Part I: Mainstream Media and the Sexual Revolution

1 * Rate It X? Hollywood Cinema and the End of the Production Code

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We will oppose these intrusions into a communications art-form shielded and protected by the First Amendment. We believe the screen should be as free for filmmakers as it is for those who write books, produce television material, publish newspapers and magazines, compose music and create paintings and sculptures.

. . . I have urged film creators to remember that freedom without discipline is license, and that's wrong, too. I have, in the many meetings I have had with creative people in film, suggested that the freedom which is rightly theirs ought to be a responsible freedom and each individual film-maker must judge his work in that sensible light.

JACK VALENTI, MPAA, "Motion Picture Production Code and Ratings Program: A System of Self-Regulation," personal statement of Jack Valenti, 1968.

Commercial American movies are at last beginning to talk about sex with pertinent and refreshing candor. But although they are outspoken, most of the new movies are less revolutionary than they look. Traditional puritanical attitudes are often concealed beneath the kinky contemporary trappings, still dictating rewards and punishments for the characters. Only the language of the sermons has changed; now they are phrased in the up-to-date psychoanalytical lingo that the "permissive society" understands.

STEPHEN FARBER, "A Film That Forgets Sex Can Be Fun . . . ," *New York Times*, 1971.

Historians have described the period from the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s as one of the most tumultuous and transformative in American film history, perhaps second only to the coming of sound.[1] In addition to the myriad pressures that rocked American society at this time, the decision on the part of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to finally abandon the increasingly obsolete Production Code in 1968 in favor of a voluntary age-based rating system enabled the possi-

bility of making more adult-themed Hollywood films that could explore, in unprecedented detail, formerly regulated topics such as sexuality and violence. Given the profound changes in sexual and cultural mores from the time of the establishment of the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934, this transformation was a long time coming. Although the dramatic shift in the treatment of screen sexuality was embraced by some as a sign of Hollywood's belated willingness to deal with more culturally relevant, mature subject matter, others objected to many of these new films and lamented the demise of the family audience. It is clear that the MPAA, straddling both sides of this divide, introduced the new Code and Rating Administration (CARA)[2] largely as a public relations ploy to help Hollywood's faltering box office, to refresh the organization's image, and to answer the demands of the fragmented filmgoing audience, particularly its most lucrative demographics: the increasingly well-educated adult audience, and the youth market.

This chapter examines this transitional period in film history, using the backdrop of shifts in the social, cultural, and sexual climate of the era to consider debates about sexuality and sexual representation in a number of films made at this time. My emphasis will be on those films made immediately preceding and after the implementation of the rating system through 1973–1974, when this new system was largely consolidated and Hollywood had recovered from a period of severe economic crisis and instability. I will concentrate on films that were controversial for their sexual representation, whether in the courts, through the MPAA's regulatory constraints, or through the media. Before discussing this period, however, brief background on Hollywood during the years preceding the adoption of the rating system will provide context for this transformative move from the PCA-era model of "harmless" entertainment suitable for all to one that allows for discretion and distinction on the basis of age appropriateness, a system promoted by Jack Valenti as "responsible" entertainment.[3]

Code and Law: Postwar Challenges to the PCA and the Changing Legal Status of Motion Pictures

In the postwar period the Hollywood studios were forced to forego their oligopolistic control of the film business when a Supreme Court ruling in 1948, *U.S. v. Paramount Pictures et al.*, required them to divest of their theatrical holdings. Along with the dramatic decline in film attendance that began in the late 1940s and continued into the 1960s, production costs increased significantly, fewer films were made, and more money

was invested in a smaller number of films with the hopes of realizing large financial returns. Challenges to the Production Code increased significantly during the period, as the PCA-enforced morality collided with changing audience demands and industry conditions. Foreign films, notable for addressing adult themes, began to make inroads at the box office through the proliferation of art house theaters.

A foreign film became the subject of a groundbreaking legal case that changed the status of motion pictures in American society. *Il Miracolo* (*The Miracle*) was one portion of an anthology film, *L'Amore* (1948; *The Ways of Love*). Directed by Roberto Rossellini, it was the story of a peasant woman (Anna Magnani) who believes that a stranger she sleeps with is Saint Joseph, convincing herself that the baby she carries is the product of an immaculate conception. The film sparked controversy in its native Italy and was deemed blasphemous by the Catholic Church both there and in the United States. It also was condemned by the Catholic Legion of Decency, becoming the subject of localized pickets in New York City, where it opened in December 1950. Although *The Miracle* performed well at the box office, the New York State Board of Regents revoked its license in response to various pressures. When the film's distributor, Joseph Burstyn, appealed the regents' decision and the New York State Supreme Court upheld the ban, he took his case all the way to the Supreme Court and won.

Burstyn v. Wilson (1952), also known as "The Miracle decision," reversed the precedent set by the 1915 *Mutual v. Ohio* case (regarding D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*), which denied First Amendment protection to motion pictures. In the *Burstyn* case, Justice Tom Clark overturned the ban on the film, describing cinema as "a significant medium for the communication of ideas" and concluding that "the importance of motion pictures as an organ of public opinion is not lessened by the fact that they are designed to entertain as well as inform."[4] *The Miracle* decision effectively argued that films should not be subjected to censorship simply because they are produced by an industry conducted for profit (as was the press, in any case). Although the case was about a foreign film made beyond the purview of MPAA restrictions, the effect of this decision on Hollywood filmmaking was enormous. By dramatically modifying the legal status of local and state censorship boards, *Burstyn* became a "watershed moment" for future films about politically sensitive and controversial issues.

One significant outcome of the studio divestiture was that MPAA members no longer had guaranteed exhibition outlets for their products. The autonomy of theatrical exhibitors coupled with film's new First

Amendment privileges eliminated the necessary collusion among all parties required for the survival of self-regulation. The MPAA could no longer effectively police film content through the Production Code. As a consequence, independent producers and distributers—whose numbers rose dramatically as a result of industry restructuring—began to risk offering more adult fare in American motion pictures. For example, producer and director Otto Preminger released his provocative film, *The Moon Is Blue* (1953) through United Artists (UA) without obtaining a seal of approval, providing an early test of the waning relevance of the PCA. The "scandal" of *The Moon Is Blue*, adapted from a successful stage play, focused on its risqué dialogue (including the use of the previously forbidden word "virgin"). Despite its lack of a seal and its condemnation by the Legion of Decency, the film was a financial success.

Other studios and filmmakers were willing to tackle more sensational topics to draw people back into theaters and to push against the constraints of the PCA in a variety of ways. In turn, the PCA responded with increased flexibility and by revising the code several times, beginning in 1956. Some films reflect this flexibility: *From Here to Eternity* (1953), for its more liberal attitude toward adultery; *The French Line* (1954), with its revealing costumes on Jane Russell; and Preminger's *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955) and *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), dealing, respectively, with the previously forbidden topics of drug use and homosexuality. Another controversial project, Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll* (1956), based on a notorious one-act play by Tennessee Williams, received a code seal to the surprise of many observers but was nevertheless condemned by the legion, which targeted theaters exhibiting the picture in its campaign against it.

Sex Scenes and Ratings Rumbles

Theaters became a primary target for contestation of controversial material at this time. Although the *Paramount* decision enabled theater owners to book films in a more open and competitive "free" market, they were also no longer supported by a studio oligopoly that had historically been willing and able to defend them from public pressures by lobby groups such as the Legion of Decency. The MPAA member studios had no direct financial interest in the success of newly independent theater owners and consequently adopted a policy not to intervene in local censorship issues that arose in the distribution and exhibition of challenging material. With virtually no financial or public relations support from the MPAA, many exhibitors frequently capitulated to the pressures

of local activists and censorship boards. A few theater owners, however, fought back.

One such case involved a Cleveland Heights, Ohio, art theater manager, Nico Jacobellis, who defied a local police order and was arrested for exhibiting Louis Malle's film *Les Amants* (1958, *The Lovers*) in 1959. The film chronicles the unhappy marriage of a young woman and her older husband, featuring partial nudity and a long sequence in which she meets a young man, falls in love, and presumably has sex with him. The theater owner, Louis Sher, and Daniel Frankel—president of the distributor Zenith International Films—decided to challenge the obscenity ruling in a suit that took five years to make its way through the courts. *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964) proved to be a crucial test case both for the regulation of film content as well as state censorship in general. In the ruling, Justice William Brennan contested the use of "community standards" as a measure for labeling the film obscene, for a time redefining community not as a local jurisdiction but as "the society at large," "the public, or people in general." He argued that though obscenity might have "a varying meaning from time to time," it should not vary substantively "from town to town or county to county."[5] Interestingly, Brennan supported an age-based model to help distinguish among degrees of adult entertainment, something the MPAA would subsequently adopt. Revision of this ruling became crucial to the ways in which obscenity cases would be reconceived almost a decade later.

Another significant court case pertaining to sexual representation on screen and the issue of "obscenity" took place in 1957 with *Excelsior Pictures Corp v. New York Board of Regents*, a court decision involving a low-budget, nudist/exploitation film: *The Garden of Eden* (1954). When the case found its way to the New York State Court of Appeals, the presiding judge, Charles Desmond, ruled that the nudity depicted in the film was not obscene. *Excelsior v. Regents* was one of the crucial decisions that "effectively ended the ban on nudity in motion pictures and also contributed to breaking the New York censor board."[6] This led to the proliferation of other nudist movies and to the rise of sexploitation cinema generally, as classical exploitation films were surpassed by more daring fare, beginning with Russ Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959; figure 1.1). The influence of exploitation film on mainstream Hollywood would certainly begin to show over the course of the 1960s and into the 1970s, leading one historian to label the new group of Hollywood filmmakers coming of age at this time as "the exploitation generation."[7]

By the end of the 1950s, interpretation and enforcement of the code were relaxed. The changing legal status of motion pictures with their

Fig. 1.1 The popularity of Russ Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) helped initiate a cycle of low-budget "sexploitation" films that in turn exerted an influence over Hollywood filmmaking through the 1960s and 1970s.

First Amendment protection meant that debates about obscenity on screen gradually became the primary criterion for banning a film's exhibition. The PCA was increasingly pressed to confront the murky issues around this ill-defined concept as a way of continuing to self-regulate its product in a new era of "permissiveness." The idea of classifying films based on age appropriateness gained currency by the late 1950s, since its implementation could enable the MPAA to deal with the disparate demands of audiences. That is, some sectors were seeking more adult fare,

and others—such as religious and civic groups—were increasingly upset by the lax enforcement of the Production Code. Since 1936, the Legion of Decency had such a system in place with its A1 (Unobjectionable for general patronage), A2 (Unobjectionable for adults), B (Objectionable in part), and C (Condemned) categories. The United Kingdom, notoriously more conservative than the rest of Europe, also had a rating system. Yet there was division among MPAA members and within the PCA about the merits of swapping the code for a classification system. In the early 1960s the MPAA president Eric Johnston fought against the legion's lobby to get the MPAA to endorse a classificatory scheme, arguing that such a system would be undemocratic because it would supersede parental authority and decision making.[8] Various historians, however, have countered that this line of reasoning is specious and that Johnston and his supporters were far more concerned about the box-office repercussions of classification.

Clearly something had to be done to cope with the changing cultural climate that demonstrated a significant market for more adult fare. The inability of the PCA to adequately control studio product led to a situation in which, by 1966, only 59 percent of all films shown in the United States had an MPAA seal (compared to 95 percent compliance before the Paramount decree). Moreover, between 1963 and 1965, thirty-nine films by MPAA-member companies were either not submitted to the PCA or were released through subsidiaries after being denied a seal.[9] Censorial action against specific films—including local boycotts, arrests, prosecutions, confiscations, and license revocations—increased tenfold. By 1965, roughly 60 percent of the films in general release were met by some sort of local censorship action, virtually all of it targeted at the nation's exhibitors.[10]

To help broker the problems, after Eric Johnston's sudden death in 1963, the MPAA instituted a revised Production Code in September 1966 that Kevin Sandler describes as "a prototype that two years later would morph into a classification system."[11] The first "trial run" for this new system was instituted by Jack Valenti, the newly appointed president of the MPAA in 1966, in his handling of the controversial Mike Nichols film, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966). Released by Warner Bros., the film obtained a PCA exemption in order to secure an MPAA-sanctioned release when the studio agreed to label the film "Suggested for Mature Audiences" (SMA) with all advertising for the picture containing the blocked letter statement: "NO PERSONS UNDER 18 ADMITTED UNLESS ACCOMPANIED BY A PARENT." This exemption, based on the film's extensive use of profanity, left the task of enforcement to exhibitors and

was viewed as a "test case" for an age-based regulatory system. Although Valenti was clear that the special code exemption offered to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* would not set a precedent for future cases, the film's enormous box-office success certainly encouraged the accelerated production of more adult-oriented dramas in Hollywood at the time. For example, in 1967, the number of SMA-designated films rose dramatically from six to forty-four. In the twelve months preceding the adoption of the 1968 rating system in November of that year, approximately 60 percent of films released by the studios carried the SMA tag.[12] By now the picture was clear: adult-themed films made money and helped to maintain the profile of the film industry against an increasingly competitive leisure and entertainment marketplace.

Perhaps Valenti's biggest challenge after becoming MPAA president was when the British import, *Blow-Up* (1966), directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, was denied a seal of approval for release by MGM. The fight by MGM to have the film granted the SMA designation was to no avail. The problem, for the PCA, involved two scenes: one in which the main character frolics with two teenage girls and pubic hair is very briefly visible (full frontal nudity then, as now, continues to be controversial), and another in which he watches his neighbors having intercourse. Several factors made this case notable: first, MGM had a long history of vigorously supporting the code; second, Antonioni was an internationally respected Italian auteur who refused to make the two cuts requested by the PCA in order to obtain a seal. He had an ironclad agreement with MGM according him this power. Moreover, *Blow-Up* had already been released to box-office and critical success in Europe and had won the Cannes Film Festival's Grand Prix as Great Britain's official entry.

MGM ultimately got around the problem of noncompliance with the PCA by releasing the film under the banner of its wholly owned and operated non-MPAA subsidiary, Premier Pictures. After *Blow-Up* performed exceedingly well at the box office, the studio dropped the matter. But as James Monaco remarks, "The whole *Blow-Up* incident demonstrated to most observers that the Hollywood Production Code and the seal of approval had, in essence, become irrelevant."[13] From these cases, the introduction of the MPAA's age-based rating system appeared to offer a pragmatic compromise to the changing times. It provided a solution that Valenti was prepared to make in the transition from the "harmless" entertainment model of the PCA era, to the "responsible" one that Valenti would strive to standardize and maintain in the new system of boundary maintenance provided by the voluntary age-based rating system. With the newfound First Amendment freedom accorded to motion

pictures, Valenti offered a contradictory message of support for creative freedom so long as this artistry conformed to CARA's model of "responsible" and "disciplined" freedom.

The Rating System and Its Vicissitudes

The rating system initially included four categories: G (suggested for "General" audiences), M (for "Mature" audiences, which changed to GP in 1970, then renamed to PG in 1972 [Parental Guidance recommended]), R ("Restricted," no one under age sixteen [later seventeen, in 1972] admitted unless accompanied by a parent or adult guardian), and X (no one under sixteen admitted [this age eventually varied across different regions]). Within a few weeks of introducing the new system on October 7, 1968, it was adopted industry-wide with the task of classifying films in advance of their release falling to the CARA. Films rated G, M, and R received an MPAA seal, while those rated X did not. The MPAA sought copyright only for the first three ratings, ultimately leaving the X rating vulnerable to widespread interpretation and appropriation. Ostensibly, Valenti felt that Hollywood and the MPAA had no use for the X rating, since it represented material that precluded an MPAA seal of approval anyway. The National Association of Theater Owners (NATO), however, had insisted on its adoption as a means of protecting its members from local prosecution. That the X classification was not copyrighted led many independent producers to freely adopt it, often as a publicity stunt and advertising gimmick, without ever submitting their films for CARA review. For filmmakers working under the purview of the Hollywood industry with mainstream aspirations, the X rating could pose an enormous threat to the widespread distribution and exhibition of films dealing with adult, controversial subject matter.

Less than a month after the new CARA system took effect, the first appeal was filed against an X rating. The claim was made by a small non-MPAA company, Sigma III, which had produced a low-budget antiwar film, *Greetings* (1968), directed by the then unknown Brian De Palma and starring a young Robert De Niro. The problematic scene was one in which several characters watch a hardcore stag reel, images of which are included in the film. Instead of merely cutting the scene down, Sigma III used the appeal process to call immediate attention to a fundamental and larger problem concerning the very structure of the new rating system, arguing that its film had been evaluated unfairly and that CARA would have given *Greetings* an R if it had been a studio picture. Jon Lewis suggests that the executives at Sigma had a point, but their argument—

Fig. 1.2 Coral Browne nuzzles Susannah York's nipple in *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), a scene the led to an early showdown over the X rating between the MPAA and Robert Aldrich, the film's director and producer. (Digital frame enlargement.)

heard by an "all-industry committee" consisting entirely of MPAA member executives—would have been unsympathetic to such a claim.[14] In the end, the appeal was lost and Sigma III eventually released a cut R version of the film following a short release of the X. The story quickly faded from the trades.

Soon after, two other appeals were filed on behalf of *If* (1968)—a British import directed by Lindsay Anderson for a scene depicting full frontal nudity—and *The Killing of Sister George* (1968; figure 1.2)—adapted from the successful British stage play about a destructive lesbian relationship, and directed by American Robert Aldrich. From the outset, *Sister George's* subject matter automatically made it relatively groundbreaking for a Hollywood film, albeit one that was produced independently. At issue for CARA was a sexually explicit seduction scene between two women. Although Anderson made a few cuts to his film to gain an R rating for *If*, Aldrich was unable to appease CARA without significantly altering the film's content and meaning. Aldrich defended the seduction scene's inclusion in the film as a crucial and dramatic moment of betrayal that effectively ends the central couple's relationship. Despite that the story's integrity was one line of defense, in a transcribed discussion with the scene's two stars the director is quoted as saying "What gets people into the theater? This scene. . . . So it's an unavoidable must." This was arguably a way of convincing actress Susannah York to agree to a sex scene that she was quite publically and vociferously against shooting. Elsewhere, Aldrich acknowledged the scene's exploitative poten-

tial when he said: "We have to bring off the most erotic, provocative, English-language sex-scene that anyone has photographed."[15]

Aldrich lost his appeal, and subsequently sent a letter to Valenti—a portion of which was leaked and printed in *Variety*—in which he complained that the X was an unreasonable designation, one creating the false impression that *The Killing of Sister George* was "a dirty picture not fit for viewing by anyone."[16] The director went on to argue that the X rating as a descriptive classification was too broad precisely because it equated controversial content (as featured in his film) with more prurient content, ranging from softcore simulation to hardcore live action. In addition, the X designation severely undermined the film's box-office potential, since its pornographic taint spilled over into censorship of the film by national exhibitors and restricted potential advertising opportunities in many media outlets both nationally and locally.

Aldrich's letter quite rightly pointed out the problems with CARA's failure to distinguish among different categories of adult-only entertainment. The X rating, when initially outlined by Valenti, was never intended to exclusively imply "a dirty picture"; nonetheless, this was the connotation that it quickly acquired. Aldrich argued for the recognition of nonpornographic films that were clearly intended only for adult viewers and that simultaneously offered up serious dramatic fare, much like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* In the end, Lewis surmises, Valenti refused to agree with Aldrich because the MPAA could not control the X rating[17]; nor did Valenti have any interest in having MPAA members produce X-rated pictures, especially as negative connotations accrued around the designation.

After failing in his bid to change the CARA rating, Aldrich continued to battle on behalf of *Sister George*, seeking legal assistance from the ACLU to help contend with the problem of promoting and distributing the film. Because so many newspapers refused to advertise X-rated pictures, Aldrich filed his complaint with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), calling into question antitrust issues related to fair access to advertising. The ramifications of these restrictions were huge for independent producers and distributers who were responsible for the majority of X-rated products. Aldrich's battle also had the support of NATO, the members of which opposed advertising bans that could undermine their freedom to screen non-MPAA films.[18] Many theaters favored an AO (Adults Only) rating, which could delineate between adult-themed material and the X-rated fare that was increasingly synonymous with softcore and hardcore sexual representation. Aldrich and his legal team alleged that the newspaper syndicates, TV and radio net-

works, and mass-market magazines "operated in collusion with the film studios to make it difficult for independents to market their X-rated product lines."[19]

He lost the case and went on to release *Sister George* to a poor showing at the box office. Reviews of the film didn't help. Although many of the performances were praised, especially Beryl Reid as the title character, the infamous sex scene that Aldrich fought so hard to retain was singled out for attack by several critics. In the *New York Times*, Renata Adler described it as setting "a special kind of low in the treatment of sex—any kind of sex—in the movies now."[20] Stanley Kauffmann in *The New Republic* quipped:

> I suppose there may be a few remote nomads in Turkestan who haven't yet heard of the scene in *The Killing of Sister George* where Coral Browne sucks Susannah York's left nipple. I won't pretend to be blasé about it: it's a startling scene to encounter in an "aboveground" picture. But like the film's Naughty Language, it's so obvious an attempt to get the picture talked about that I resent talking about it.[21]

Since the explicitness of this so-called scandalous sex scene actually only involved the caressing and tonguing of Susannah York's nipple, it is interesting that it so unanimously placed the film's "aboveground" aspirations in question.

That the X rating didn't help *Sister George*'s performance at the box office is doubtless. On the other hand, the self-imposed X rating that UA gave to John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), released as Aldrich's legal battle was well under way, certainly didn't appear to hamper that film's enormous success at the box office. The film chronicles the journey of would-be hustler Joe Buck (Jon Voight) from Texas to New York, where he is convinced his macho cowboy persona will yield him enormous wealth from lonely upper-middle class women. His dreams are quickly dashed, and he forms an uneasy alliance with a sickly conman—Ratso Rizzo (Dustin Hoffman)—who initially hopes to profit from Buck's naïveté. Dealing with urban decay, drug use, male hustling, homosexuality, and a palpable homosocial bond in the relationship between the film's two leads, *Midnight Cowboy* ranked number seven at the box office that year, earning $11 million domestically. It also won the Best Picture Oscar for UA, Best Director for Schlesinger, Best Screenplay for former "blacklistee" Waldo Salt, and Best Actor nominations for both Hoffman and Voight.

The self-applied X rating is a curious part of the film's history that reflects, in this instance, acquiescence to the perceived "problem" of de-

picting homosexuality on the part of the studio rather than to CARA restrictiveness. According to Tino Balio, the film was initially accorded an R, but UA president Arthur Krim opted to self-apply the X after consulting with a Columbia University psychiatrist because he feared the adverse effects of "the homosexual frame of reference on youngsters."[22] The film's producers, Schlesinger and Jerome Hellman, agreed with the decision. Released just one month before the Stonewall Riots of June 1969, which marked a new era in the gay liberation movement, *Midnight Cowboy* is a fascinating countercultural document that draws on both the buddy film formula and a dystopian rereading of the Western genre in innovative ways. It is interesting to note that, unlike *The Killing of Sister George*, reviews at the time found little that was particularly salacious or exploitative about its treatment of homosexuality. That Joe Buck is consistently portrayed as a reluctant and unwilling partner in these inexplicit but suggestive sex scenes may be one reason. The women in *Sister George*, on the other hand, are depicted as mutually invested in their sexual pleasure. The sex seen on screen, despite that it only involves breasts, is considerably more overt.

Despite its success, *Midnight Cowboy* did not ignite an industrywide trend in X-rated filmmaking, though it certainly brought into question its industrial utility. For example, another topical film from 1969, *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (figure 1.3), was cut slightly to avoid an X.[23] A satire chronicling the marital and extramarital relations between two upper middle-class couples, the film begins with Bob and Carol (Robert Culp and Natalie Wood) attending an Esalen-type self-actualization institute where they are inspired to transform their marriage and their relationships to those around them into partnerships of total honesty. The "institute" sequence is presented as a send-up of 1960s countercultural and therapeutic discourses, depicting primal scream therapy and nude massage and meditation, as well as a marathon, twenty-four-hour consciousness-raising group session (one woman, e.g., is attending in her quest for "better orgasms").

Back in Los Angeles, Bob and Carol share the "beauty" of this experience with the skeptical and more conservative Ted and Alice (Elliot Gould and Dyan Cannon). Bob has an affair, and in the spirit of their new commitment to honesty, he confesses to Carol, who is neither jealous nor angry. Instead, she tells a somewhat confused and perturbed Bob that his honest confession is "beautiful" and presses for details of the encounter as foreplay to their own sexual congress. When they later share this information with Ted and Alice, their friends react somewhat stereotypically along the lines of gender: Alice is furious with Bob for his

Fig. 1.3 Columbia's *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (1969)—with Elliott Gould, Natalie Wood, Robert Culp, and Dyan Cannon—presented provocative ideas about sex but was ultimately quite demure.

matrimonial betrayal, and Ted is more shocked by Bob's confession than by the infidelity itself. Carol then has an affair that Bob is at first considerably less understanding about when he unexpectedly returns home to find his wife with her lover. He must initially fight against his own impulse to a double standard, though he soon acknowledges his shortsightedness and genially orders Carol to fetch drinks for himself and her dumbfounded paramour in a comical about face.

When Bob and Carol tell Ted and Alice about Carol's affair while the foursome is on a weekend getaway to Las Vegas, Ted confesses to his own recent extramarital affair. Partially out of shock and perhaps retaliation, Alice suggests that the foursome have an orgy. Although they eventually attempt to do so, none can follow through with it. The failed gesture ends with all four characters sitting silently alongside one another in bed: *the* suggestive and canonical image for this film in virtually all of its advertising. Whereas some critics at the time argued that the failure to depict an orgy between the two couples shows the film's refusal to offer a truly radicalized picture of sexual liberation, others observe that the failure of the foursome to follow through with such an act is perfectly in keeping with the characters themselves.[24] *Bob & Carol & Ted*

& Alice is a curious document of countercultural values played out by characters who strive but fail to live out the free love ideals of the sexual revolution. It positions the couples as too decidedly (and comfortably) middle class and middle aged to embrace such an ethos. In this way, *Bob & Carol* courts a limited degree of controversy—dealing with marital infidelity, the potential for group sex—at the same time that it critiques many countercultural values as naively misguided and unrealizable. Like so many countercultural films of the period, *Bob & Carol* is provocative more for its treatment of sexual themes than for its depiction of sexuality per se.

Hollywood's Desperate Measures

Despite these and other box-office successes, Hollywood was nevertheless in an economically vulnerable position at the beginning of the 1970s. The recession of 1969 produced more than $200 million in studio losses, leaving MGM, Warner Bros., and UA under new management and bringing Universal and Columbia close to liquidation.[25] Together the majors tallied $600 million in losses between 1969 and 1971. By 1970, 40 percent of Hollywood filmmakers were out of work. Of the many reasons for this predicament, in 1969 there were record high interest rates (of about 10 percent), and Hollywood began to suffer from an overproduction boom from 1966–1968. This included a large number of expensive musicals and big-budget spectacles that bombed at the box office. Hoping to repeat the enormous success of 20th Century Fox's *The Sound of Music* (1965), which grossed $135 million within two years of its release, various studios tried their hand at duplicating the formula. Fox produced *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), *Star!* (1968), and *Hello Dolly!* (1969), all of which lost money; Paramount flopped with *Paint Your Wagon* (1969); UA with *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968). Big-budget spectacles such as Fox's *The Bible* (1966) and *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), Columbia's *Casino Royale* (1967), and UA's *The Battle of Britain* (1969) also failed to break even.

The repeated inability to find a winning formula with mass appeal led many studios to rethink the kind of product they were willing to produce. *Easy Rider* (1969) rather belatedly led them to consider courting the youth market, an audience that exploitation companies such as American International Pictures (AIP) had been cultivating for over a decade. Produced independently for just under $375,000 and distributed by Columbia, *Easy Rider* earned over $19 million and ranked fourth at the box office for 1969. Along with such counterculture films as *The Graduate* (1967) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), the film became a symbol for "New

American Cinema," characterized as challenging the traditional Hollywood model and emphasizing, from French critics and from New Wave Cinema, the creative vision of the director/auteur with low-budget productions featuring small casts that targeted the late teen and college-age audience.[26] The "youth cult" bubble in Hollywood film production came about both as a result of economic desperation and of the rating system with its age-based reorganization of the filmgoing audience. David Cook surmises that the net effect of this situation led the major studios to "embrace exploitation as a mainstream practice" by the late 1960s, "elevating such B genres as science fiction and horror to A-film status, retrofitting 'race cinema' as 'blaxploitation,' and competing with the pornography industry for 'sexploitation' market share."[27] The "excess" of many of these genres was frequently bound up in issues surrounding sexuality and its representation.

Fox's decision to sign sexploitation pioneer and auteur Russ Meyer to a four-picture contract is an interesting consequence of this effort. Meyer built his reputation on cheaply made, independent films that yielded big box-office returns. His first feature, *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959), was shot in four days with a budget of $24,000 and grossed over $1 million at the box office.[28] His other films—such as *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965), *Vixen!* (1968), and *Cherry, Harry & Raquel* (1970)—were all similarly reflective of his camp or trash style, demonstrating his authorial predilection for especially outrageous female characterizations, obsessive attention to large breasts, suggestive but never graphic softcore sexual situations, and bad acting, as well as cheesy scripts. Hired by Richard Zanuck, newly appointed as Fox's head of production by his father—famed studio mogul Darryl F. Zanuck—Meyer was brought on board for precisely his ability to make low-budget, highly profitable (and sensationalistic) films. The first of only two films completed before he was let go by the studio, *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970), is a curious example of Hollywood's brief flirtation with sexploitation.

Co-scripted by Meyer and film critic Roger Ebert, *Beyond* is a parody of an earlier Fox melodrama, *The Valley of the Dolls* (1967), adapted from the trashy Jacqueline Susann bestseller about the rise and fall of women in show business. *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* has been read as a hybrid between Hollywood filmmaking practices and the more typical exploitation techniques upon which Meyer built his reputation.[29] For example, it makes some use of such exploitation staples as nondiegetic inserts, a moralizing voice-over (deployed to humorous effect toward the end of the film), and over-the-top "gore shots" of extreme violence. Nevertheless, it also conforms to Hollywood narrative conventions more than

most of Meyer's earlier films.[30] The film chronicles the misadventures of a beautiful rock-girl trio who go to Los Angeles seeking fame and fortune. Once there, they get mixed up in the bizarre world of the music industry with, for example, a swinging hermaphrodite and a pop music gigolo who quite literally loses his head over the former. Ashley St. Ives (Edy Williams) is a prototypical Meyer heroine who uses men as "toys for her amusement," while a middle-aged lawyer, described by Vincent Canby in the *New York Times* as "a sort of nasty Mr. Teas," goes to bed with a member of the band without bothering to remove his black dress socks and his garters. Canby's lukewarm review of the film complained that Meyer's once "earnestly vulgar sensibility" is overwhelmed by a complete parody that the critic read as patronizing of his audience. Even worse, claimed Canby, was the fact that "[Meyer] has become downright inhibited, at least in terms of female nudity on display, but it may be that Meyer is a prude."[31]

In a second *New York Times* article, entitled "Getting Beyond Myra and the Valley of the Junk," Canby acknowledged that though it was possible, in some ways, to take Meyer seriously, the film was ultimately a brand of trash:

> Meyer has had a wonderful time showing us various ways in which lives can be collapsed; one young man gets his head chopped off; a lovely girl has her brains blown out when she commits fellatio with a revolver, a couple of others are simply shot, one full in the face. All of this is presented as middle-class camp, which is great if you want to make fun of movies. I don't, particularly. There are too many good movies one could be seeing, and too many legitimate ambiguities to be resolved, to waste time worrying whether one should laugh or cry over junk films.[32]

Canby's remarks were typical of the tepid reception given to *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, which still performed well at the box office. His observation about the toned-down sexuality in the studio release, which is indeed "tamer" than Meyer's independently produced films, may reflect compliance with studio or MPAA expectations. Meyer may have been more willing to exploit gore than sex on screen in *Beyond*, given the greater latitude accorded to screen violence around this time (e.g., *Bonnie and Clyde, The Wild Bunch* [1969], and *A Clockwork Orange* [1971]), which pushed against the boundaries of acceptability over the far more restrictive surveillance of screen sex. Meyer also admitted that his studio contract came at an opportune moment, when increasing popularity of hardcore pornography was suddenly taking over a significant audience for his own preferred softcore mode.[33] *Beyond* received an X rating (the

second of two Fox releases in short succession) and, as part of a cluster of "trash" films released around this time, became embroiled in both a critical and antiporn backlash.

The other controversial film produced by Fox and released just a week before *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* was *Myra Breckenridge*. Adapted from Gore Vidal's novel, *Myra Breckenridge* is another showbiz send-up, which chronicles the exploits of Myra (Raquel Welsh), formerly Myron (played by film critic Rex Reed), who undergoes a sex change operation in the prologue of the film. As Myra, Myron wreaks revenge on a greedy uncle, Buck Loner (John Huston), by coming to Hollywood to take over his acting school, and by her mission to attain "power over both sexes and therefore power over life itself." The film is a series of vignettes and seductions, including a scene in which Myra ostensibly dons a dildo (never shown) and sodomizes a young male ingénue before sending him onto another woman's casting couch. That casting agent is played by septuagenarian Mae West, who makes a brief appearance performing her infamous and voracious appetite for sex.

Myra Breckenridge uses the exploitation convention of nondiegetic inserts throughout, mostly old Hollywood films from the Fox archive, which often comment on the film itself in a parodic way. It even incorporates a perhaps self-referential exchange between two characters in which one asks the other for his opinion about the state of contemporary cinema and its deployment of so much "pornographic smut." *Myra Breckenridge* was universally panned. Stanley Kauffman said: "The film looks like an abandoned battlefield after a lot of studio forces tussled and nobody won," going on to quip of both films: "If this is what 20th Century-Fox needs to save itself, why bother?"[34] Vincent Canby said that though the novel was "a reasonable, dirty, witty and straightforward satire of movies, pornographic novels and earnest movie critics," the film version "satirizes nothing, except, perhaps, the desperate lengths to which today's moviemakers will go to try to be different and dirty."[35] When independent film producer Paul Monash accused Fox of pandering to the "sick fantasies of the perverted" with these two exploitation releases, a fiery debate ensued between him and Richard Zanuck in the pages of the trade press.[36]

Blaxploitation briefly became another Hollywood effort to capitalize on a target audience: the previously untapped African American demographic. As more attention began to be paid to audience research at this time, the studios quickly discovered that despite composing roughly 12–15 percent of the total population in the United States at the time, African Americans represented almost 30 percent of the audi-

ence in first-run, major city theaters.[37] The canonical films that inaugurated the cycle—*Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), *Shaft* (1971), and *Superfly* (1972)—were directed by African American men and all featured highly sexualized male leads. *Sweet Sweetback*, for example, chronicles the coming-of-age of a young boy raised in a brothel and initiated into sex as a ten-year-old by one of its employees (shown, suggestively, in the film's prologue). From performing sex acts in the whorehouse as a young adult, Sweetback (played by the film's director, Melvin Van Peebles) gradually becomes a politicized and militant pimp hustler hero: "A Baadasssss Nigger" who is "Coming to Collect Some Dues" from the white establishment, as the closing title states. When the film earned an X rating for its sexual content and racially inflammatory violence, Van Peebles responded by defiantly including the line "Rated X by an all-white jury" on all of the posters for the film. Self-financed for $500,000 and independently distributed, *Sweet Sweetback* made $10 million in its first run alone, demonstrating the enormous potential for this untapped market.

Hollywood quickly appropriated the formula and also picked up many independently produced films for distribution. *Superfly*, for instance, was produced for less than $500,000 and distributed by Warner Bros., which reportedly made $28.5 million on the deal. It features a cocaine dealer, Youngblood Priest (Ron O'Neal), who organizes one last "big deal" in order to retire from the business. Priest is portrayed heroically as a sexual stud who ventures from the bedroom of one wealthy young lover to another. Although the film never crosses into softcore simulated sex to the degree of *Sweet Sweetback* (it received an R rating), nudity is shown throughout. *Shaft*, from MGM, was toned down considerably in terms of sex seen on screen, though again John Shaft (Richard Roundtree) is portrayed as a highly sexualized detective who sleeps with a number of black and white women over the course of the narrative, all of whom are treated rather poorly. The success of the film yielded $18 million on a $2 million investment and spawned two sequels.

American International Pictures made a number of blaxploitation films featuring black heroines, most notably *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), both directed by Jack Hill and staring Pam Grier. These films (as well as those starring Tamara Dobson as *Cleopatra Jones*) placed enormous emphasis on her highly sexualized body. Grier's persona had been established through a series of sexploitation films made at AIP and New World Pictures (former AIP producer Roger Corman's company founded in 1970) such as *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *Women in Cages* (1971), women-in-prison films that deploy lesbian subtexts. *Black Mama, White*

Mama (1973) has been read as an important transitional film in Grier's career from sexploitation to blaxploitation, continuing her "forceful woman-warrior iconicity" in a prison narrative that mimics and reverses many themes from *The Defiant Ones* (1958). Here the male buddy formula from that film is reworked with Grier as Lee, an imprisoned prostitute alongside a fellow con, Karen, a white idealistic guerilla fighter. One of several differences between the more respectable Hollywood drama and its sexploitation "remake" is the fact that Lee survives the prison escape (handcuffed to Karen) and does not sacrifice herself for her costar, who dies in the end of the film. As Mia Mask argues in her critical reappraisal of Grier's career, this marks an important break from conventions in film history (and popular literature) that portrayed the sacrifice of black characters for their white costars or counterparts.[38] Moreover, though sexploitation's female characters were frequently punished for transgressions of the patriarchal sociosexual order, *Black Mama* enables Grier's Lee to triumph.[39]

Blaxploitation films with male leads tended toward a certain sexual conservatism, notably in the "exploitation" of the nude female body, though the exploitation of the female body certainly continues into the female action films emerging later in the cycle. In Grier's first starring role, *Coffy*, for example, the eponymous character exposes her breasts on numerous occasions. When Coffy infiltrates a brothel in her vigilante quest to exact revenge on the drug dealers who disabled her addicted younger sister, the ensuing disruption instigates a prototypical "cat fight" among the prostitutes during which almost every participant is rendered topless. Coffy's success in infiltrating this underworld of sex and drug traffic depends on her promise of sexual favors as she lures and undermines the criminals, kingpins, and petty pushers responsible for the crime and despair in black communities. Although exploitation films with male protagonists certainly emphasize the sexual prowess of their leads, their sexual performances tend to be for gratification rather than bait. Moreover, the display of male nudity is hardly comparable.

On the heels of *Coffy*'s notable success, Grier also starred in *Foxy Brown* (figure 1.4). Again, Grier's breasts are bared on numerous occasions. Yet Foxy is also a model of empowered femininity, shown nurturing, protecting, and defending others around her and also enjoying and initiating sex with her boyfriend. Foxy is drawn into a criminal underworld of drugs and prostitution to seek justice for the murder of both her brother and her lover, an undercover narcotics officer. She feigns an interest in becoming a high-priced call girl in order to penetrate the

Fig. 1.4 Blaxploitation films such as *Foxy Brown* (1974), starring Pam Grier, offered an African American heroine with greater narrative, sexual, and political agency.

underworld led by a woman, Miss Katherine (Kathryn Loder). After sabotaging the sexual payoff to a corrupt judge (who has a penchant for black women), Foxy is captured and taken to a remote ranch where she is gang-raped by racist white thugs, whom she subsequently sets on fire. Critiques of both racial and patriarchal ideologies are much in evidence. *Foxy Brown* references numerous racial, social, and political issues, especially pertaining to black self-determination and social justice. Grier displays a range of hairstyles across the film, reflecting the changing image of beauty associated with African American women during this time. Toward the end of the film, she goes from long wavy hair to a striking Afro, when she solicits the aid of the "Anti-Slavery Committee" to avenge the murder of her brother and her boyfriend. This scene literally juxtaposes Foxy against a poster of Angela Davis, reinforcing a visual link between the real-life political activist and a screen incarnation of empowered black femininity. The film concludes as Foxy delivers to Miss

Katherine a pickle jar containing the penis of her lover, Steve. Although neither Foxy's castration of Steve (with a hunting knife!) nor the contents of the jar itself are explicitly shown, these acts are a not-so-subtle staging of a rape-revenge convention that literally and figuratively dramatizes Foxy's triumph over Steve (the penis) and the white patriarchal drug lords (phallus) who have violently exploited and debilitated both her loved ones and the black community more broadly. In her final confrontation with Katherine, Foxy defends herself by pulling a gun from her Afro, after the viewer has been set up to believe she is unarmed and certain to meet her death.

Interestingly, it is only the white characters in the film who objectify and strive to exploit Foxy. To all of the black men in the film, she is a crime fighter and a peer to be respected for her conviction and her strength. The combination of femininity, sexuality, and narrative agency that Pam Grier demonstrates in this cycle of films are all important precursors to the emergence of the Hollywood action heroine that will occur a decade later, first on television and then on the big screen. Grier's work in the blaxploitation cycle provides an example of the complex ways in which the formulas used by genre films were sometimes less conservative and retrograde than many critics have claimed, given the degree to which these texts may be seen to assimilate (and market) countercultural ideologies in ways that invite multiple interpretations and counterreadings.

The violence, sexuality, nudity, and coarse language in these and other blaxploitation films demonstrate the extent to which the regulation of film content had loosened over the period as Hollywood embraced exploitation tactics. To be sure, blaxploitation films courted controversy on a number of fronts, not least of which was critical reception among black intellectuals, writers and activists who, at the time, railed against the violent drug-dealing pimps and gangsters who populated the formula. For example, Marion Barry, then president of the Washington, DC, School Board, described the genre as a form of "mind genocide."[40] That said, the antidrug message of films such as *Coffy, Foxy Brown*, and *Cleopatra Jones* highlight the significant differences in the image of black community and female sexual and social emancipation that the female blaxploitation heroines provided. Nevertheless, as Hollywood became less dependent on exploitation formulas for short-term profit, these genres quickly disappeared from the industry repertoire, since they were ultimately too disreputable and too troublesome to conform to the MPAA's mandate of "responsible entertainment."

Obscenity, Community Standards, and Hollywood's Recovery

By the early 1970s, many films reflecting the sexual politics of the era had been produced. A case involving local censorship of an MPAA release, *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), perhaps represents a closing chapter to certain aspects of the debates about the limits of Hollywood screen sex. Adapted from an unproduced play by Jules Feiffer and directed by Mike Nichols, *Carnal Knowledge* was an adult melodrama about the sexual hypocrisy of two classmates, Jonathan (Jack Nicholson) and Sandy (Art Garfunkel), through their college days in the late 1940s to the present as they enter middle age in the dramatically changed sociosexual climate of the early 1970s. The film, rated R, does show some partial nudity, but its controversy was mostly for the frank discussion about sex conducted in the confessions and observations between the two friends. Over the course of the summer and into the fall of 1971, *Carnal Knowledge* was the subject of numerous articles on the pages of the *New York Times*. Vincent Canby praised it for being "in effect, a political and social history of this country during the last 30 years, as defined, exclusively, in the sexual triumphs, adjustments and disasters of two middle class nebbishes."[41] Stephen Farber made similar claims, arguing that it was groundbreaking for at least dealing with "the rich potential in subjects that have up to now been taboo—for instance, the way in which a thorough study of sexual failures might refer to and illuminate larger social and political failures." He argued that though the film did not go far enough, it was among the first to "try to uncover some of the relevant, disturbing secrets of American private life."[42]

In another *Times* article published a month later, Rosalyn Drexler weighed in on the debate from a feminist perspective, taking a critical stance on the marginalization and exploitation of women in the film and even reading the relationship between the two friends as "a study in latent homosexuality": "Everything that happens to Nicholson and Garfunkel becomes boasting about sex, sex, sex. It is their relationship that is the soulless center of *Carnal Knowledge*, man to drippy man: the search for each other in the vagina of a mutually shared woman."[43] The closeness between the two men, expressed primarily through their intimate discourse about sex, led many critics to remark on the buddy aspects of the film and the degree to which it plays more powerfully upon their homosocial bond than on any heterosexual coupling they achieve. As Joan Mellen contends: "It is not that these men are explicitly homosexual, but that in a culture which encourages distrust of and hostility toward women, erotic trust becomes possible only between men. *Carnal*

Knowledge acutely chronicles that sexual tension which grows up between men as an inevitable result of their treating women as the alien 'other.'"[44]

The film opens as the two young college students discuss their views about love, the ideal woman, and losing their virginity. Although this scene plays out in complete darkness—juxtaposed with the film's title sequence—the contrast between the two characters is immediately established. Jonathan is coarse, sexist, opportunistic. Sandy is naive, romantic, and decidedly less brutal. At college, Sandy begins to date Susan (Candice Bergen), whom he will later marry (then divorce). Soon after, Jonathan begins an affair with Susan, which highlights his ruthless and competitive relationship with Sandy. The explicit sex talk between the two friends thus takes on a more sinister dimension. After many scenes showing the sexual negotiations between the two couples in this triangle, kissing and petting, the first scene to visualize intercourse is carefully framed in such a way as to make us initially uncertain about whom Susan is with. A long static sequence shot frames Susan passively positioned beneath a man who is penetrating her. Her face displays a range of emotions, though she appears to be deriving little pleasure from the act. Only when her lover climaxes then collapses onto the grass beside her is he revealed to be Jonathan. One of the curious aspects of the film is that in a narrative preoccupied with sex and sexual knowledge, it ultimately depicts very little of the act.

Some twenty years later, after Sandy has left Susan and their family for a much younger woman, Jonathan unwittingly reveals the secret affair in his "Ball Busters on Parade" slide show when he presents a maliciously narrated chronology of all the women he has slept with. Jonathan's marriage to Bobbie (Ann Margaret) has ended in divorce and he now is single, bitter, middle-aged, and virtually impotent save the carefully scripted sexual scenario he controls with a prostitute, Louise (Rita Moreno), who can only arouse him by following a precisely directed description of his sexual power and potency against the fundamental weakness of women. The film ends with this encounter between prostitute and john, as Louise coaxes him into his fantasy of manhood by preparing to fellate him. With this, *Carnal Knowledge* created a fascinating and troubling picture of two men struggling to come to terms with the tumultuous changes in the sociosexual culture that evolves around them. The film courted controversy more for its antifeminist backlash, for its thematic treatment of sex, and for the frank discussion between the two men about their sexual desires and exploits than for its visualization of sexuality on screen.

In Albany, Georgia, a local ban against a movie theater exhibiting the film turned statewide. *Jenkins v. Georgia* found its way to the Supreme Court in 1974, where the Georgia ruling was summarily and unanimously reversed. At first this case against reading the film as "obscene" may have appeared to be a harbinger of complicated negotiations for MPAA-rated films in the years to come; however, its resolution actually seemed to bolster Jack Valenti's steadfast refusal to endorse X-rated and hardcore product lines. On the heals of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Miller v. California* the year before, which laid down the "community standards" test for determining obscenity, the courts certainly created sufficient ambiguity to plague the legal system for years to come. These and other obscenity cases all offered up reinterpretation of obscenity laws that left content regulation open to prosecutors in individual communities once again. Giving power back to local rather than national "community standards" opened up too many potential problems for almost all NATO members to risk noncompliance with the rating system. Although hardcore features—including *Deep Throat, The Devil in Miss Jones*, and *Behind the Green Door*—enjoyed a brief economic boom from 1972 to 1973, outgrossing many Hollywood films at the time, these landmark court cases gradually pushed hardcore films out of the theatrical marketplace into home video.

The outcome of this legislation bolsters Kevin Sandler's argument that by 1973, the MPAA—through CARA—and now with the full cooperation of NATO, had consolidated its new model of "responsible entertainment" (a balance of artistic freedom with restraint) that functioned in much the same way as the PCA-era's "harmless entertainment" model. He argues that CARA functioned quite similarly to the PCA insofar as both bodies aimed to control entryway and participation into the legitimate theatrical marketplace.[45] These claims are reinforced by the fact that, since 1974, studio films rated G, PG, PG-13, and R have moved through the marketplace with virtual immunity. The R rating became the tag that signified Hollywood, whereas the X became associated with American independent and foreign art fare as well as softcore and hardcore pornography.[46]

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As Hollywood slowly showed signs of economic recovery, arguably beginning with the blockbuster success of *The Godfather* in 1972, MPAA members began to reconfigure their product, moving away from more challenging "adult" pictures into a reformulated all-ages blockbuster model.

From today's perspective, the cinematic sex scenes from this period may look simultaneously dated and new. On the one hand, the sex scenes in Bernardo Bertolucci's X-rated *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), one of the most provocative films of the period, did not lead to the anticipated transformation in motion picture content predicted by the likes of Pauline Kael.[47] On the other hand, the infantilized treatment of sexuality in so many recent teen pics and sex comedies certainly makes these older films seem refreshing in their maturity and candor. That said, the picture of sexual liberation that so many of these counterculture films seemed to offer is—more often than not—rather bleak. Although the discourse about and representation of sex and sexuality were certainly transformed in this period, many of the films still tackled these topics with a kind of skepticism and moralism that was fundamentally quite critical and wary of liberationist ideology, a point made by Farber in the epigraph at the start of this essay. Today, one is more likely to find feature films that deal with sexuality in frank and explicit ways coming from independent (including queer) cinema or from other countries (particularly France and Denmark in recent years) that appear to be invested in pushing against status quo representations. That sexuality continues to be vigorously scrutinized by CARA, whereas screen violence has continued to expand and—dare we say—flourish, is perhaps a sign of how fleeting the legacy of this cultural moment has proven to be with respect to sex scenes and sex seen in Hollywood cinema.

Notes

1. David Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1–7.
2. The abbreviation CARA first stood for the Code and Rating Administration but was later changed in 1977 to the Classification and Rating Administration in an effort to abolish all reference to the former Production Code, including the historical practice of vetting scripts in advance of production.
3. See, esp., chaps. 1 and 2 of Kevin S. Sandler, *The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn't Make X-Rated Movies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
4. Cited in Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 102.
5. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 133.
6. Eric Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 300.

7. Maitland McDonough. "The Exploitation Generation. Or: How Marginal Movies Came in from the Cold," in *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwarth, and Noel King (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 107.
8. Murray Shumach, *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor: The Story of Movie and Television Censorship* (New York: William Morrow, 1964), 258–259.
9. Sandler, *The Naked Truth*, 35.
10. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 145–146.
11. Sandler, *The Naked Truth*, 35.
12. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 145–146.
13. Paul Monaco, *The Sixties: 1960–1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 62.
14. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 164.
15. Kelly Hankin, "Lesbian Locations: The Production of Lesbian Bar Space in *The Killing of Sister George*," *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 1 (fall 2001): 3–7, 5.
16. Cited in Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 165.
17. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 165.
18. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 167.
19. Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hardcore*, 167.
20. Renata Adler, "Screen: 'Sister George': Robert Aldrich Directs Film of Marcus Play," *New York Times*, December 17, 1968, 58.
21. Stanley Kauffmann, "On Films: Greetings and Groans, *The New Republic*, January 18, 1969, 34.
22. Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company That Changed the Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 291.
23. Balio, *United Artists*, 292.
24. Roger Ebert, review of *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice, Chicago Sun-Times*, December 22, 1969, accessed June 8, 2013, www.rogerebert.com/reviews.
25. Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 9.
26. Monaco, *The Sixties*, 188.
27. Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 4.
28. Cook, *Lost Illusions*, 92.
29. See Craig Fischer, "*Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* and the Exploitation Genre," *Velvet Light Trap* 30 (fall 1992): 18–33.
30. Fischer, "*Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* and the Exploitation Genre," 30.
31. Vincent Canby, Review of *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls, New York Times*, June 27, 1970, 19.
32. Vincent Canby, "Getting beyond Myra and the Valley of the Junk," *New York Times*, July 5, 1970, 186.
33. Fischer, "*Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* and the Exploitation Genre," 26.
34. Stanley Kauffman, "*Myra Breckenridge* and Other Disasters," *The New Republic* 392, no. 12, July 18, 1970: 22.
35. Canby, "Review of *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*," 19.

36. Fischer, "*Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* and the Exploitation Genre," 30.
37. Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 83.
38. Mia Mask, *Divas on Screen: Black Women in American Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 84.
39. Mask, *Divas on Screen*, 86.
40. Mask, *Divas on Screen*, 102.
41. Vincent Canby, "I Was Sorry to See it End," *New York Times*, July 4, 1971, D1.
42. Stephen Farber, "A Film That Forgets Sex Can Be Fun . . ." *New York Times*, August 1, 1971, D9.
43. Rosalyn Drexler, "Do Men Really Hate Women?" *New York Times*, September 5, 1971, D7.
44. Joan Mellen, *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 315.
45. Sandler, *The Naked Truth*, 43.
46. Sandler, *The Naked Truth*, 52.
47. Pauline Kael, "Introduction," in Bernardo Bertolucci and Franco Arcalli, *Bernardo Bertolucci's* Last Tango in Paris*; the screenplay, by Bernardo Bertolucci and Franco Arcalli* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973).