by Joë de Palmer (1982; France).

Paul's letters back home to Paris punctuate the film and are read over shots of Jérôme wandering the city streets, riding the Staten Island ferry, or eating in diners. These long scenes languidly eroticize the city. Jérôme looks for sex in cruising grounds near underpasses and the West Village's broken piers and abandoned warehouses, postindustrial spaces that are covered in graffiti and are ripe with danger and promise. The powerful erotics of New York City were as much a personal experience for the film's creators as for its characters. The director of photography, François About, who partnered with Scandelari on the film, remembers that "it was at that moment that I accepted my homosexuality, and with Scandelari I made *New York City Inferno*, in which there is a lot of myself, discovering that sumptuous city where everything shocked me."⁶³ Of course, the idea of New York as a perilous metropolis was not a notion confined to French tourists. Miriam Greenberg has shown the ways in which New York was the "capital of the 1970s," a city caught between its declining industrial past and projecting a neoliberal future.⁶⁴ The appropriation of abandoned industrial spaces as sets for international pornography must be seen as a part of the same process of economic and cultural transition, with outsiders also projecting their own hopes onto the city.

If the erotic potential of New York's bars, streets, and waterfronts fascinates the film's creators, *New York City Inferno* also explores more disturbing aspects of the city's gay scene. In his review for the glossy gay monthly *Spécial man*, Philippe de Mazières expressed distress at the trajectory of the film's plot: "The bestial relations of the mustached queens in New York City are incomparable to the tender juvenile pettings of little French boy scouts. It's a journey to the end of the night, a tale of exhaustion and the proximity of death. . . . *New York City Inferno* is the reflection of a wild and violent desire."⁶⁵ In its justification for the film's X rating, the CNC noted that many of the scenes were presented with a "certain cruelty."⁶⁶ The commission's comments were often moralistic, but this assessment accurately describes the filmmakers' intentions. The film's opening sex scene presents Jérôme having sex with his taxi driver in an abattoir; the driver is hanging onto a pig's corpse as he is being penetrated. It is hard to image a more brutal visual metaphor for the worth of gay bodies.⁶⁷ The film's "journey to the end of the night" culminates in a scene at the "Warehouse Club," where

⁶³ About's interview appears in Zimmer, *Histoires du cinéma X*, 259.

⁶⁴ Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (London: Routledge, 2008), 38–39.

⁶⁵ Philippe de Mazières, "New York City Inferno," *Spécial man: L'homosexualité au cinéma*, 73.

⁶⁶ Bier, *Dictionnaire des films*, 704.

⁶⁷ This juxtaposition of meat and men is also taken up by Guy Hocquenghem in his account of the Mineshaft bar in New York's Meatpacking district for the French newspaper *Libération*. He describes the doors of the bar opening onto a pavement slick with blood from the day's butchery work. Hocquenghem, *Le gay voyage*, 51.

Jérôme finds his lost lover, who is in thrall to his new “master.” A live rock band screeches, men in ghoulish masks writhe on wooden scaffolding, shots intercut in a crescendo of noise and flesh. If Scandelari titillates at first, by the film’s close he clearly wishes to shock and unsettle. The film ends with Jérôme overpowering Paul’s American master in an S&M ritual in order to reclaim his lover. Order has been restored, as have Jérôme’s and Paul’s fur coats and Louis Vuitton bags (as opposed to the grungy denim and leather they wore in New York) as they walk back into John F. Kennedy Airport and return to Paris. This interplay between America as a land of opportunity and a frightening place of excess was turned into pornography to be shown nightly at Le Dragon cinema, demonstrating how the genre amplified both the joys and fears of unrestrained sexual liberation in order to fascinate and stimulate its audience.

If Scandelari wanted to shock and excite the men who sat in the cinema back home in Paris, he also intended to educate them. Politics breaks into the film explicitly when a New Yorker explains the current state of the gay movement in the United States to Jérôme, describing the new difficulties they were facing with the rise of Anita Bryant’s “Save our Children” campaign. Unusually for a film where francophone actors improbably pop up all over the city to converse with our French protagonist, the whole scene plays out in English, suggesting that his interlocutor, “John,” is a real activist rather than an actor.⁶⁸ The scene certainly has an unscripted feel; the French man sits patiently listening to his American counterpart and undergoes a political apprenticeship that mirrors the sexual apprenticeship that drives the film. The content of this political exchange would not have been comprehensible to all customers at Le Dragon, as the original was not subtitled, and the extended dialogue would likely have sent attentions wandering to equally bored neighbors. But the scene caught the attention of *Soft men’s* magazine, whose editor, Jean-Christophe Balmann, thought that the exchange was important enough to translate and print for his readers.⁶⁹

In the imagination of French pornographic filmmakers of this period, New York was simultaneously a place of danger and excitement, a place to try out new forms of politics and relationships. Scandelari further explored this relational fluidity in *Un couple moderne* (A modern couple, 1978). Also set in New York, the film is noteworthy for its rare depiction of male bisexuality. This inclusion could certainly be read as an attempt to appeal to a broader market (although the “heterosexual” aspects of the film are far outweighed by the homosexual ones, as the title of its American release, *Cock Story*, attests). The film depicts the adventures of a married couple—a

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, I have been unable to recognize this activist. He is unnamed in the film and uncredited. The name “John” only appears in the translated dialogue printed in *Soft men’s* magazine; “New York City Inferno,” *Soft men’s*, May 1978, 40–41.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

French man and an American woman—who are radically (even comically) open with each other about their extramarital adventures with other men. Even the fact of the protagonist's marriage is eroticized: his wedding ring features prominently in many of the sex scenes. The figure of the wife transforms into accomplice, helping her husband pull on his leather chaps, squealing with delight as he recounts his sexual adventures as she attends to the household chores. Scandelari presented a dream on-screen for the many married gay and bisexual men who must have taken brief refuge in *Le Dragon*. The scenario is made plausible by its American setting, a land of imagined freedom to live alternative lifestyles.

Yet these alternate lifestyles came with a price tag. The marketing of spaces in which sexual pleasure could be found was a prominent theme of France's gay pornographic boom; pornographic films demonstrated that commercial spaces such as cinemas, bars, saunas, and sex shops were brimming with sexual potential. This on-screen trend reflected a real-life phenomenon of a growing gay market in France. Where in 1967 the French gay travel guide *Incognito* listed fifteen establishments catering to homosexuals in Paris, the 1982 *Spartacus* gay guide, the largest international gay travel guide of the time, listed no fewer than sixty-two bars and clubs in central Paris alone, not to mention numerous saunas, bookshops, cinemas, introduction services, and a travel agency.⁷⁰

Militants such as Alain Sanzio, a contributor to the gay cultural and political review *Masques*, feared that French gay men were blindly reproducing the “gay ghettos” of New York's Greenwich Village or San Francisco's Castro at home. He viewed the commercial premises dedicated to sex in these cities as “the quintessence of phallocracy . . . men reduced to pure merchandise (their penises) and exchanges reduced to the commerce of sperm.”⁷¹ Yet this political hand wringing did not stop the growth of businesses aiming to cater to the desires of gay men.

Just as the American gay market was dramatized by pornographic filmmakers, so were domestic commercial sex spots. Jean Étienne Siry's 1978 film *Et Dieu créa les hommes* (*And God created Man*) plays out like a tour of Paris's gay commercial premises.⁷² After the death of his lover, the protagonist, Lucien, goes out looking for sex and finds it in a pornographic cinema, a sauna, and then the bar *Les Toilettes* (filmed in the Keller, a well-known Parisian leather bar). *Et Dieu créa les hommes* depicts places with which many members of its audience would already be familiar and reworks them into pornography. For instance, a scene set in a pornographic cinema can be read as an ironic nod to the viewer's own experience of watching the film in such an environment. The scene even seems to invite

⁷⁰ *Incognito Guide Europe Méditerranée Hiver 1967–8* (Paris: Éditions ASL); and John Stamford, ed., *Spartacus International Gay Guide 1982* (Amsterdam: Spartacus, 1982).

⁷¹ Alain Sanzio, “Les espaces du désir,” *Masques*, Autumn 1980, 111.

⁷² *Et Dieu créa les hommes*, directed by Jean-Etienne Siry (1978; France).

the viewer to copy Lucien and to repair to the toilets with his partner for a more private experience (and presumably to stop watching the film). Lucien then visits a sauna (the Continental Opéra in the ninth district), where he witnesses a man being fisted by two partners. Lucien watches, perhaps as the naive cinemagoer does, first aghast, then intrigued as he is shown the slow process of lubrication and massage by which the act is made possible. The staging of this scene is an illustration of Richard Dyer's argument that pornography not only reflects sexual practices but also constructs new erotic trends; pornography's display of the sexual act can constitute a form of sexual education, particularly for niche activities.⁷³ The fisting scene in *Et Dieu créa les hommes*, for instance, plays out like a patient "how-to" guide, Lucien observing the scene as a novice, asking questions as if preempting those of the viewer. As the film progresses Lucien gallops through all the sexual and commercial possibilities that Paris affords him, even engaging in (literal) telephone sex, a scene that leads Mazières to comment on Siry's obsession with inserting objects into his actors, a nod to the sexual gadgets proliferating in the gay marketplace, and the appearance of commercial phone lines offering sexually explicit chat and encounters.⁷⁴

Similarly, in *New York City Inferno*, Jérôme begins his quest to become an S&M master with a visit to a sex shop. With the help of the shopkeeper, he browses the shelves and inspects and tries on the various products (leather shorts, jock straps, nipple clamps) in a scene that never quite breaks into sex. Jérôme's initiation into the New York scene occurs through consumption, just as it had for his partner, Paul, before him. One of Paul's letters reports: "Another day gone by and I've learnt something else. Yesterday I went to buy some leather gear and 'gadgets' like they say here, I don't know if you'd like to use them with me but I find them a lot of fun." If in *Et Dieu créa les hommes* it is mainly the spaces of consumption that are eroticized, in *New York City Inferno* it is the process of shopping itself. The pornography of the gay liberation moment also contained an element of both "sex education" and "consumer education" when it came to depicting sexual practices in the new gay commercial landscape.

On the one hand, while the mutually reinforcing relationship between joyful sex and consumption implies hope, these films are also characterized by a sense of the trauma that was characteristic of the uncertainties of the decade. The plot of *Et Dieu créa les hommes* is in many ways a tragic one. Lucien believes that he has been jilted, and once he has smashed and spit on his lover's portrait, he finds out that, in fact, his lover is dead. The sex

⁷³ Richard Dyer, "Idol Thoughts: Orgasm and Self-Reflexivity in Gay Pornography," *Critical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1994): 49–62.

⁷⁴ Philippe de Mazières, "Et Dieu créa les hommes," *Spécial man: Dossier l'homosexualité au cinéma*, 52. Props provide Siry with many playful opportunities in *Et Dieu créa les hommes*. A scene in which butter is used as an impromptu lubricant can be read as a reference to the anal rape scene in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972, Bernardo Bertolucci), one of the most influential and controversial sex scenes of the decade.

that Lucien engages in becomes increasingly extreme, and in an ending that could not be accused of subtlety, the film closes with the unattributed text:

I loiter all day
and then all night
Child of shadow
And of nobody
Streets and bars
are my shelter
I give myself
to all comers . . .
God, why have you made me a man?
Why did you create men?

The trajectory of *Et Dieu créa les hommes* could be a case of a pornographic film reproducing the trope of tragic homosexual love common in literature in a cloying attempt to lend itself gravitas. Or it could be read as a political message warning of the dangers of limitless sexual liberation bereft of affective links. The critic Alain Minard went so far as to claim that the film shows Siry as a “Christian moralist.”⁷⁵ Mazières’s review declared that the film “holds out a mirror to you. Look at yourself! And for emphasis it spits in your face, pisses on you, and if you’re still hard, all hopes are permitted for the exploiters of degradation.”⁷⁶ This pornographic moralizing was not limited to Siry’s films; Scandelari’s 1977 film *Homologues ou la soif du mâle* (*Man’s Country*) was critiqued by Mazières as being “quite a worrying spectacle of multiple deviations, perversions, numerous odd behaviors, which the tabloid press feeds upon, and when welded to a hardcore script, it produces over the course of the film a nightmarish quality.”⁷⁷ These films seem to warn against itinerant desire and question the link between sex and commerce. Yet given that the pornographic medium relies on such desire and its commercial resonance, the message seems at once subversive (in that it undermines pornography itself) and simply hypocritical.

THE CADINOT TOUCH

The pornography that gay French men produced in the 1970s and 1980s was thus caught between a vision of problematic freedom in America and precarious toleration at home, the pleasures of the “ghetto” and more purist political projects. But not all directors fell into the mode of first selling sex and then condemning their own work with moralizing poetry. Jean-Daniel Cadinot, the most enduring and commercially successful director and

⁷⁵ Alain Minard, “*Et Dieu créa les hommes*,” in Bier, *Dictionnaire des films*, 358.

⁷⁶ Mazières, “*Et Dieu créa les hommes*,” 52.

⁷⁷ Mazières, “Homologues, ou la soif du mâle,” *Spécial man: Dossier l’homosexualité au cinéma*, 60. *Homologues ou la soif du mâle*, directed by Marvin Merkins [Jacques Scandelari] (1977; France).

businessman to emerge from this milieu, stood apart from his late 1970s peers by presenting the audience a retreat into fantasies.⁷⁸ It is Cadinot's fantastical touch as a filmmaker that would make him the most famous gay porn director that France has ever produced. His directing career would span thirty years and over seventy films. Originally a photographer, he also shot models and personalities for the gay press, such as the novelist Yves Navarre and the model-turned-singer Patrick Juvet. Cadinot began distributing his own softcore albums in 1974, and these glossy magazines featured a number of nude portraits of men in staged poses.⁷⁹ If at first the journalist Robert Harpen found the models to appear cold, like "ancient marble," these difficulties were soon overcome.⁸⁰ Cadinot quickly began to develop a unique approach, creating a story around each of his models and including short biographies. These backstories were not without cliché, but they were effective. "Alain," for instance, is photographed seminude with a motorbike: "Friday evening, place de la Bastille [a notorious meeting point for young bikers in Paris], I met Alain. His motorbike is his hobby. . . . Alain, sheathed in leather, protects his tenderness, his worries, and his shyness underneath a rough armor of chains and pistons."⁸¹ Cadinot's albums evolved to further emphasize storytelling and to fulfill the promise of his very first album to "introduce you to some of my friends."⁸² Indeed, a chance to spot one of "Cadinot's boys" became an attraction for the visitor

⁷⁸ The films analyzed here, a selection of Cadinot's most important work from the beginning of his career in filmmaking to the onset of the HIV-AIDS crisis in France, are chosen for their demonstration of the key features of his filmmaking style and the themes that would concern him throughout his career. A full list of his short and full-length films released during this time on the French market under their original French titles and excluding compilations would read as follows: *Hommes de chantier*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1980; France: French Art, 2001), DVD; *Stop*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1980; France: French Art, 2001), DVD; *Tendres adolescents*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1980; France: French Art, 2001), DVD; *Garçons de rêve*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1981; France: French Art, 2001), DVD; *Les hommes préfèrent les hommes*, directed by Tony Dark [Jean-Daniel Cadinot] (1981; France: French Art, 2001), DVD; *Scouts*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1981; France: French Art, 2001), DVD; *Aime . . . comme minet*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1982; France: YMAC Video, 1984), VHS; *Garçons de plage*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1982; France: YMAC Video, 1982), VHS; *Sacré collège*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1982; France: YMAC Video, 1986), VHS; *Charmants cousins*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1983; France: YMAC Video, 1983), VHS; *Age tendre et sexes droits*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1984; France: YMAC Video, 1984), VHS; *Harem*, directed by Tony Dark [Jean-Daniel Cadinot] (1984; Tunisia: YMAC Video, 1984), VHS; *Le jeu de piste: Scouts 2*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1984; France: YMAC Video, 1984), VHS; *Les minets sauvages*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (1984; France: YMAC Video, 1984), VHS; *Stop surprise*, directed by Tony Dark [Jean-Daniel Cadinot] (1984; France: YMAC Video, 1984), VHS.

⁷⁹ Jean-Daniel Cadinot, *Masculin pluriel* (Paris: Fharon, 1974).

⁸⁰ Robert Harpen, "Jean-Daniel Cadinot face à la sexualité de l'an 3000," *Incognito*, May 1977, 24.

⁸¹ Jean-Daniel Cadinot, *Franchement masculin* (Paris: Fharon, 1975), 17.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

to Paris, with the 1982 *Spartacus* guide claiming that the “Rue Sainte-Anne has become business boys from end-to-end. . . . If you like Cadinot models you can often find them offering themselves here.”⁸³

Cadinot made the move into film with the production of his first short, *Stop*, which was filmed in 1979 and released in France the following year. In contrast to the cruder styles of Scandelari or Terry, Cadinot had a talent for cinematography. He controlled the casting, scenario, and camera operation, aiming to create a gay pornographic *cinéma d'auteur*, film as a direct expression of a director's vision, without intermediary.⁸⁴ In an interview in 1982, Cadinot mentions some of his favorite films, including those produced by the American pornography directors Joe Gage (*El Paso Wrecking Corp*), William Higgins (*Pacific Coast Highway*, *The Boys of Venice*), and Jim French (*Every Which Way*).⁸⁵ But what is striking is not the way in which Cadinot assimilates the work of these contemporaries but how he stands apart from them. While he did not work in a vacuum and did not claim to do so, Cadinot has a clear aesthetic independence from both American productions and his fellow Frenchmen. In choosing to ignore rather than depict contemporary developments of the gay scene in France and abroad, Cadinot's work today appears much less dated than that of Scandelari or Terry. Instead of finding erotic inspiration in the real-life action of sex clubs and backrooms, Cadinot mined and eroticized the images of France's collective memory, a technique that would sustain his imagination and popularity throughout his career. René-Paul Leraton explains Cadinot's success as being the result of this ability to speak intimately to the experience of a particular generation of French men, a generation of which he was a part: “Cadinot takes back all those moments of our lives and makes our fantasies come true. The dormitory, the scout tent, the barracks, all become charged with an eroticism and a sexuality that is explicit and liberating.”⁸⁶ Even though his films are saturated with themes and images that spoke to the experience of a certain generation, the quality and artistry of Cadinot's productions made him a worldwide success.

Another factor in his success was his attention to new technological realities. Cadinot quickly realized the value of VHS tape to the availability of pornography and began to make films for home distribution very early in his career. He conceptualized many of his films with the video player in mind, imagining the viewer to be watching his films in the comfort of

⁸³ Stamford, *Spartacus International Gay Guide* 1982, 199.

⁸⁴ Philip Simpson, “Authorship,” in *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and Philip Sampson (London: Routledge, 2001), 30.

⁸⁵ Philbert, “Jean-Daniel Cadinot,” 30; *El Paso Wrecking Corp*, directed by Joe Gage (1977; California: HIS Video, 2000), DVD; *Pacific Coast Highway*, directed by William Higgins (1981; California: Catalina Video, 2004), DVD; *The Boys of Venice*, directed by William Higgins (1979; California: Catalina Video, 2005), DVD; *Every Which Way*, directed by Jim French (1979; California).

⁸⁶ Leraton, *Gay Porn*, 72.

home, in private rather than as a collective experience. In his 1983 interview with the gay magazine *Samourai*, Cadinot explained his relationship to new VHS technology; unlike a film watched in the cinema, home video allowed the viewer to pause, rewind, and watch at leisure, and Cadinot conceived his pornography around this home-viewing experience.⁸⁷ Catering to the consumer watching at home (most probably alone) also explains Cadinot's usual practice of casting a single protagonist. This protagonist tends to play a sexually passive role, and the viewer is invited to engage with him as he embarks on a sequence of sexual encounters, a sort of "passive odyssey," as Christian Fournier has described it.⁸⁸ This freedom from the space of the adult cinema allowed Cadinot to explore the fantasy world of his viewer in his own home. In this domestic space he became, in his own words, the creator of "contagious erotic dreams."⁸⁹ For Cadinot, a retreat into fantasy was also a retreat into the home, away from the contemporary gay scene. This private sexual release likely became more important for him as the gay community became conscious of the AIDS epidemic, but the tendency is also visible in Cadinot's pre-AIDS-era work. Cadinot's early short films, *Stop* (1979), *Hommes de chantier* (*Working Men*, 1980), and *Tendres adolescents* (*Tender Adolescents*, 1980), set up many of the themes for which his films would become famous, such as an alternation between tender and violent scenes and an obsession with the erotic possibilities of places and institutions (reform and boarding schools, scouting and the church, and colonial settings like North Africa).

It is worth examining some of the erotic preoccupations in which Cadinot found refuge, since they show a retreat into fantasy more pronounced than the more realist pornography of his peers. Cadinot's second feature film, *Sacré collège* (*One Hell of a School*, 1982), introduces two of his enduring fascinations: educational institutions and religion. This film could be read as a pornographic reimagining of Roger Peyrefitte's writings on love between schoolboys, and in it Cadinot turns the setting of the all-boys boarding school into what Jaap Kooijman has called a "pornotopia."⁹⁰ Kept at boarding school over the Easter break for stealing biscuits and other minor infractions, the boys enjoy sexual encounters around the school, from the dining hall to the bathing pond, the kitchen to the dormitory, all the time glancing at the camera to solicit the viewer's complicity. *Les minets*

⁸⁷ Philbert, "Jean-Daniel Cadinot," 29.

⁸⁸ Fournier argues that in presenting us with these "passive odysseys," Cadinot creates a unique hero who is "actively passive." Christian Fournier, "Cadinot," in *Dictionnaire de la pornographie*, ed. Philippe Di Folco (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005), 71.

⁸⁹ Frédéric Martel, *The Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France since 1968* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 166.

⁹⁰ Jaap Kooijman borrows this term from Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Corgi, 1964), 271. Kooijman applies this term to Cadinot's films set in North Africa, but it could easily be extended to all of Cadinot's early work. Jaap Kooijman, "Pleasures of the Orient: Cadinot's Maghreb as Gay Male Pornotopia," *Indiscretions* 22 (2011): 97–111.

sauvages, (*Tough and Tender*, 1984) develops these dreams of unrestrained antics in the dormitory, this time set in a reform school. These films are a pornographied version of the sort of sexual experimentation that a whole generation of French gay men must have experienced (or fantasized about) before mixed-sex education became widespread in France in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹¹ Deft touches help root Cadinot's films in a longer context of homosexuality in French art and literature. To take just one example, in *Les minets sauvages* the inmates of the reform school gather around a large table to make silk flowers in scenes that echo Jean Genet's juxtaposition of imprisoned masculinity and floral imagery in his novel *Miracle de la rose* (*The Miracle of the Rose*, 1946).⁹² In *Sacré collège*, the pupils pick armfuls of rhododendrons to decorate the chapel's altar.

Of course, setting a pornographic film in a school raises issues of age and consent, and here Cadinot's fantasies appear more problematic. The sign at the gates of the school displayed in the opening shot of *Sacré collège* states that the institution depicted is the "Collège Saint Charles—secondary education establishment—boarding for boys 11 to 18," a device that perhaps purposely added ambiguity to the characters' ages. The "Coral Affair," a scandal that occurred in the year of the film's release, in which a number of prominent writers and academics were accused of abusing boys in care at the Coral special educational establishment near Nîmes, threw a problematic light on Cadinot's choice of setting but did not stop Cadinot using the same setting in subsequent films.⁹³

An avowed anticlerical, Cadinot described the delight he took in excoriating religion in a 1998 interview: "Through my movies I settle scores with my parents, with society, with the Church."⁹⁴ The priest in *Sacré collège* acts as a sexually frustrated comedic character. He is supposedly an authority figure, but the pupils in fact evade him at every turn, and he repeatedly attempts and fails to catch the boys "at it." In one scene, the priest takes to spying on his young charges as they bathe and sunbathe nude at the school's bathing pond. As he peers through his glasses at the youthful crowd laughing and roughhousing, he is made to look ridiculous, an impotent witness to priapic youth. Cadinot engages in the sort of pornographic lampooning of the clergy that would make an eighteenth-century libertine smirk. In the 1981 short *Scouts*, for instance, a clergyman in full cassock masturbates to

⁹¹ For a history of juvenile homosexuality in institutional environments in this period, see Régis Revenin, *Une histoire des garçons et des filles: Amour, genre et sexualité dans la France d'après-guerre* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2015), 155–204.

⁹² See, for instance, the transformation of chains into roses in the novel's titular miracle: Jean Genet, *Miracle de la rose* (Lyon: L'Arbalète, 1946), 25.

⁹³ Indeed, Cadinot would take up the setting of a reform school in *Les minets sauvages* just two years later. Discussion of the Coral Affair and its impact can be found in Pierre Verdrager, *L'enfant interdit: Comment la pédophilie est devenue scandaleuse* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), 29–30.

⁹⁴ Michael Sibalís, "Cadinot, Jean-Daniel," in *Who's Who in Contemporary Gay and Lesbian History*, ed. Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (London: Routledge, 2001), 70.

a Tom of Finland comic tucked in his Bible. However, for modern viewers the joke may fall flat, as images of “boys” with their buttocks exposed next to giant crucifixes are more likely to recall subsequent revelations of clerical sexual abuse.

One of Cadinot’s methods for clearly distancing his work from the issue of child abuse and nonconsensual sex was to stress the consent and enjoyment of his actors. This move also had the effect of emphasizing the willingness of his stars, sidestepping the commercial relationship between filmmaker and actor that underpinned his work. That Cadinot’s films were authentic representations of actors enjoying themselves was a part of his marketing. Cadinot claimed to produce his films in an atmosphere of camaraderie; he wanted his actors to become friends and enjoy each other in order to make for more convincing pornography.⁹⁵ On the set of a Cadinot photo shoot in the summer of 1977, an actor named only as François claimed: “I’ve already worked with Jean-Daniel and with him you always feel like you have fun! The bonds that he creates between us and himself are intoxicating.”⁹⁶ In 1983 the journalist Kevin Kratz interviewed a number of porn actors for a piece in *Samourai* magazine, comparing their experiences. While “Dominique” emphasized that he was motivated only by financial gain, “Franck” was clear that he was involved “primarily for my own pleasure” and that he was now in a relationship with one of his costars.⁹⁷ Cadinot’s desire that his actors enjoy themselves on film stands in contrast to Norbert Terry’s filmmaking style. Terry made his actors sign contracts stating they would not have any sexual contact with each other outside of the shoot to avoid exhausting their energies, a stark contrast to Cadinot’s encouragement of relationships between the cast members.⁹⁸

Cadinot used this fluid boundary between pornography and reality to increase the identification of his viewers with the actors on-screen, deepening their engagement in fantasy rather than provoking the sort of self-reflection on sex and cruising that Siry attempted to encourage with his clumsy use of poetry. Cadinot’s earliest shorts have a biographical quality, as if they are stitched together from the chance cruising encounters that punctuated the life stories of so many gay men in this era. This quality was no accident, and Cadinot claimed to be collaborating with his actors and drawing on their own sexual escapades for ideas about scenarios. *Charmants cousins* (*Becoming Men*, 1983) was allegedly based on a true story experienced by one of the actors in the film.⁹⁹ This “biographical” approach was taken a step further in *Aime, comme minet* (*All of Me*, 1982) in which the photographer (whom we never see, but who we are meant to

⁹⁵ “Une journée pas comme les autres,” *Incognito*, August 1977, 33.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Kevin Kratz, “Pour le plaisir,” *Samourai*, March 1983, 68.

⁹⁸ Bernier, “Norbert Terry,” 12.

⁹⁹ Philbert, “Jean-Daniel Cadinot,” 29.

assume is Cadinot himself) is in conversation with his actor, Pierre Buisson (who takes his own name in the film). The actor recounts his first sexual experience and other escapades—the events that led him to consider becoming a porn performer. These scenes are shown to the viewer in flashback: Buisson as an apprentice in a bakery, with a fellow student, and out jogging. When questioned about his preferences, Buisson responds: “I take it up the ass! . . . If I go with a guy it’s to do something I can’t do with a girl.” For Cadinot, the perfect boy was not innocent of the sexual act, far from it, but he is innocent of the shame and stigma that often pollute it. In this sense, although he usually evaded political engagement, Cadinot reflects one of the enduring threads of gay liberation ideology: the injunction to free homosexual acts from shame.¹⁰⁰

The reality of work in the pornography industry could of course be much less joyful and was much more exploitative than Cadinot’s films let on.¹⁰¹ But Cadinot’s success depended upon the way that he elided the economic reality that underpinned his business. Perhaps it is for this reason that Cadinot thought the label “pornography” had such negative connotations: “For me, porno is something ugly, dirty. But it’s also showing a sexual act. And we all perform sexual acts.”¹⁰² Cadinot was praised by contemporaries precisely because he managed to evacuate the notion of financial transaction from his work. Luc Pinhaus’s review of Cadinot’s work in *Gai Pied* magazine gushed: “Cadinot’s boys, whose beauty is vivid, even moving—this certainly isn’t the world of clones—get hard and have a blast in a film in which they don’t *seem* to participate only because *business is business*.”¹⁰³ Note that Pinhaus used the English expression “business is business,” equating the “clones” of other films with a world of insincere sex as transaction; he clearly had the pornography that took direct inspiration from America’s commercial spaces in mind.

But even though Cadinot attempted to evacuate the financial and sexual transaction from his work by avoiding depiction of the commercial gay scene and all the compromises it entailed, he could not fully escape his contemporary political milieu. While most of Cadinot’s obsessions have generally gone unexamined, his foregrounding of the North African man, another erotic theme with deep roots in the French imagination, has received criticism.¹⁰⁴ Maxime Cervulle argues that Cadinot’s 1984 film *Harem* is

¹⁰⁰ Expressed, for instance, in one of the FHAR’s slogans, “Lesbiennes et pédés, arrêtons de raser les murs!” (Lesbians, fags, stop hiding in the shadows!). FHAR, *Rapport contre la normalité*, 6.

¹⁰¹ For a thorough examination of contemporary working conditions in the pornography industry from a French perspective, see Trachmann, *Le travail pornographique*.

¹⁰² Philbert, “Jean-Daniel Cadinot,” 30.

¹⁰³ Luc Pinhaus, “Jean-Daniel Cadinot, humour et tendresse dans l’erotico-porno,” *Gai Pied Hebdo*, 18–24 December 1982, 10.

¹⁰⁴ For insight into the role of the “Arab man” in the post-decolonization French imagination, see Todd Shepard, “‘Something Notably Erotic’: Politics, ‘Arab Men,’ and

the pornographic illustration of the racial politics of gay liberation. In their 1971 special issue of Jean-Paul Sartre's Maoist political newspaper *Tout!*, FHAR published a petition to claim sexual solidarity with North African men, playfully modeling its argument on the petition for abortion rights, "manifesto of the 343," that had appeared earlier in the same year: "We are more than 343 sluts," the FHAR's petitioners declared, emphasizing their number rather than their moral value. "We have been buggered by Arabs. We're proud of it, and we'll do it again."¹⁰⁵ Cervulle argues that this was an instrumentalization of racist notions of Arab men in service to the liberation of white French subjects: "Caught between the politics of porn and the erotic charge of politics, the nonwhite subject is reduced to a body to be exploited by white pornographers and revolutionaries alike as both a sign and a mode of exchange, as both a battlefield and a playground."¹⁰⁶ The FHAR's politics and Cadinot's pornography bookend France's gay liberation moment, both underlining that gay liberation's subject was the white French man. In *Harem* Cadinot eroticizes racial stereotypes for his audience. He portrays the white French boy as the passive partner in a succession of encounters with sex in the open-air market, in the hammam bathhouse, with the tailor, thus playing on all of the classic stereotypes of the hopeful holidaymaker. But although *Harem* does lean on racist stereotypes, Cervulle overlooks the diversity of many of Cadinot's other productions. Cadinot's work of course bears the imprint of gay liberation's "homonormativity": the tendency to see the "normal" gay subject as French, cis-male, white, young, and abled. But although Cadinot exploited racialized fantasies in his work set outside of France, his attitude toward race within France seems to have been much less charged. Despite often featuring an exclusively passive white protagonist, Cadinot's early work does not tend to assign sexual roles exclusively along racial lines.¹⁰⁷ And if Cadinot's problematic portrayal of North Africa receives critical attention today, it is because he became an international figure, exporting his vision around the globe (lately facilitated by the Internet). By 1984 Cadinot was the only French director left making commercial gay pornography in France. The VHS revolution produced a flood of US imports, and Cadinot was the only producer to survive in such circumstances.

Indeed, Cadinot's film output was sustained until his death in 2008. Through these decades Cadinot's work reflected both the changing sociopolitical context in which gay men operated and his own increasingly international audience and financial success. Although the latter meant that

Sexual Revolution in Post-decolonization, 1962–1974," *Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 1 (2012): 80–115.

¹⁰⁵ FHAR, "Pétition," *Tout!*, 23 April 1971, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Maxime Cervulle, "French Homonormativity and the Commodification of the Arab Body," *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 176.

¹⁰⁷ To take just one example, the black actor who plays one of the students in *Sacré collège* engages in both active and passive sexual roles.

Cadinot's works became more ambitious and complex in terms of scripting and scenarios, themes first explored at the opening of his career tended to be not far from the surface, even as he explored them from different angles, by using the tropes of genres outside pornography. For instance, Cadinot's 2004 release *Secrets de famille* (*Family Secrets*) borrowed elements of the Hollywood thriller to portray the breakdown of a bourgeois family. Other later films are near retreads of his older output, such as the trip to North Africa in *Hammam* (2004), or the 2002 release about an all-male boarding school, *Cours privés* (*Private Lessons*).¹⁰⁸ Although erotic fantasy remained present in his films throughout his career, these later films broke with the pattern of depicting fantasy as a retreat and delved more deeply into the possibilities of pornography and sexual fantasy as explorations of social issues.

Yet Cadinot's prolific output in the 1980s and 1990s hid personal pain. In an interview given to the gay magazine *Têtu* in 2001, Cadinot described being hit hard by the HIV-AIDS crisis: "After the disappearance of a number of close friends, I seriously considered stopping."¹⁰⁹ The crisis provoked dramatic changes in the context in which gay pornography was produced and consumed. In May 1983 France's Institut Pasteur identified what would later become known as the HIV virus, and in the same year the first French organization to fight the epidemic was set up by Patrice Meyer, Vaincre le SIDA (Defeat AIDS). It would take time for the implications of this discovery and the extent of the epidemic to become apparent, but it was soon clear that HIV-AIDS would create the greatest existential threat that France's nascent gay community had yet faced, and it would change the face of politics and pornography alike.¹¹⁰ Pornography's repertoire of images of sexual abandon, leather-clad men enjoying multiple sexual partners, began to appear a relic of the past as the police moved to close down Paris's commercial sex spots during the crisis.¹¹¹ The decade in which gay pornography could depict homosexual acts free from the specter of HIV-AIDS appears brief after the disaster that followed, but it took time for the nature and extent of the epidemic to become apparent.

In light of the fear and confusion of the early years of the HIV-AIDS crisis, the pornography pioneered in the early pornographic boom by diverse directors such as Cadinot, Scandelari, and Siry now appears to share a certain naive charm. By the mid-1980s this moment was irrevocably lost. But something of this period's concerns can be recovered in the images of desire that men projected for one another. The production, distribution, and consumption of new gay pornography reveal the interlinked nature of

¹⁰⁸ *Secrets de famille*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (2004; France: French Art, 2004), DVD; *Hammam*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (2004; Turkey: French Art, 2004), DVD; *Cours privés*, directed by Jean-Daniel Cadinot (2002; France: French Art, 2002), DVD.

¹⁰⁹ Jürgen Pletsch, "Pension complète," *Têtu*, March 2001, 64.

¹¹⁰ Christophe Broqua provides a comprehensive account of the crisis in France in *Agir pour ne pas mourir: Act Up, les homosexuels et le SIDA* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2006).

¹¹¹ Martel, *The Pink and the Black*, 204–6.

sex, commerce, and politics at a time of transformation in the politicization of homosexuality in France and the West. Gay pornography drew on and capitalized on the fears and desires of this era, transforming them in ways that could be provocative and challenging but also escapist and whimsical. Whether through a retreat inward into Franco-French fantasy in the Cadinot style or through a fraught vision of America, pornography grappled with the pleasures and pains of the early years of gay liberation. For the men who sat watching in the darkness of *Le Dragon* or in the comfort of home, these films were products to be consumed in masturbatory bursts. But in these moments they also functioned as a community-building tool, a sex education aid, a political intervention, and an artistic medium.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAN CALLWOOD is a PhD candidate at Queen Mary, University of London, where he is completing a project entitled “Reevaluating the French Gay Liberation Moment, 1968–83,” funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.