Lewd Looks

AMERICAN SEXPLOITATION CINEMA IN THE 1960s

Elena Gorfinkel

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Introduction

"Coy Leericism"

New York City, mid-1960s, black-and-white 35mm film stock and a familiar sexploitation scenario: young Candy leaves her small town. We see her departing on the train. She is fleeing the fate of her mother, a prostitute who has committed suicide. She opines in voice-over about a new life in New York City, which holds the promise of another identity and respite from the shame bestowed by maternal disgrace. Candy (Barbara Morris), with dark hair and cropped bangs, evokes a low-budget Anna Karina circa Jean-Luc Godard's early 1960s films. She moves in with an old girlfriend, her enchantment by the city's roiling creative energies and architectural marvels rendered through street scenes, vertiginous views of skyscrapers, female flânerie. Introduced to the world of the single urban working girl by the women whom she befriends, Candy resorts to nude modeling and escorting. After two failed romances, with a philandering nude photographer and a sculptor more piqued by his art than by Candy, she returns to her party girl life while secretly edging toward despair.

This film's penultimate "orgy" scene is one of prototypical bohemian carousal: a drunken swinging pot party in the girls' middle-class apartment, replete with mid-century details and decorative flourishes. The camera sits at hip or "couch" level, surveying the pairings and unpairings of potential sexual partners. Men and women abandon decorum to grind on each other and make out. They laugh ostentatiously, gesturing come-ons in thick, slowed motions, at the pace of striptease. The women dance to records and circulate from man to man, bouncing on their laps. Whiskey glasses are filled and cocktails disbursed, big crystal ashtrays overflow, and we hear the sounds of a saucy percussive jazz sound track. Candy switches from one man to another, tentatively settles down with a young man on the carpet. An older man in sunglasses and white tennis shorts arrives,

FIGURE 1. Candy resorts to nude modeling in *One Naked Night.*

laughing and leering, his eyes concealed. As the women's outer garments inch off, couples pair to make out and grope in available corners in kitchen and hallway. A 16mm film projector is set up on the coffee table, and the group eagerly gathers around to watch. The lights go off and a "stag film" unspools—in it a woman plays strip chess with an older man. There is a cutaway to the man in sunglasses, watching and laughing. The stag film's action, we are to impute, encourages if not enjoins the group's sex action. In the dark, underneath the illumination of the projector's beam, which filters and draws shafts of light through the smoky air, Candy's friend Laura makes out with a man on the floor. We see her skirt getting pulled up over her legs. The diegetic film runs out, creating a blur on the wall as light is thrown through the projector's gate, an illuminated rectangle. Another girl, the exhibitionist Peg, with a blonde bouffant hairdo, leaps up in front of the projector's beam and into the light, entering the doubled "frame." She slowly dances and strips off her blouse and then her bra, casting high-contrast shadows onto the blank white rectangle behind her.

The film's knowingness—an elemental scene of film spectatorship, the recognition of the female erotic body as the undergirding substrate of cine-

FIGURE 2. *One Naked Night*'s scene of looking, the female body doubled as spectacle and screen.

matic spectacle—seems to collapse onto that which it describes. The live, dancing, stripping girl reflexively *replaces* the film, her body supplanting the diegetic movie, providing her own screen for projection. As her bra comes off, we see the shadowed shapes of other figures, a man at the edge of the screen, pulling her back down below the frame. The lights come back on. A montage of sexual grappling ensues. We see male hands grasping at bra hooks in close-up, waist-up kissing and much heavy breathing, bare feet rubbing each other on caftans, a woman's hand ecstatically grabbing a crocheted blanket in close-up. Metonymic extremities signal a distinctly sexual pleasure that must remain off-screen. This cumulatively paced crescendo indicates sexual action, but it is organized by ellipsis, evasion, and the sense of the film's presentation of an illicit view. One scene of looking—at the film within a film and at a writhing, dancing female body, bidden to move and to undress for the camera and the on-screen spectators turned participants, reflexively points outward to another implied scene, of the film spectator's look at this lascivious fiction of excess, sensation, sexual circulation, and consumption.

This self-conscious scenario of looking and sensational corporeality

is at once both chaste, as nudity remains minimal but strategic, and unsavory, in the film's exposition of single girls caught in a seamy trade of sexual commerce. The scene appears in the sexploitation film *One Naked Night* (filmed in 1963 but released in 1965) directed by Albert Viola, and it is emblematic of the gambit of the sexploitation cinema of the 1960s, which overflows with scenarios such as this one: a young, sexually curious but naive young woman in the big city becomes embroiled in sex work of one kind or another and an industry of erotic spectacle and is finally corrupted, used up, discarded. The film is also fairly illustrative of 1960s sexploitation films' preoccupation with the conjunction of sexual labor, spectatorship and performance, and the contradictory nature of a mode of address that sits between the illicit and the permissible. The film is conversant with popular sexual discourses of its time and uses these as novel currency, evoking the trilling intonations of lurid pulp paperbacks, pinup photography, and sexual science manuals in a post–Kinsey Report, post-*Playboy* era, yet one still cognizant of the *limits* of cinematic conventions proscribing screen sex.

Making sense of this film, and many like it produced in this decade, necessitates recognizing their location at the precipice between different regimes of sexual representation and in the context of the history of the obscene image. Sexploitation film has been bracketed as a precursor or bridge to a more authentic or explicit mode of sexual expression, in the hard-core hypervisibility of pornographic features that emerged in the early 1970s. As a chapter in the history of film pornography, sexploitation's uniqueness as a finite phenomenon can contribute to a broader understanding of the place of sexual representations in American film history and culture. If, as Linda Williams has suggested in her work on pornographic film and sexual representation, the transition from the *obscene* to the *on/scene* is the story of cinema as a sexual medium, what can sexploitation films such as *One Naked Night* and its dialectic of seen and unseen (and obscene and on/scene) tell us about the transformations of cinema, the film spectator, and forms of sexual expressivity in the 1960s?[1] What do we make of the sexploitation text that traffics in the constant deferral of the explicit sexual act into off-screen space? How does the simulation of the signs of sex operate within the sexploitation film, and what kinds of desires, knowledges, and affects does it produce? In short, how to historicize and theorize the *implicit,* rather than explicit, image? This book examines the historically overlooked sexploitation film to tackle these questions and to unravel the material and discursive relations between bodies, looking, and spectatorship that these films impudently present. Sexploitation films made the sensational body and female sexu-

ality public and visible in distinct and unprecedented ways, tensing it in a constant vacillation between concealment and revelation.

Sexploitation Film, between Cinematic and Social History

Although sexploitation cinema is central to this history of an ever-greater visibility of sexuality "on scene" in the 1960s, it has been scantly treated in film history and film studies. The *American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States 1961–1970* reveals pages upon pages, hundreds of film titles that fall into the category of the sex film or sex exploitation film. These hundreds of films constituted a cottage industry and locus of independent film production at the forefront of a newly sexualized media and popular culture in American public life. Despite the renaissance of low-budget sex films that proliferated in that decade, sexploitation films' value as a historically, culturally, and aesthetically significant branch of independent film has been largely overlooked. This explosion of sex cinema has also not been accounted for in histories of American or 1960s cinema—most overviews and textbooks bear minimal mention of this bountiful "adults-only" cinema that flourished on the margins of an ailing Hollywood system. For example, Paul Monaco's important macro-account of the cinematic decade in the History of the American Cinema series contains not a single mention of sexploitation in its 359 pages.[2]

Sexploitation films' importance to film history and to the transformation of 1960s cinema is deep and manifold. The emergence of sexploitation films as a viable niche in the 1960s augments and complicates a picture of the rise of independent production in the postwar period. The American film industry faced considerable challenges in the postwar era, struggling with the impact of the major studios' divestiture of their holdings in exhibition in the wake of the Paramount decree of 1948 and the broadened expressivity bestowed to cinema by the *Miracle* Supreme Court decision of 1952.[3] A product shortage throughout the 1950s, as Hollywood produced fewer and fewer pictures, led to the expansion of the art house market and the widening exposure among American audiences to foreign films.[4] It also led to the rise of and greater space available for independent producers, who dove into low-budget genre territory, from monster horror and science fiction potboilers to teenpics.[5] Exhibitors, especially neighborhood theaters, confronting the paucity of product, became receptive to independent, foreign, and exploitation fare, creating a window for the emergence of sexploitation. The influx of racy art films from nations such as France, Italy, and Sweden, as well as changing legal definitions of obscenity, led

to a rising tide of films with more robust sexual or mature content across modes of production, among which sexploitation films became some of the most brash and direct.[6] The precipitous decline in American moviegoing was linked to the stratification of a newly unpredictable film public whose greater access to television and a widening array of leisure activities, from sports to pop music, siphoned their undivided attention from the silver screen. Filmmakers were thus both unmoored and liberated from a one-size-fits-all demographic and imagining of audience taste. In these years, the youth, family, and adult markets emerged as distinct fields, and film product diversified away and apart from the major studios, in the increase in independent productions. Before the arrival of feature-length hard-core porn, the lowly sexploitation film defined and constituted an "adults-only" cinema and its terms of sexual expression, liberalizing the American screen.[7]

Sexploitation film thus made visible the "maturation" of cinematic subject matter, in the decade when the movies seemed to suddenly "grow up." Low-budget operators, based primarily in New York and Los Angeles, sexploitation filmmakers and producers seized on an opening in legal doctrine regarding obscenity. As Hollywood's Production Code floundered and a ratings system eventually took shape, the gap created by the Hollywood studios' product shortage in these years allowed the sexploitation producers to make risqué and salacious films that could fill ailing neighborhood theaters. As a mode of production, sexploitation extended the tradition of classical exploitation cinema and its network of producers and distributors from an earlier era but also operated as a distinct field of practice from other independents that were gaining visibility in these years, such as larger-budgeted exploitation operators like Roger Corman and American International Pictures, and from the more personal, artisanal, and noncommercial approach of avant-garde and underground cinemas strongly associated with sexual expressivity and experimentation in this decade.[8] Sexploitation films presented something distinct from these neighboring modes, an erotic expression emboldened by the market but hampered by budgetary limitations and whose aesthetic aspirations were often circumscribed by generic and economic necessities.

Eric Schaefer provides a historical framework for understanding the antecedent mode to sexploitation, in what he identifies as the "classical" exploitation film tradition, which operated in varied forms from 1919 to 1959. Exploitation film, as he illuminates, was a mode of production that worked on the margins of Hollywood, capitalizing on the subjects of sex, drugs, disease, and vice, which the Hollywood industry—beholden to the Production Code—could not broach.[9] Schaefer illustrates how exploita-

tion films charted the transition from a production- to a consumption-based sexual economy in their subject matter and mode of address, exposing "cultural ills," taking a moralist stance on them, and simultaneously encouraging their audiences to consume and implicitly enjoy. This paradigm of a cinema that attempts to veil its economic intentions through the alibi of moral circumspection and morbid narrative resolutions, while simultaneously offering "cheap thrills," is one that persists, with some alteration, into the period of the sexploitation picture, as this book will show. Classical exploitation films often made use of a pedagogical "square up," a framing device through narration or intertitles that offered an absolution for the spectator's morals for watching salacious, sensational images of sexual disease, vice, nudism, or the dangers of marijuana.[10] While this device disappears in sexploitation, its residue remains, couched instead in a language that incorporated changing obscenity standards and the contours of 1960s legal limitations in the form of "socially redeeming value." Schaefer's periodization and exhaustive account of the parameters of classical exploitation facilitate this book's examination of the period that follows and the emergence of sexploitation cinema.

What came to be called *sexploitation* by the late 1950s—an abbreviation of "sex-exploitation"—developed on the heels of a 1957 New York State Board of Appeals decision marking the presentation of nudity in film as not, in and of itself, obscene.[11] The following decade, roughly 1960 to 1970, witnessed the production of hundreds of sexploitation films.[12] Their plot pretexts functioned to present the maximum nudity and sexual content, at times mixed with violence, allowable by law, often promising a bit more than the law sanctioned. Narrativizing sex through transparent plots, pretexts, and generic gimmicks, sexploitation films codified a soft-core aesthetic ethos and elaborated excessive scenarios of social change represented through changes in sexual practices. The films and their fulsome promotional address—in trailers, advertisements, and the films' titles themselves—lured audiences with promises of sexual spectacle, using the bait of scenes of female nudity, primarily exposed breasts and buttocks, and of risqué topics borrowed from tabloid headlines, sex manuals, and current events. The melodramatic scripts of "sex and its discontents" that engine the generic attractions of sexploitation run the gamut, with returns to common motifs, among them the flight of the unsatisfied wife into the arms of sinister men or the fate of the insatiable nymphomaniac (*Agony of Love,* William Rotsler, 1966; *Love Me . . . Please!,* Victor Petrashevic, 1969), the fall of innocents into a den of depravity involving promiscuity, prostitution, bohemianism, and the occult (*Orgy at Lil's Place,* Jerald Intrator, 1963; *Olga's House of Shame,* Joseph P. Mawra, 1964; *The Sex*

Perils of Paulette, Doris Wishman, 1965), the submission of men to sadistic women (*Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!,* Russ Meyer, 1965; *Venus in Furs,* Joseph Marzano, 1967; *She Mob,* Harry Wuest, 1968), narratives of rape, revenge, and torture (*Mondo Keyhole,* Jack Hill, 1966; *The Touch of Her Flesh,* Michael Findlay, 1967), the currency of the newly emancipated working girl refigured as a sex worker (*Rent-a-Girl,* William Rose, 1968; *The Hookers,* Jalo Miklos Horthy, 1967; *The Sexperts,* Jerald Intrator, 1966), the sexual psychopathology of peeping toms (*Strange Compulsion,* Irvin Berwick, 1964; *Electronic Lover,* Jesse Berger, 1966), the underground exchange in "white slaves," and sexual bondage through blackmail (*Olga's Girls,* Joseph P. Mawra, 1964; *How Many Times,* Don Walters, 1969). Perversion; sexual deviance; nonnormative sexual practices such as sadomasochism, swinging, and wife swapping; emergent identities such as lesbianism, bisexuality, and cross-dressing (and, to a far lesser extent, male homosexuality); and the sex industry itself provided hardy material for sexploitation's wide generic variations—from melodramas to pseudo-documentaries and sex exposés to noir-ish, violent action films. But central to all is the anxious status of autonomous female labor and desire, unhinged from the reproductive certitude of family and marriage, most often set loose in the permissive urban space of the city—as is Candy in the streets of New York in the opening of *One Naked Night*—but also left to wallow in hothouse scenarios of "suburban sin."

These kinds of sexual and gendered representations are inseparable from the social contexts within which these films were made and the larger cultural and political forces that constituted public life in the 1960s, including its many "revolutions." This period witnessed a heightened visibility and proliferating discourses surrounding sexual practices and identities, the civil rights movement's battle for racial justice and equality, the women's movement's rising consciousness, and the emergence of gay liberation politics, as well as a youthful insurgency—as young people disinvested from the ideologies and values of their parents and, "turned on, tuned in, and dropped out," joined student activist organizations, and protested the Vietnam War.[13] Youth also gravitated toward forging countercultures, through creative practices such as art, performance, rock music, and psychedelia. Though often pathologized as deviant in this era of radicalization, young people were the defining and sought-after demographic of the 1960s, and their tastes and habits created the architecture of American popular culture's preoccupations and anxieties.[14] These developments were refracted and filtered in sexploitation cinema's ideological attitudes toward youth cultural practices, new sexual identities, social and racial mobility, and the economic and erotic lot of single women. Sexploitation cinema in many ways capitalized on a cultural fascination with the lives

FIGURE 3. Blazing promotional come-ons for *The Skin Game* and other sexploitation titles featuring nudity and vice address passersby at the State Theater, Washington Street, Boston, 1965. Mayor John F. Collins Records, Collection 0244.001, City of Boston Archives, Boston. Reproduced under a Creative Commons 2.0 License.

and practices of the young as well as the generic stakes of sexual difference, particularly the fate of sexually active, primarily white women.[15]

The sexual revolution in particular has been ascribed in no small measure to the transformation of the media and popular representations in the 1960s. Hilary Radner suggests that it was not politics per se but popular culture that was most instrumental in positing the personal as the political and constituting the consuming self as a new sphere of value and pleasure, pleasures most overtly oriented in sexual form. Eric Schaefer also asserts that the "mass media served as the most important and visible battleground on which the sexual revolution took place."[16] Sexploitation films, one of the key sites of sexual representation, participated in and prognosticated the arrival of this "revolution," even while the films, politically and ideologically, often remained suspicious of sexual liberation's value or social effects. Counter to the liberatory discourses often associated with the cultural products of the sexual revolution, this book examines the unique status of sexploitation film in its pessimistic, frequently shame-drenched

imaging and imagining of the changing conception of social relations, sexual identities, and gender roles in the 1960s. *One Naked Night,* for example, ends with Candy, after waking up on the floor after the sex party, in a state of humiliated self-abnegation, perceiving herself as no different than her prostitute mother. Her solution is to jump to her death off the balcony of her shared apartment, her stilled body, in the final shot, captured in an overhead high angle—resembling a modernist, Michelangelo Antonioni composition. Such morbid, punitive endings were common in the mid-1960s, as they could appease censorial restrictions and stave off charges of obscenity, moralist punctuation that provided narrative buffer for the mode's indulgence in sexual excess. However, by the late 1960s, the gambit of guilt and shame began to abate as more competitors entered the sex film market in the wake of legal, cultural, industrial, and political transformations that expanded the sphere of the permissible, although an air of suspicion and self-consciousness remained.

This book also locates sexploitation films within the film culture of the 1960s, accounting for how these films circulated; gained notoriety; and were perceived, made sense of, and talked about in the decade's public culture. Sexploitation's very publicness, in presenting audiences with sexual content and female nudity previously prohibited or unseen, challenged notions of film spectatorship and definitions of obscenity. Fluctuations in censorship practices and state and federal obscenity law placed sexploitation films within a highly visible and public sphere of contest and debate over what constituted aesthetic and social value in a period of an expanding consumer culture and leisure economy. Functioning at the margins and in the gaps between other modes of production, sexploitation's importance and influence are paradoxically bound up in its marginality, its cultural status, and the currency and pervasiveness of its sexualized representations as the 1960s wore on. Reliant on the residual prohibitions on sexual content, sexploitation films codified what would later become identified as a soft-core aesthetic, contra the hard-core of pornography. Yet the greater sexualization of Hollywood and other wide-release films and the emergence of feature-length hard-core would economically eclipse the novelty of sexploitation by the early 1970s. Therefore this book surveys the period and films produced roughly from 1959 to 1972, the latter a crucial year in the commercial success of publicly exhibited feature-length pornography.

The renegade economic logic of the sexploitation film—one that Hollywood attempted in the late 1960s to appropriate for its own failing market—was founded on a principle of lowest investment yielding the highest return in profit.[17] Bottom feeders within the sea of a market economy, sexploitation producers drew on the traditions of recycling, reediting,

and repackaging, trick tactics and expedient forms culled from previous eras of the exploitation trade.[18] The huckster mentality and the entrepreneurial attitude of carnival sideshow and vaudeville circuit are a strong residue in sexploitation's marketing strategies and mode of address to its audience, even as newer and younger filmmakers and producers entered the field over the course of the decade—and many notable New Hollywood talents, such as directors Francis Ford Coppola and Brian De Palma as well as cinematographer László Kovács, notably worked early on making lowly "nudies."[19]

Andrew Sarris, in a not-too-belated postmortem written in 1971 on the valence of the sexploitation film as a lost form, would call this quality of sexploitation's address a "coy leericism."[20] *Lewd Looks* traces the peculiarity and historicity of sexploitation's mode of address to its audience, this very "coy leericism." The courting and production of an illicit mode of looking through promises of erotic spectacle articulates a moment marked as much by shame and prohibition as it was by license and liberation. It is a mode also underwritten by the self-conscious novelty of the sexual commodity. Sexploitation film continually managed its audience's "foreknowledge of spectacle," as Paul Watson terms it, through the promotional promise of unseen and sexualized sights.[21] Sexploitation producers would consistently negotiate the expectations and disappointments of the ticket-buying public through aesthetic strategies of syntactical tease and erotic deferral. These strategies of tease, which Tom Waugh identifies as the regnant rhetoric of 1960s sexual culture, were constitutive to the films' style, ethos, mode of address, and construction of a skin flick spectator.[22] The historical spectator was tasked to navigate and negotiate this dialectic of plenitude and absence, circumvention and titillation.

Sexploitation films, I argue throughout this book, foreground the conditions of looking at erotic spectacle, making the subject and object of sexual looking the crux of their drives, self-consciously underscoring their own status as cultural artifacts caught in a period transitioning from restriction to license. If we understand spectatorship as a form of erotic consumption, these films make this consumption possible, visible, and sensational, in their appeal to the viewer's visceral faculties through the construction of erotic spectacle housed in salacious narratives of vice and excess, through the spectacle of the female body gripped by sexual desire, and through the incorporation of the spectator as figure into the films' narratives. In the process, sexploitation films widened the terms of legitimate male consumer desire, paving the way for an exponentially proliferating marketplace of sexual media, a marketplace and consumer identity that would face much pushback and critique in the 1970s porn age.

My analysis emphasizes the ways scenes of looking at erotic labor

abound in sexploitation cinema and contends that the film spectator is central to sexploitation's generic, industrial, and social identity. Following on the work of Karl Schoonover, whose analysis of the international reception of neorealist cinema reveals the construction of a spectator—the bystander, outsider, witness—whose humanism can be authenticated by geographically distant images of "imperiled corporeality," this book attends to the construction of a libidinous mode of address in a more explicitly prurient mode of production that bears no pretense of elevation.[23] The book investigates the figure of the film viewer within sexploitation films' narratives, in the mode's address to its audience, and in assorted historical reception spheres of sexploitation cinema. In legal situations, in social science, in municipal debates, in the popular press, and in trade journals, the "adult film audience" is inaugurated by the publicity attached to and the economic success accorded the sexploitation film. It is not that this figure of the "adult consumer" emerges historically only at the moment of the sexploitation film but that the peculiarly public characteristic of sexploitation focused popular interest on the activity and effects of film viewing in its relation to sexualized film content, which had often been reserved for exclusive, private, and primarily male consumption.

Sexploitation thematized this consumption and made the issue of visual access to the sexual its primary subject—in its narratives, in its mode of address to its audience, and in its promotional identity as purveyor of barely legal spectacle, designated "for adults only." Although the historical audience of sexploitation seems perhaps the most ephemeral element of this mode of production, I argue that this spectator is defined by the mode of address, marketing strategies, and narrative ploys of the films as well as being a product of cultural discourses regarding the emerging sexual marketplace within popular media. Across the book, I map the appearance and management of the figure of the sexploitation spectator in the contexts of film censorship and other forms of regulation, in the films themselves and their thematization of erotic consumption and the vagaries of new modes of erotic looking, and through the critical reception of sexploitation as a filmgoing experience and cultural phenomenon throughout the 1960s.

Historically, the 1960s marked a period in American film history when film audiences were becoming economically unpredictable due to the postwar slump of divestiture after the Paramount decree and the competition of television, an era when target markets, segmentation, and classification gained prominence.[24] Thus the figure of the adult film spectator operates as an extreme pole in the designation of the taste for a certain kind of film entertainment, set in stark contrast to the sixteen- to twenty-four-year-

old demographic Hollywood had identified as the bulk of U.S. moviegoers in the 1960s. Alongside imported art cinema, sexploitation was central in the 1960s in transforming and heightening the visibility of the category of "adults-only" entertainment. As Mark Betz and Schoonover each detail, the proximities of exploitation cinemas to art cinemas at the level of promotion and exhibition in the 1950s onward highlight their "shared discourses" and modes of audience address.[25] "Adults only" as a designation for audiences prior to the development of the ratings system in sexploitation cinema and art cinema provides one instance of the confusions generated by sexual content in marking other kinds of classed taste boundaries.[26]

By the time the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography had taken account of the threat of numerous forms of erotica in varied media to public health and the national character in 1970, the soft-core stylizations and crude renderings of sexual melodrama in sexploitation had begun to blend with hard-core pornography, which would soon overtake it.[27] Numerous sexploitation makers, such as Radley Metzger (as Henry Paris) and Joe Sarno, continued on into hard-core productions; many others did not. Whereas the filmmakers who made sexploitation and who began to make commercial pornography represented different generational groups, the audience transitioned more smoothly from the soft-core to the hard-core venue in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As with pornography, sexploitation was made with a male audience in mind, although unlike the historically privatized screening contexts for stag films and amateur porn, it opened up the possibility, in its publicness, for female audiences to attend.[28]

As a product of these social, cultural, and industrial circumstances, at the level of textuality, sexploitation often tends to narrativize this historical spectator as a thematic figure, positioned as either the peeping tom or leering voyeur who is impotent to act—like Russ Meyer's bumbling protagonist in *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959)—or the sexual psychotic whose actions confuse sexual drives and violent ones, as seen in the murderous psychotic lead in Michael and Roberta Findlay's "Flesh" trilogy, *The Touch of Her Flesh*, *The Curse of Her Flesh*, and *The Kiss of Her Flesh* (1967–68), and, later, even as permissiveness takes hold, of the "curious female" whose erotic inquisitiveness leads her toward embroilment in risky sexual scenes (*Love Me . . . Please!*; *Vibrations*, Joe Sarno, 1969). Such are the grave dangers in the satisfaction of desire and the lifting of restraint within the ideological worldview promulgated by sexploitation films. Narratively, the sexploitation film constantly contravenes the distinction between "seeing sex" and "doing sex," articulating the

fundamental quandary that motivates the troubling nature of the sexual image and its incitement to mimesis. Looking at the sexual image in this particular historical moment thus has contradictory and incendiary implications, which sexploitation films self-reflexively map. In this sense, sexploitation is always circumstantially dialoguing with itself about itself.

As this book elaborates, sex in sexploitation cannot end happily or in a gesture toward the plenitude of pleasures: owing to the extenuating threat of censorship and the necessities of legal protection, a loosely rendered moralism is deployed to do the work that the sexually explicit cannot. In this sense, sexploitation largely presents a diegetic and discursive space distinct from the utopian and naturalist tendencies ascribed to pornography, the space, in Steven Marcus's coinage, of "pornotopia."[29] Instead of a sexual economy dependent on an endless exchange and multiplication of sex acts that we see in hard-core pornography, sexploitation films provide a more stringent economy, which enumerates teleological outcomes and is dependent on logics of scarcity and what I term *guilty expenditure*. By the late 1960s, however, pressed by changes in permissiveness and competition with Hollywood and other independents, sexploitation films slowly begin to alter their approach with respect to the abundance of the sexual marketplace and acquiesce to the terms of the market in the broadening explicitness of its sexual situations and an at times "lighter" approach to sexual experimentation.

Sexploitation films and their fundamentally contradictory nature and budgetary constraints produce fissures between what is said and what is shown, between sound and image, between the promise of the trailer and the film itself, between narrative events and their outcome. They thus raise questions about the historicity of spectatorial expectations regarding sexual content in a moment hovering between prohibition and license and speak to the specific cultural climate of the 1960s, a moment marked by the tension between the overt and the covert in sexual representations. Thus this book argues that sexploitation as a mode provides a fascinating semiotics of the currency of the public revelation of sexual, frank, and salacious imagery heretofore more distinctly cordoned off within private domains of consumption.

In addition to adding to the larger film historical record in its account of sexploitation cinema's rise and decline over the course of the 1960s and its contribution to the culture of the era, this book intervenes in research that theorizes and historicizes sex in cinema within the areas of the history of independent production as well as in adult film studies and porn studies. The work of two film scholars in particular has laid the pathways for this project. Linda Williams's foundational *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure,*

and the "Frenzy of the Visible," on pornography, and Schaefer's essential study of the classical period of the exploitation film, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of the Exploitation Film, 1919–1959,* serve as chronological bookends for the sexploitation "period" and provide conceptual frameworks for this book. Although more recent studies that consider some aspects of exploitation cinema, porn, cult, and adult film have emerged, Schaefer and Williams's works still considerably define this field of research.[30]

Williams's 1989 book addresses the "problem" of pornography through a Foucauldian analysis of the genre's process of truth production and the paradox of the visibility of sexual pleasure. Williams attends to the generic features of the hard-core form, particularly in the films from the "golden era" of hard-core in the 1970s. Working through Freudian and Marxian models of sexual economy, Williams reveals embedded structures and systems of meaning within explicit moving images. Her insights raise the question as to whether one can posit a comparable ontology of the soft-core image. If hard-core's generic modus operandi invests in the presumption of the "truth of sex" in its visible evidence, then sexploitation's syntactical organization, as I here argue, offers an entirely different experience of the mediation of the sex act. In the constant teasing of the spectator with images of unmaterialized promise, of the approximation, rather than the definitive transcription, of the sex act, sexploitation films generate their own energies and receptive affects, apart from the documentary associations of the hard-core image. Sexploitation films are also clearly allied with what Williams has termed the classed and corporeal subject matter of the "body genre,"[31] a form of "sleazy," low, sordid American culture. This very crass, sleazy sensibility challenges conventions of cinematic taste and aesthetic value. Jeffrey Sconce, in his articulation of the value of sleaze as a hermeneutic for comprehending exploitation films' ethos of subterfuge, writes,

> Sleaze . . . by necessity evokes a whole range of textual issues, from the industrial mechanics of low-budget exploitation to the ever shifting terrains of reception and taste. . . . Sleaze is a feeling one has about a film that requires judging, if only in one's imagination, that there is something "improper" or "untoward" about a given text. Often sleaziness implies a circuit of inappropriate exchange involving suspect authorial intentions and/or displaced perversities in the audience.[32]

In this sense, the nature of the implicit, of sexploitation's reliance on duplicity, on subterfuge and switch and bait, opens up certain complexities and contingencies of interpretation. That complex process of reading mixed signals and the curiosity of an historical encounter with the contradictory,

sometimes anarchic sexploitation text orient the approach of *Lewd Looks* to its objects. Sexploitation films provided a public space—the adults-only theater—where the proximities of desires and distaste, spectacle and its disavowal, subterfuge and sensation, could intersect for its curious spectator. As such, different moments of reception and confrontation with the eccentric sexploitation text, in different scenes of looking, become the object of my analysis in the following chapters. Across varied methodological and historiographic scales, I track the figure of this spectator, as product of censorial regulation, of moralist anxiety, as a textual construct and thematized figure, as subject of critical and sociological speculation, as well as a motoring fantasy of retrospective reception.

Finally, I engage with the notion of sexploitation films of the 1960s as a corpus of texts and contexts constituted through a discourse of obsolescence. Sexploitation cinema's boundedness by its own historical conditions of possibility, as an extinct, finite mode of production, and the fragility of its tightrope walk on the border of the permissible and the obscene in the 1960s, produced an experience of sexual spectacle contingent on its own acknowledged evanescence. This sense of ephemerality emerged not only from the self-consciousness of the films regarding their conditions of exhibition and potential regulation but also from the fleeting nature and the sense of illicitness in the erotic images themselves. The historical place of sexploitation films within this decade of tumult and transition, and in the contexts of a fracturing and diversifying film industry, gives the films the quality of what fans and critics frequently remark on as their status as peculiar "time capsules": they are documents of changing attitudes regarding gender and sexuality and manifestations of ideological resistance to these nascent transformations. The notion of obsolescence is useful here not as a rhetoric of devaluation of these complex films and their contexts but as a way to understand the shifting valences and contingent meanings of sexual images in the public sphere of 1960s American culture, in terms of their historicity and their purchase on the recognition of cultural change.

Retro Archive, Cult Afterlives

While this book considers the historical conditions of sexploitation's public life in the 1960s, it is necessary to contextualize the reemergence of sexploitation films into wider circulation in more recent years with respect to the question of the sexploitation archive. The lack of a legacy or a sense of historicity in advance for sexploitation films has been simultaneously cultural and institutional, a product of the marginal and culturally disreputable nature of adult cinema in the long view as well as a consequence

of the inadvertent actions and decisions of the producers and distributors themselves. The independent nature of the sexploitation enterprise in the 1960s and 1970s did not predispose filmmakers and producers toward a cultural, preservationist mind-set. Sex films such as *Body of a Female* (John Amero and Michael Findlay, 1964), *All Women Are Bad* (Larry Crane, 1969), *Moonlighting Wives* (Joe Sarno, 1966), and *The Sexploiters* (Al C. Ruban, 1965) were seen to some degree as disposable commodities, made to fill a market need in a moment when nudity and sexual situations were in short supply. Some filmmakers worked for hire, or on a film-by-film basis with producers' funding, so did not necessarily own the rights to their own helmed efforts. Some less canny producers themselves saw little future value in their films, which became suddenly obsolete in the wake of hard-core pornography in the 1970s and by the heightened frankness of big-budget and studio pictures by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ascertaining existing business and production records is also a difficult and tricky endeavor—as these records exist among surviving filmmakers and those foresighted enough to have saved this documentation, although many did not. As with pornographic cinema more broadly, both the explicitly sexual and outré nature of the film material, its maligned status, and the noncanonical nature of the films have resulted in wariness and caution on the part of archivists and preservationists.[33] Very few of these films are housed in film archives, nor do they have a coherent or summary archive attached to them that might catalog representative or atypical works. Some films and promotional materials exist within larger archives, some oriented, like the Kinsey Institute Library, around inquiry into sexuality research. The salacious and sexual nature of much adult cinema has no doubt given archivists and preservationists pause, even as our knowledge of the volume of films to be preserved, the number of presumed "lost films," or ones that still need to be rediscovered has grown. Some films were sold or lost without an archival imprimatur or institutional stewardship—and the smaller number of circulating prints has also limited their capacity for archival rediscovery, although "lost" films have continued to emerge in specialty video niches, but also through scholarly rediscovery, as is the case with a newly recovered 35mm print of *The Orgy at Lil's Place* found recently at the Kinsey Institute.[34] Other bodies of texts, such as most of the sexploitation films Andy Milligan made with producer William Mishkin, are definitively lost: Mishkin's son Lewis destroyed the prints after his father's death. Data and research gathered and disseminated about sexploitation cinema have circulated piecemeal through the efforts of a small number of vigilant film scholars, amateur historians, for-profit video distributors, private collectors, and sex film devotees. This has slowly begun to change

recently, as the establishment in 2014 of an Adult Film History special interest group in the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and a growing group of younger scholars undertaking aspects of this research attest. In the age of crowdfunding and retro-nostalgia, newly organized archives are also emerging—for example, the American Genre Film Archive devoted to low-budget exploitation films and based in Austin, Texas.

Most significantly, public knowledge regarding sexploitation followed the reopening market for these films in their recirculation on cult and underground video circuits in the 1980s and now, more recently, in wider digital formats. Sexploitation films gained a robust second life on home video beginning in the mid- to late 1980s and into the early 1990s, as cult audiences, niche fans, and nostalgic enthusiasts for American trash or low culture found in the films an alternative appeal counter to the slick surfaces of studio productions. These audiences and collectors espoused a particular zeal for sexploitation films' quasi-documentary qualities as "time capsules" of the 1960s, their anachronistic and politically passé sleaziness, their transgressive demeanor of rebellious independence, their financial limitations and their aesthetics of impoverishment. In magazines such as *FilmFax, Psychotronic Video,* and *Shock Cinema,* and in the *Re/Search* compendium *Incredibly Strange Films* as well as various B-movie and "bad movie" guides, sexploitation films were among the low-cultural cinematic texts that were extolled and excavated, seen as a refreshing counter to the "corporate" pablum of late 1980s and 1990s multiplex cinema. *Incredibly Strange Films,* perhaps one of the first such publications, released in 1985, was in many ways a paean to the anachronism of sexploitation cinema—with interviews and profiles of sexploitation directors such as Doris Wishman, Joe Sarno, Herschell Gordon Lewis, and Russ Meyer.[35] For audiences of paracinema, as Jeffrey Sconce has termed it, sexploitation represented a field of practice more obscure and more appealing in its unkempt independence and illegitimacy than the discourses around the emergent talents of the New Hollywood directors or art house auteurs.[36] The era of home video opened up access to unknown and unexplored corners of autonomous and then seemingly anonymous productions, yet ones that revealed the work of intrepid operators and creative talents invested in making films in whatever venue might allow it, and despite certain limitations of means. With the widening video circulation provided by early exploitation film distributors and collectors, most notable among them Something Weird Video, but also Sinister Cinema, Video Vault, and independent collectors and video traders, this amateur, fan-oriented sphere became the logical location for the earliest amateur historical and vernacular discourses on sexploitation's mode of production, often gathered

under the broader rubric of cult or psychotronic cinema.[37] The psychotronic milieu, a tributary of postmidnight movie culture, operated at the interstices of the rise of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* and exhibited both retrospective nostalgia for the vintage of 1960s turbulence and idealism and a relish for atypical cinematic conventions; this milieu gave ground to the establishment of a sexploitation cinephilia.

The research for this book began in this largely predigital, persistently analog moment, with fanzines and mail order small print catalogs, in local video stores (such as Reel Life and Kim's Video and the well-stocked rental behemoth Tower Video in New York City) and purloined bootlegs, as well as in distinct local places like the Anthology Film Archives in New York City and urban underground film and queer film festivals. Pursuing sources and industry data on microfilm and fiche and in small corners of larger libraries and archives, the discovery of small details often took circuitous routes. That moment of this project's inception seems a far cry from the plethora of detail, however inaccurate or tendentious at times, that circulates today online on IMDb, various cult and exploitation websites, collector and fan review sites, and specialty blogs and compendia on varied aspects and ephemera connected to sexploitation cinema, and as a subset of grind house, cult, adult, or generally weird cinema histories. Much has changed in terms of the access provided to and vernacular knowledges circulating around the films and milieus that produced these peculiar, maddening, and oddly seductive films. At the same time, beyond filmmakers such as Radley Metzger and Russ Meyer, as Eric Schaefer has noted, who represented the summit of the industry and its apex of cinematic craft, and were made legible through the terms of auteurism (as I discuss in chapter 4), many more sexploitation films have remained obscure despite these niche audiences and publics. Their obscurity is reproduced as a residual and countercultural value in their second life—a reproduction of the underground status of these filmic objects, a doggedly recursive replaying of their place in time and their status as "trash."[38] Yet they also serve as grist for the mill of urban and cosmopolitan specialty tastes in a debauched scene of the historical past—made evident as much in the anecdotal and ethnographically oriented books such as Josh Alan Friedman's *Tales of Times Square* and Michelle Clifford and John Landis's *Sleazoid Express* and in the grind house fever that followed the release of Tarantino and Rodriguez's retro-fitted double feature.

Such "grind house nostalgia," as David Church and others have called it, has also witnessed a certain revivalism in sexploitation's public programming, as in the "Deuce" series at the independent microcinema Nitehawk Cinemas in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Sexploitation- and adult film–specific

blogs and online magazines, such as *The Rialto Report,* also indicate new and younger audiences, if not a third "millennial" wave of enthusiasm.[39] The 2009 sexploitation retrospective at the British Film Institute curated by Julian Marsh, which screened representative works by Meyer, Sarno, and Metzger, and the series "This Is Softcore" at Lincoln Center in New York City, which profiled Radley Metzger's films in 2014, signal a widening repertory audience. In addition to a series of documentary films produced around and about the subject of sexploitation, exploitation, and grind house cinema, including films such as *Schlock! The Secret History of American Movies* (Ray Greene, 2001), among others, and the recent *That's Sexploitation!* (Frank Henenlotter, 2013, produced by Something Weird Video) and *The Sarnos: A Life in Dirty Movies* (Wiktor Ericsson, 2013), also demonstrate a popular interest in sexploitation's history.[40] In such a ripe moment, one would hope that the sexploitation film, some fifty years later, is soon to arrive.

My interest in sexploitation films emerged out of the convergence of a subcultural and academic space of analysis and out of these questions of past moments of reception—in the cross-pollination of a feminist film theory classroom and the local underground film festival. Championed by feminist avant-garde filmmakers Peggy Ahwesh and M. M. Serra, the rediscovered sexploitation director Doris Wishman, one of the very few women working as director and producer in this primarily male-dominated industry, was soon to visit my graduate feminist film theory classroom (this was 1998). In anticipation, I went to see her film *Double Agent 73* (1974) at the New York Underground Film Festival, where Wishman was featured as a special guest. Her singular position as sole woman in a male-dominated mode of production was fascinating and stupefying, an intrigue compounded by the uniquely vertiginous style of her work and the peculiarity of the film itself. *Double Agent 73*'s conceit involved the implantation of a spy camera in the protagonist's (exotic dancer Chesty Morgan) very large breasts, making them a somatic weapon wielded by the actor contra spectator, and made the film an unwitting exercise in screen theory.[41] What may have begun as a theoretically driven interest in this mode of production and the formal architecture of its erotic spectacle became a broader concern with the complex social and political context out of which Wishman's films, and many others' films, were molded. Numerous questions emerged, among them, what was the milieu and the conditions that gave rise to such a film and its highly baroque premises and gimmicks, all bound up in the spectacle of the naked female body? What kind of audience attended and engaged with these simultaneously excessive and rhetorically complex films? The fusion and intermingling of

a subcultural, cinephile milieu and a scholarly, academic one ultimately provoked this exploration into the history of the sexploitation film and its relationship to its spectator.

In the beginning of this project, I was bootlegging VHS tapes from my Kim's Video rentals—who employed a full wall in the back corner, just outside of the hard-core porn backroom, devoted to Something Weird tapes. In the late 1990s, sexploitation's diffusion occurred through videotape, and this was certainly the key intervention of Something Weird Video in the field, the Seattle-based video distributor, run by the late Mike Vraney, that from the early 1990s onward bought many sexploitation film prints outright and in bulk from whomever they could and built perhaps the largest commercial collection of sexploitation, exploitation, scare films, and other filmic arcana.[42] Their evolving catalog contains an impressive assortment of sexploitation but also drug films, hygiene films, imported spy films, trailers, 16mm and 8mm adult loops, and early porn. A fruitful collaboration with the producer David Friedman and the acquisition of numerous works by Joe Sarno, Harry Novak, Doris Wishman, Barry Mahon, and many others secured their place as the scrappy Criterion Collection of sexploitation film, with less emphasis on pristine restoration and more on voracity. Catering to a retro-nostalgia fueled in the VHS era for the shocks and titillations of yesterday, the stock in trade of Something Weird relied on the premise of the time capsule and of giving voice to the horizon of the past spectator's desire, however bewildered, aroused, or embarrassed.

At the time of writing, sexploitation films by varied filmmakers and from diverse distributors are available for instant viewing through many digital, online streaming, and on-demand services, such as Fandor, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu, as well as whole films that appear and disappear on YouTube and other online video sites. The changes to the video market and the reign of streaming delivery have no doubt had an impact on the ways that sexploitation gained value via video circulation, and its larger effects remain to be seen in relation to the acquisition of physical media. The establishment of grind house–oriented or exploitation-centered streaming channels, such as Exploitation.tv and The Grindhouse Channel, is an attempt by independent distributors to adjust to the changing climate of home entertainment. Nevertheless, this sea change in digital access to the films, like the proliferation of access to production information regarding films via online fora, is remarkable and has no doubt made sexploitation a more popular and widely viewed form in the popular cultural public sphere and particularly among niche, specialty audiences, even if it does little for actual preservation or the sexploitation archive. Yet what

persists, at some level, is the sense of sexploitation cinema's remaining and relative obscurity as an aesthetic form, even as canons and countercanons of significant filmmakers (Sarno, Wishman, Metzger, Meyer, the Findlays, Lewis, Milligan), actors (Audrey Campbell, Pat Barrington, Marsha Jordan), and producers (Novak, Friedman, Weiss) have found a new audience in the digital context of collector, niche, and narrow-casted tastes. Specialty distributors and conservationists, such as Something Weird, Alternative Cinema's Retro Seduction line, Cult Epics, Vinegar Syndrome, and Distribpix, are all recirculating the legacy of 1960s and 1970s sex cinema in more visible ways, available for purchase on Amazon, at Best Buy, and at other mainstream retailers. What made sexploitation films forgotten was in part the perception of their negligible status as culturally valuable texts or objects and their sense of obsolescence and anachronistic function once hard-core arrived. The work of intrepid collectors and enthusiasts, as well as that of for-profit video businesses with a vested interest, such as Something Weird, has immeasurably reconstituted the history at the level of access and what can be watched and rewatched.

But it is still the labor of film history to recover the wider aesthetic, cultural, and industrial significance of these works—their importance in a wider field of film practice and in their innovation in the battles against censorship and the policing of obscenity law. This book focuses on the formation of sexploitation cinema as a complex aesthetic and cultural phenomenon, which had a force and drive of its own. This approach has its limitations in terms of its granularity, but it is committed to giving a wider sense of sexploitation's public existence as an object of scrutiny, a field of practice, discourse, and concern in wider debates about sexuality, obscenity, spectatorship, and film culture of the period. It accounts for the tenor of sexploitation's circulation in the public life of media forms and traces the discourses that accrued around it, particularly concerning the fractious status of adult filmgoing itself.

Lewd Looks joins a range of scholarship that explores from varied perspectives the film culture and sexual politics of the 1960s, its status as representation, culture, and cult.[43] It aims to elaborate on a period that is underrepresented in the histories of American cinema, perhaps due to its "transitional" and thus liminal status between "classical Hollywood" and New Hollywood and on the margins of other independent production scenes.[44] As an entry in the contextualization of the history of adult film, soft- and hard-core, it addresses the relationship between economic, industrial, legal, representational, and discursive shifts that allowed the emergence of a previously shadowy category of film and spectator. This book assesses the importance of sexual content to the American film scene

of the 1960s and establishes how this content was regulated, classified, and managed by regulatory and public agencies in the name of a collective national propriety. Additionally, as a contribution to theories of the obscene image, it conjoins the cultural and symbolic work that these images perform with an understanding of their circulation within a public sphere of cinematic consumption.

Sexploitation film thus remains a low-cultural, "bad" object without a housing archive or a unitary method that might arrogate its meaning. As an ephemeral, and, until recently, disposable cultural form, sexploitation as an object of knowledge requires its "collectors" to be comprehensive and expansive. Affectionately allied with the "trashy," the research paradigm that sexploitation demands necessitates multiple methodologies. This project employs reception studies as a mode of film history that intersects with both cultural studies and historiography; theories of the image and of gender and sexuality; and the historicization of the discourse of the film audience. In a sense, this book is as much answerable to a cultural history and the history of sexual representation and politics as it is to film studies. Barbara Klinger, in retooling and reorienting reception studies to the aims of cinema studies, connects the goals of reception with the goals of film history more generally.[45] Klinger argues for the necessity of a "total history" that attempts to bring together as many aspects of a film's social existence as possible, acknowledging the impossibly idealist nature of the task, one that must nevertheless be pursued to achieve a "materialist approach to textuality." Piecing together the history of sexploitation film and its reception requires the mobilization of varying and diverse sources and texts. One challenge that emerges is how to integrate and synthesize primary materials from disparate areas of research into a cohesive historical narrative. For the purposes of this book's analytic, the film spectator is deployed as a historical figure who operates as a point of synthesis, a figure who emblematizes the crisis of the film industry as a whole as well as being a figure for the projection of the specific anxieties of the sexploitation film and of the problem of "consuming sex."

By reconstructing some of the conditions and contexts of sexploitation films' public life, one can, in Klinger's words, pursue the sense of sexploitation's "semiotic environment" in which relations between different audiences and viewers of sexploitation encountered the films and their traces.[46] The engagement here with discourses of reception studies attempts to bridge the gap between understanding empirical spectators and imagined ones through the dense discursive materiality of sexploitation's public life. By thinking the textual spectator produced in and by the films, the "peek snatcher" or the "girl with hungry eyes" alongside the historical

spectator whose traces appear in archival accounts, I would like not to foreclose on the relation between the materiality of actual social practices and the animating stakes of the discursive and of cultural fantasy.

Chapters

The chapters herein move through a set of contexts through which sexploitation's public status was mediated and talked about. Chapter 1 discusses the importance of regulatory and censorship contexts to the constitution of sexploitation film as a mode of production and set of aesthetic strategies. The chapter analyzes the history of sexploitation producers' wrangling with censor boards, various obscenity suits and legal interventions, and other forms of regulation and self-regulation. While the history of censorship is only one framework through which to understand sexploitation's mode of production, this chapter argues that a horizon of prohibition on sexual content was constitutive to sexploitation's identity. The chapter thus surveys the appearance of sexploitation in these highly public and contentious disputes about sex, cinema, and aesthetic value and investigates how sexploitation producers both capitalized on and negotiated accusations of obscenity amid a transforming national standard of screen permissiveness. Detailing the history of legal decisions that wore away at the acceptability of nudity and sexual situations; specific contestations of sexploitation producers, such as Radley Metzger and Ted Paramore, with state censor boards; and the late-1960s climate of local and community uprisings against adult films, this chapter analyzes the terms through which an idea of proper and improper viewers was produced within censorship discourse around the threat of sexploitation as a new type of filmgoing activity. Therefore censorship, regulation, and the history of obscenity law are deployed as one sphere of reception of sexploitation films, yielding a set of expectations regarding spectatorial response and aesthetic value.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the aesthetic and thematic manifestations of sexploitation films over the decade, tracing the development of the films' style and modes of address. They survey the range of films created in the 1960s and their unique textuality, attending to the shifting terms of representation of nudity and the sexualized female body in its varied subgenres and cycles. Elaborating some generic and ideological characteristics of sexploitation films of the 1960s, these two chapters contend that sexploitation films, in their constitutive interest in presenting forbidden spectacle, often thematized their own conditions of reception and more broadly made the "problem" of consuming sex—in scenarios of looking,

peeping, erotic consumption, and scenes of sexual exchange—their anchoring tension or paradox. Chapter 2 tracks the shift from the early-1960s "nudie cuties," such as *The Immoral Mr. Teas, The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1961), and *Bunny Yeager's Nude Camera* (Barry Mahon, 1963), among others, with their formulaic and comic presentations of female nudity, to the darker, more violent variegations in mid- to late-1960s films often called "roughies," such as *Lorna* (Russ Meyer, 1964), *The Defilers* (Lee Frost, 1965), *Sin in the Suburbs* (Joe Sarno, 1964), and *Bad Girls Go to Hell* (Doris Wishman, 1965). Chapter 3 examines the rising interest in female sexual desire and agency, and alternative sexual practices in the continuation of the roughie form and in films that begin to deal with female desire and agency, and forms of sexual "deviance," such as lesbianism and sadomasochism, in quasi-documentary and sex exposé variants and that take up the countercultural zeitgeist of more liberatory attitudes, such as swinger films. Chapter 3 considers films such as *White Slaves of Chinatown* (Joseph P. Mawra, 1964), *Free Love Confidential* (Gordon Heller, 1967), *Office Love-In, White Collar Style* (Stephen Apostolof, 1968), and *Monique, My Love* (Peter Woodcock, 1969). Both chapters analyze films that articulate a certain concern with the transforming sexual marketplace and the reconceptualization of gender and sexual roles within the cultural context of the 1960s. Embedded within the narrative and syntax of sexploitation films, despite their overwhelming and chaotic variety, is a reflexive interest in the consumption of sex and its conditions of visibility within an economy that vacillates between notions of scarcity and abundance. Over the course of the decade, sexploitation's preoccupation with corporeal spectacle, sexual consumerism, and female sexual autonomy is paramount and gets mapped across a broad expansion of interest, from male peepers and perverts, in chapter 2, to the emergence of female observers and female sexual agents in the 1960s, discussed in chapter 3. The conclusion of chapter 3 points to ways sexploitation films narrate their place in a wider sex film market, as in the meta-backstage drama *Starlet!* (Richard Kanter, 1969).

Chapter 4 elaborates on the critical and cultural reception of sexploitation film as a phenomenon over the course of the 1960s, assessing how sexploitation films, their audiences, and their exhibition contexts entered the public imaginary and became indicative of the larger social problem of sexual media as well as the more specialized problem of filmic taste. Drawing from varied archival sources, it examines different discourses of filmgoing that obtained within this marginal mode of production. Rather than presuming the shorthand of the audience as dupe, which sexploitation filmmakers themselves often perpetuated in their promotional appeals

to the "slack jawed trade,"[47] it points to places where sexploitation film, as a type of filmgoing experience, began to be negotiated through a language of aesthetic distinction and connoisseurship. In these discourses of reception, the figure of the adult film audience becomes an animating object of projection, speculation, and anxiety but also is newly constituted as a taste public and a consumer. It treats the way the reception of Russ Meyer and Radley Metzger films positioned them as "auteurs" of the mode as well as offering unique accounts of countercultural forays into the sex film scene in the mid- to late 1960s. The last section of the chapter examines how the federal inquest into obscenity set its sights on the empirical audience as an object of knowledge. While acknowledging the ultimately fragmentary nature of these transcriptions of sexploitation's reception, this chapter illuminates the conditions—and the anxieties—of moviegoing within the newly constituted adult film marketplace as well as sexploitation's determinative role in defining it.

Thus this book investigates a set of interlocking contexts for the emergence and decline of the sexploitation film, using the optic of reception and the figure of the spectator. In approximating some of the conditions of sexploitation films' reception across the decade of the 1960s, it reconstructs some of the ways that these contradictory films, which trafficked in libidinal excess and forms of diegetic restriction, were received, perceived, and regulated by their various publics and how they spoke to the era's anxieties about gender, sexuality, and the obscene image. Finally, *Lewd Looks* problematizes some commonplaces around our notions of the 1960s as an untrammeled, liberatory sphere by pursuing the semiotics and affective resonance of sexploitation's bounded images, its illicit views, and the horizons of the historical spectator. Sexploitation, as *Lewd Looks* suggests, was always an anachronistic, belated form, about to expire and about to begin, caught between different regimes of representation and between a wary circumspection about social and sexual change and a capitalization of its profit-making potentials. Moralizing and hedonistic, hearkening to a time before such roiling transformation, yet also prefiguring a possibly more sexually egalitarian, if unreachable, future in the fantasized eruption of corporeal pleasures, sexploitation's contradictory identity articulates the capacity of new cinematic forms both to trace sedimentation and to promise the novel shocks of contingency. At the heart of these films lie the fleshiness and obdurate materiality of bodies both recalcitrant to and in excess of the hold of the gawker's gaze.