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The uncut version: The Mattachine Society's pornographic epilogue

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Abstract

Countering dominant historical narratives of the Hal Call-led Mattachine Society (a homophile organization dating from the 1950s) as ‘conservative’ or ‘respectable,’ this article examines the organization’s 1970s evolution into a porn theatre and sex club known as the Cinemattachine (later the Circle J Cinema). Arguing for continuities between the 1970s Cinemattachine and prior Mattachine tactics, Call’s own publishing business ventures, and discourses of sexual education, this article suggests that the organization continued to negotiate evolving sexual politics through the exhibition of pornography.

Keywords

Gay history, Hal Call, Mattachine Society, pornography, San Francisco

‘Tired of feeling guilty when you go to a porny movie?’ So queried an advertisement for the Mattachine Society’s Sex Education Film Series in the *Bay Area Reporter*, San Francisco’s gay newspaper, in November 1972.¹ The Mattachine Society, best remembered as a homophile organization whose tactics were viewed as outmoded by the time of post-Stonewall gay liberation, had been screening explicit sex films in San Francisco since the prior year and would soon rebrand this effort as the Cinemattachine in 1973. The venue could only be entered through the back of the Adonis gay adult bookstore—literally making the entire operation an extended ‘back room.’

As a latter-day part of the Mattachine’s history, the Cinemattachine falls outside the standard historical narrative of the overtly ‘respectable’ homophile (early gay rights) organization dating from 1951. Although often mentioned in accounts of long-time San Francisco Mattachine leader Harold ‘Hal’ Call, the porn venue and

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sex club is generally situated as a curious epilogue that departs from the seminal organization's political and cultural contributions. Conversely, the Cinemattachine has gone almost completely unmentioned in the histories of gay pornography (see Escoffier, 2009; Stevenson, 1997; Turan and Zito, 1974; Waugh, 1996).² Nonetheless, the venue's popularity and longevity refute its recurrent marginalization.

The Cinemattachine complicates our understanding of the Mattachine by revealing that in the 1970s, although Call continued the kinds of collaborations with professional experts that prompted allegations of conformist politics, he did so with newly and overtly erotic aims. Sexual liberation has been understood as central to the politics of the young upstart gay leftist radicals at this time, yet it was also explicitly central to the latter-day San Francisco Mattachine's mission—so much so that the Mattachine and Call's porn cinema and sex club would become indistinguishable. By the mid to late 1960s, the San Francisco Mattachine was effectively Call's own one-man organization, and his frankly sexual enterprises from then onward complicate perceptions of his politics as assimilationist or conservative—as well as open up questions about our understanding of the Mattachine's longer-standing goals under his controversial leadership. What if a porn and sex club really was the next evolutionary stage of sexual politics, not just an embarrassing *denouement* for the Mattachine?

This article fleshes out a micro-history of Call's Cinemattachine to reconsider the Mattachine in the context of 1970s' San Francisco, gay politics, and pornography. This archival case study exposes the challenges of thinking through the significance of a political organization that essentially became a single individual's cause and commercial enterprise. Call's claims to pornography's potential often read as comic, contradictory, and self-serving, yet his Cinemattachine spurred and reflected the broader 1970s intersections of sexuality and public life. Call created a gay male space and a film archive that suggest that a politics of erotica, not just a politics of respectability, was his life's work.³ Call's business continued operations (later under the name Circle J Cinema) for three and a half decades until after his death in 2000; the venue closed when the space was purchased by a church in 2005.

The histories of the Mattachine Society

The Mattachine Society was co-founded by Harry Hay and a handful of other men in Los Angeles in 1951 and has generally been understood to have been driven by a radical, communist-informed politics and anonymous cell-like structure during its early days, which gave way to more integrationist politics by 1953. Informed by his Marxist readings and communist training, Hay conceived of homosexuals as a cultural minority (Hay, 1996). But a shift in priorities and a falling out among members led Hay to resign, and the headquarters migrated to San Francisco, where it was led by Call and Don Lucas. The Mattachine effectively splintered into independent but active localized chapters, including ones in New York and Washington, DC by the early 1960s.

From the start, Call was a divisive yet influential figure. He drove the anti-communist turn in the Society's ideologies in the early 1950s, in the wake of the red scare; he also edited the *Mattachine Review* (1955–1967), which had a national readership that far exceeded membership in the Society itself. It is the Call-era homophile ideologies, publications, and politics that retrospectively earned the *Mattachine* a reputation as conformist and conservative, which has become a dominant reading (see Boyd, 2003; D'Emilio, 1983; Stein, 2012; Timmons, 1990). In an important reappraisal of the San Francisco chapter's activities, Martin Meeker (2001) makes a strong case that the mythologized understanding of the *Mattachine's* trajectory from radical to assimilationist to passé does not hold.

Hay's and Call's philosophies and strategies have been understood as diametrically opposed. In the 1950s, Hay believed anonymity enabled safe spaces for what were effectively consciousness-raising groups, whereas Call demanded publicity and openness; Hay sought to cultivate a sense of homophiles as a distinct cultural minority with its own language and heritage, whereas Call advocated integration into mainstream society and collaboration with straight cultural authorities. In the midst of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, Hay believed sexual liberation was key to relationships, collectivity, and spirituality,⁴ whereas Call's business endeavors embraced eroticism and sexual gratification as ends in themselves.

Call self-identified as a 'sexualist' who embraced sexual activity in contrast to other homophile leaders whom he considered to be squeamish about actual sex (Marcus, 1992: 59–69). In an oral history interview from 1995, Call estimated that he had sexual contact with six thousand men and had made erotic photos or films of four or five thousand. 'I[ve] run a gay cinema since 1972. We had anywhere up to fifty, sixty, seventy-five people a day visiting, and most of them jacking off... I believed in gay sex, and we were trying to achieve the freedom to have it, and I said, "Well, goddammit... Let's just don't be crusaders and never touch what we're crusading for.'"⁵ The *Cinemattachine* became Call's venue for facilitating community and sexual contact.⁶

Importantly, Call countered the anonymity and 'invisibility' previously believed essential for *Mattachine's* membership with his commitment to *publicity* (Meeker, 2001: 88–89; 2006). He was originally a newspaperman and was dedicated to publishing and other forms of media outreach as the bases of both his income and his activism; he was also adamantly pro-sex. Call was the founder and editor of *The Mattachine Review* and *The Dorian Book Service Quarterly* (1960–1964), co-owned with Lucas the gay publishing and distribution businesses Pan-Graphic Press (1954–1964) and Dorian Book Service (1957–1964), and collaborated with bar owner Bob Damron on the first few editions of *The Address Book* guides to gay venues (started 1964, often colloquially called 'the Damron guide'). In 1967, the year that Meeker (2006: 219) identifies that the *Mattachine Society* functionally ceased to exist, Call opened the Adonis Bookstore, which was in all probability the first storefront gay bookstore in the USA and one that included pornography alongside more 'respectable' literature. Historian Whitney Strub writes, 'The proper death knell of homophile respectability was arguably not Stonewall,

but rather the 1967 opening of the Adonis Bookstore' (2013: 58). In contrast, Craig Rodwell's Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore in New York opened later in 1967 and refused to carry 'exploitative' adult material (Duberman, 1993: 164).

The Cinemattachine was Call's own private business, building from his commitment to publishing, the Adonis bookstore, and Grand Prix Photo Arts, which produced photos and films from 1968. Around 1976, Call further expanded his businesses to include the Zante Studios, a model and escort service offered to Mattachine members. Call's businesses provided a seminal model for the public gay community to emerge and organize through such commercial ventures as gay bars, the gay press, and other commodified 'lifestyle' forms during the 1960s and 1970s (Meeker, 2001: 113).⁷ These efforts also reflected and invigorated the development of seismic shifts in sexual cultures specific to San Francisco. Call's more commercial enterprises—such as the *Dorian Book Service Quarterly* as opposed to the *Mattachine Review*—were where he ultimately took more overtly confrontational political positions and which yielded broader influence (Meeker, 2001: 101). Such investments—politically and commercially—in the visual media laid the foundation for Call's entry into producing and exhibiting gay male pornographic films. His film screenings, in turn, reflected the centrality of explicit erotic films to sex education and personal liberation that gave way to more commercialized public sex cultures during the 1970s.

Call framed his later sex film screenings as a therapeutic extension of prior social services, and the first proposal for the Cinemattachine listed 'lay counseling' among its member services.⁸ Importantly, Call's notion of publicity operated in tandem with the post-1953 Society's investment in rights to privacy. In effect, Call sought to secure libertarian rights to engage in sex acts and to consume homoerotic media in private spaces, which he considered to include the Cinemattachine as a 'private' club venue.

The San Francisco Bay Area had long held a mythic status as a 'wide open town' that fostered sexual and social countercultures. In the mid-1960s, *Life* magazine called the city the gay 'capital' of America (Welch, 1964). By the 1970s, the city—particularly the burgeoning Castro area, which came to exemplify a gay mecca—was iconic for its gay public life and liberated sexual cultures; indeed, the 1970s in San Francisco has come to be viewed by many as a gay golden age. In contrast to the gentrifying Castro, Call's businesses continued to operate in San Francisco's Tenderloin, which in the mid-1960s had been billed as a 'white ghetto,' understood as 'the final resting ground for all those destined never to assimilate' (Hanhardt, 2013: 44). Despite its proximity to the municipal government buildings, this neighborhood was known for its commercialized vice and marginalized denizens—prostitutes and hustlers, drug users, and transgender women—who were part of the city's sexual cultures but peripheral to gay political enfranchisement. The South of Market district, the city's other major zone for queer sexual cultures, was the center of leather and S&M venues. Many men circulated between these three neighborhoods, but each had distinct queer cultural connotations.

In 1971 *The New York Times Magazine* dubbed San Francisco 'the Porn Capital of America' where hard-core films, live sex shows, and drag were all part of the

counter-cultural scene of the sexual revolution (Murray, 1971; see also Duong, 2014; Schaefer and Johnson, 2010); that same year the Mattachine started its film screenings. Local gay film programming, all of which would have been considered adult cinema, at the Haight Cinema and the Tom Kat Theatre dated from the mid-1960s (Stryker and Van Buskirk, 1996: 44; Waugh, 1996: 269), and multiple local venues, likewise clustered in the Tenderloin, screened gay hardcore during the 1970s.⁹ The intersections of erotic cinema and pan-sexual liberation were perhaps most prominently articulated in the Bay Area in 1970, with the debut of the First International Erotic Film Festival (Gorfinkel, 2006).

As early as 1967, Call collaborated with the progressive Glide Memorial Methodist Church (located on the same block) as an executive producer of a compilation of silent color gay male stag films titled *Trilogy: Three Aspects of Male Homosexuality* (*Rough Trade, Romance, Psychedelic*). The church operated the National Sex Forum and developed the accredited Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. Film pornography was central to the Institute's sexual programs as well as local educational efforts at the University of California Medical Center, Stanford University, and even Berkeley High School.¹⁰ Such uses of pornography for pedagogy—Call's included—were validated by the findings of the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (appointed in 1967, with a comprehensive report published in 1970), which determined that graphic sexual media was actually more beneficial than harmful to society and that censorship laws should be repealed.

The building that housed the Adonis and the Cinemattachine has been razed, but the blueprint floor plan for the venue included six spaces: a TV/reading lounge, an audio lounge, lockers, showers, rest room, and office.¹¹ With lockers and showers, the venue was designed more like a sex club than a typical cinema. For most of its existence, the Cinemattachine also boasted 'church-pew seating,' which facilitated sex play more easily than standard theatre seats with their obtrusive armrests. More so than typical adult cinemas, where sex play would be relegated to bathrooms, corners, and awkward crouching in rows, the entire space of the Cinemattachine was designed to facilitate sexual and social contact.

Cinemattachine was a profitable membership-based club that traded on and to some extent maintained the non-profit Mattachine organization.¹² The Mattachine earned some small revenues from this arrangement, but the Cinemattachine was predominantly a for-profit enterprise for Call. From 1973, screenings operated under the dubious auspices of a 'private membership club,' which legally distinguished it from a 'public' porn theatre and shielded it during various 'red light abatement' efforts in the city throughout the decade—despite the fact that membership fees were so low as to be equivalent to one night's admission.¹³ But this business model also meant that anyone who attended the venue technically became an official member of the longest running gay rights organization in the USA. By the late 1970s, Cinemattachine advertisements touted more than 10,000 'members'; by contrast, in its heyday decades earlier, the Mattachine Society had only 300 paid members nationally (Sears, 2006: 3). Perhaps ironically, coverage of the

Cinemattachine in the adult entertainment section of the *Bay Area Reporter* educated readers about the history of homophile activism (Anonymous, 1978).

Sex education spectaculars at the Cinemattachine

The Cinemattachine integrated pornography, news documentation, lectures, and live sex in its programming throughout the 1970s. Call filmed erotic and newsreel films; although these genres occasionally intersected, the pornographic reels far outnumbered the documentary ones—both in production and in exhibition—suggesting that his primary investment was in pornography. Sexual expression and activity became Call's central concerns, often couched in relation to education or politics, but also emphatically celebrated in their own rights.

Call's screenings were initially framed as explicitly didactic. Such presentations actually demonstrate continuity with the San Francisco Mattachine's 1950s tactics of seeking legitimation for homosexuality by enlisting straight-identified psychologists and psychiatrists, medical doctors, lawyers, social scientists, and clergy for presentations or collaborations. Such strategies had long worked to influence straight institutional leaders as much as enlighten homosexual men. The 1970s film exhibitions initially included live or taped remarks by such professionals. For example, in August 1973 the Cinemattachine featured a week-long run of the *The FFA* [Fist Fuckers of America] *Experience*, about which an advertisement explained:

Included with this group of unusual films is an outstanding and significant interview with a Medical Doctor. Must be seen—This is an important presentation! (Note: This is a balanced sex action film program, not limited to fist expression only. New Mattachine Newsreel included, along with stage presentation.)¹⁴

One early flyer referred to the proto-Cinemattachine as 'Mattachine Society Incorporated Fucking Films' and featured a simple line drawing of two nude men kissing in missionary position. The flyer listed weekend showtimes but offered no further information or claims toward edification.¹⁵ A more elaborate tri-fold brochure, however, changed the program's image significantly by cropping the image to eliminate the obvious penetrative sex and using the comparatively respectable title 'Sex Education Film Series.' The revised brochure also offered extensive language to rationalize the screenings—a classic strategy at this moment for countering charges of obscenity—and suggested that the Sex Education Film Series 'fits within the long-standing aims and purposes of the Mattachine Society, Inc.'¹⁶ This brochure's text relied upon the established rhetoric of sexology and anti-censorship claims of 'redeeming social value,' while additionally including language reflecting nascent attention to environmentalism and ideological critique.¹⁷

Throughout the 1970s, Cinemattachine advertisements boasted that it screened a greater number of different films than other adult theatres; indeed, the programs emphasized shorts over features and included numerous exclusive quasi-amateur

reels made by Call himself. The Cinemattachine programmed films showcasing a variety of same-sex practices, from masturbation to S&M and fisting; likewise, films featured actors ranging from familiar white porn stars to men whose bodies were fetishized for their difference, such as black men, uncircumcised men, and youth. Early film screenings featured three-hour programs comprising short stag reels and highlight scenes from longer porn features, accompanied by commentary. Compilation programs were often given thematic titles, such as the popular *Foreskin Follies* (with four volumes), *The Uncut Version* (a spin-off from *Foreskin Follies*), and *Auto-Fellatio Marathon* (eight volumes) programs. Cinemattachine regularly advertised individual shorts with winkingly lurid titles, such as *White Spots on a Red Carpet*, *Phil Gets a Piece of Chicken*, *The Hustler Wouldn't Take Money*, *You Can't Rape the Willing*, and *No, It's Too Big*. Advertisements also promoted 'showcase presentations' of short films by specific porn studios, and revival screenings of selected high-profile gay porn features, such as *Boys in the Sand* and *Kansas City Trucking Company*.

For its first several years, the venue relied on silent 8mm and Super 8 format films.¹⁸ Acknowledging this, an advertisement from February 1973 noted, 'All above presentations are scored with specially selected stereophonic music and appropriate sound.'¹⁹ Six months later, an advertisement offered the following overblown description of its musical accompaniment: 'Jean Cardin's "Big, Hot and Horny" is probably the most popular film ever shown at CINEMATTACHINE. When Tschaikowsky's [sic] "Overture of 1812" is scored with it, you'd swear the composer wrote it for this movie. Come, hear the cannons boom with Jean—*You will never be the same again!*'²⁰

Self-documentation of the gay community for the gay community took on increased importance for Call in the 1970s, circa gay liberation and expansions of gay-made media. In 1971, the same year Call began his sex film screenings, he also started producing the Mattachine Newsreels to document gay events such as pride parades, Imperial Court coronations, a gay wedding, Tavern Guild picnics, and end-of-year recap compilations, as well as travelogues of gay tours to international destinations. The Cinemattachine's programming integrated screenings of these newsreels with programs of hardcore gay male sex films. Effectively, the Mattachine's screenings suggested that pornography was essential for helping men achieve sexual and psychological self-actualization while the newsreels attested to more civic advances in gay politics.²¹ Porn and politics were very much intertwined, not only at the Cinemattachine but also with explicit images pervasively appearing alongside news and commentary in the gay press as well.

In numerous ads, Mattachine Newsreels were marketed on the novelty of recognizing the people documented or their evidentiary significance. For instance, an early 1974 advertisement begins, 'WERE YOU THERE? . . . Film coverage of these events, with a cast of hundreds of people you know, perhaps including yourself — makes up Mattachine Newsreel.'²² Thus, these films were not only documentation of local events but also became ways of constructing an imagined—and imaged—gay community. For example, a 1973 Mattachine Newsreel compilation, restored

by the National Film Preservation Foundation, features silent Super 8 footage in vibrant color; with scenes of men wearing leis and waving to the camera, it feels like a home movie of the gay scene. The events documented include the 1973 Mr Hot Pants Contest, a benefit auction for the Society for Individual Rights, a gathering at the 527 Club, and a bon voyage party aboard a boat.²³ By 1978, Cinemattachine flyers touted these documents as historical resources:

Film Archives of the West Coast Gay Community, covering the period 1971 to date, is the only motion picture historical record anywhere of an extensive spread of gay events, depicting an active and emerging Gay Lifestyle which sociologists and researchers have noted as characteristic of this period. . . . All of these films are available to established and responsible researchers. They form a central core of the Mattachine Archives Collection of historical records.²⁴

Rather than an official Mattachine film archive, hundreds of Call's original films and audio recordings—newsreels, travelogues, home movies, and jerk-off reels—remain extant as part of his *personal* papers, continuing to blur the boundaries of the Mattachine and his erotic emporium. Call's Super 8 films, including those made for programs at the Cinemattachine, are housed at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Some Super 8 reels demonstrate more editing than others, though in every case, the films jump-cut between moments rather than constructing continuous narratives or news stories. Close-ups shot in Super 8—and corresponding distortions in lighting to produce overexposure and dark halos—suggest how close Call often got to the action he filmed.

Surely Call's most revealing film, *Hal Call, X-Rated Head Honcho*, features a series of shots of Call fellating various men and of him masturbating through the fly of his pants. A few minutes in, a hand-written intertitle queries, silent film-style, 'Good grief – was that Hal Call?' Another intertitle answers, 'Yes, it was – "I get fringe benefits, too!"' The film cuts back to Call, who smiles, takes off his glasses, and winks. Multicolored fliers for the Cinemattachine programs are posted on his office wall behind him. The film then cuts to an even more unexpected comic scene: Call, dressed as Santa, masturbates into an empty gift box that is addressed, 'To Hal Call from Santa.' Making his own proud promiscuity and sexual pleasure visible became part of Call's political project, and this self-reflexive film played upon his recognizability to Cinemattachine members. At least one compilation of jerk-off scenes, filmed in Call's office on the second floor above the Cinemattachine, was commercially released on home video as *The Gold Couch Capers*; Call can be heard coaxing various young men to orgasm from behind the camera. Call offered to donate the titular well-worn couch to the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives along with his papers and media. The archive declined the couch.

Blurring the lines between newsreel and pornography, a Super 8 reel titled *Grand Prix Opens and Jackoffs* encapsulates the Cinemattachine's politics within its first two minutes, as it cuts between a series of credits ('Grand Prix Photo Arts . . . Presents . . . Cinemattachine . . . Welcome to *Mattachine* Movies'),

aerial shots of San Francisco during the 1978 gay pride festival, and extreme close-ups of penises. The juxtapositions between broad views of public gay life and intimate shots of anonymous masturbation might seem jarring, but as the placement of the Cinemattachine's self-branding between such images suggests, Call specifically sought to integrate gay politics and erotic self-expression.

Cinemattachine's live sex tutorials were part of its expansive claims to sexual education and crucial to its development into a sex club. Two topical live sex demonstrations in 1974 were popular enough to have repeat engagements: a seminar on auto-fellatio and masturbation and another on glory holes and public sex.²⁵ Brother Ben Gardiner, OSM (Order of the Servants of Mary), led the former seminar, titled, 'Release from Tension, through Sex,' a 'lecture-demonstration-film-discussion . . . as developed by this monk who does it with LOVE.' The flyer extended its invitation, 'Clergy and those in the helping professions especially welcome.' The return program of the glory holes seminar was proclaimed as 'one of Mattachine's all-time great programs!' and marketed with the come-on, 'See HUNKY GUYS get it on—on Stage (Continental Brunch Included).'²⁶ Brunch was regularly included for these seminars.

Such live demonstrations were gradually presented on less enlightening bases, as with the 'Sex Education Spectacular Live—On Stage.' This event was billed as a 'Look-See-Feel-Experience trip into what portends in erotic entertainment in the future.' The event was actually staged live for the audience and the camera: it was to be filmed and photographed for later screenings. Ultimately undercutting its claims to education, the promotional text concluded, 'Except for a brief introductory film the entire 3-hour presentation is live action with only the briefest academic comment.'²⁷ A Super 8 reel titled *You Were There – Live On Stage* appears to have been shot during this live tutorial. The reel also indicates a dichotomy that appears to run through Call's films: backstage footage (including the first act of this reel) tends to be composed of 'vanilla' solo masturbation or fellatio scenes, whereas onstage scenes shot at the Cinemattachine events appear (as in the second and third acts of this reel) to be more experimental and hardcore. In the first of two onstage performance scenes, two men engage in a sex show incorporating rope play (including fellating and penetration with a lasso), golden showers, rimming, and amyl nitrate. In the subsequent scene, a different couple performs a series of sexual acts—deep tongue kissing, 69ing, tit play, mutual masturbation, autofellatio, rimming, and intercourse—all on a twin bed that barely fits onto the stage. (Similar footage of these acts on the reel *Circle J Live Stage* indicates that more than one camera documented this event.) These two couples' tutorials modeled an expansive range of sexual acts to expand audiences' repertoires and fantasies. In a crass punchline, the reel ends with the words 'THE END' superimposed over a flushing toilet.

Further demonstrating Call's ambition to expand both his educational and entrepreneurial aims, in early 1976, Call negotiated satellite Cinemattachine programs at the ONE Inc. headquarters in Los Angeles and the 4441 Club in San Diego. Like the Mattachine, the ONE was a long-standing homophile

organization. The short-lived agreement between the ONE Inc. and the Cinemattachine was brokered as a revenue-generating enterprise.²⁸ The programming for 'Cinemattachine Los Angeles at the ONE' replicated the San Francisco screenings. That the two oldest and most revered homophile organizations in the country presented pornographic screenings during the mid-1970s heyday of gay male liberation and public sex counters dominant assumptions of homophile groups as stodgy or averse to radical erotic expression.²⁹ In contrast to the ONE annex, the 4441 Club in San Diego appears to have been a typical sex club where Cinemattachine memberships were honored.

By the late 1970s, the original Cinemattachine's live educational seminars gave way to more standard strip shows, marketed as nightly Thursday through Sunday 'Gay Happenings,' circa 1977–1979. By the decade's end, Call rebranded the Cinemattachine as the Circle J (for 'circle jerk') Cinema, 'a private gay-oriented sex film club for men.'³⁰

'You can't keep Hal Call down'

The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed a series of sex panics: reactionary national political shifts toward the right that attempted to repeal sexual liberation, local efforts to police sex business, divisive debates within feminism, and critiques of promiscuity within the gay community (even prior to the AIDS crisis).³¹ The Cinemattachine/Circle J Cinema survived these political shifts, as well as the contemporaneous adoption of home video.

Throughout the 1970s, politicians in San Francisco, most notably city supervisor and later mayor Dianne Feinstein, campaigned to clean up the sexual businesses in the city—often incurring the rancor of the gay community in the process. In 1971, just as Call was starting to exhibit films behind his bookstore, Feinstein stated publicly, "Porno movie houses and bookstores are making it harder for the gay community to become part of the accepted mainstream of America" (Anonymous, 1971). Her position countered the philosophies of Call's endeavors, which called for both enfranchisement in mainstream society *and* erotic expression. Feinstein had relied upon the increasing power of the gay voting bloc to get into office but repeatedly took positions that seemed to oppose sexual expression; her position on pornography was viewed as being an anti-gay position (Friday, 1979; Lorch, 1979).

In the late 1970s, the Cinemattachine again figured in this local struggle between 'law and order' and sexual expression. In 1977, Feinstein angered local gays with a proposed ordinance for more restrictive zoning and containment of adult theatres and bookstores, which would have closed any adult business within 1000 feet (three city blocks) of a residential neighborhood, effectively forcing closure of all the bookstores and movie theatres in the Castro and Polk Street gay ghettos—but with unclear impact on the Tenderloin. By 1979, the ordinance was softened to only disallow permits for new businesses. In March 1979 the Cinemattachine was temporarily closed for a week as one of six private clubs targeted in a local

'Red Light Abatement' effort. The Cinemattachine was instructed to disallow sexual activity among its clientele and to cease live performances; it also installed a security system with a buzzer-entrance, which made the venue less readily accessible.³² The municipal crackdown on porn presaged the broader controversies of the so-called 'sex wars' about pornography and S&M within feminism in the 1980s, and the queer critiques of anti-sex zoning laws and gentrification in the 1990s (see *Dangerous Bedfellows*, 1996; Vance, 1984; Waugh, 1985).

The Cinemattachine was perhaps most audaciously on the front lines of sexual politics when it was regularly showing 'chicken' (young male) films in 1978. For 'Tender Morsels Week' the Cinemattachine screened the three-hour compilation program *Kentucky Fried X*, which was billed: 'Members have requested this program again and again, so here it is!' The apparent popularity of this program prompted the opening of a second dedicated screen inside the venue by July, called the 'Rooster Room,' specifically dedicated to chicken films. As the commentary on a flyer only available onsite cautioned and rationalized: 'Don't look for advertisements or program listings for these screenings. Films will be drawn from our extensive library of so-called "chicken movies," made by various filmmakers in the past. It goes without saying, we make no such films ourselves, but see no harm in presenting movies of young men who are sexually mature as all models shown are.'³³ An article in the *Bay Area Reporter*, however, stated, 'the audience for "chicken" films... is almost nonexistent' (Hernandez and Tudor, 1978).

Both attention to and discretion surrounding 'man/boy love' reflected emergent controversies and debates in gay politics.³⁴ National attention to 'child pornography' as a major moral and political issue began in 1977, though efforts to criminalize erotic images of minors relied upon discourses of child abuse rather than obscenity (Strub, 2011: 195). In 1977, the Save Our Children campaign (largely identified with spokeswoman Anita Bryant) alleged that homosexuals were recruiting and corrupting children and successfully lobbied for the repeal of a gay-rights ordinance in Miami-Dade County, Florida. The federal Sexual Exploitation of Children Act of 1977 was signed into law in early 1978. The National Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), a gay male pederasty rights group, was formed in 1978. In addition, that year California State Senator John Briggs sponsored the ultimately defeated Proposition 6, which would have banned gay and lesbian teachers or gay rights allies from teaching in public schools. Cinemattachine participated in fundraisers opposing both Bryant and Briggs, but it also audaciously opened the Rooster Room in the interim between these high-profile campaigns that had conflated homosexuals with paedophiles.³⁵ In 1979, the Rooster Room was renamed the Circle J Ranch Room, in which the content was newly described as 'popular "young-adult models" films' rather than as 'chicken movies,' probably to minimize pedophilic connotations or anxieties.³⁶

Call's Cinemattachine was considered a betrayal of the Mattachine Society's historical contributions and reputation by former members who 'never forgave Call' (Meeker, 2001: 114). Mattachine co-founder Chuck Rowland told an oral historian, "'this rotten son of a bitch turned our sacred Mattachine into a cock

suck-off club” (Marcus, 1992: 35). As Strub (2013: 58) suggests, ‘The belated convergence of homophile organization and smut was intended to capitalize on the Mattachine legacy . . . but it also brought to the surface how sheerly instrumental the respectability framework had been: discarded by its very progenitor as soon as the cultural shifts of the sexual revolution allowed.’

Although it may seem that Call had long deviated from his original homophile mission by operating a commercial porn theatre and sex club, in a curious way its complex relation with civic life echoed one of the Mattachine’s major efforts from decades earlier: advising men what to do if entrapped on ‘morals’ charges, such as soliciting, lewd conduct, or other illegal same-sex activities. In a retrospective oral history interview, Call remarked, ‘Most of the people who came to the Mattachine and got involved . . . in its early days were people who had been arrested.’³⁷ In Call’s logic, the Mattachine was a society of sex offenders seeking policy reforms. If the Mattachine had helped empowered homosexual men to come out publicly, Call’s Cinemattachine further helped define the legal parameters for them to have sex in private clubs.

Call began advertising the venue as the Circle J Cinema without reference to the Mattachine in the early 1980s, which likely would have diluted new audiences’ associations with its homophile history. Ironically, this occurred just as John D’Emilio’s landmark *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983) was published and canonized the Mattachine Society. In early 1982, when the Adonis and the Circle J lost their lease, both venues relocated around the corner onto 348 Jones Street. With the move, the storefront and the club transitioned from print materials and film, respectively, to video. In a review of the new location, the *Bay Area Reporter* porn critic cheered, ‘what a relief to find the same church pews, and feel that nothing has changed. The slippery sounds of lubricated hands mingled with occasional slurps met my ears, and I realized with relief that you can’t keep Hal Call down’ (Karr, 1982).³⁸

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Notes

1. Advertisement, *Bay Area Reporter* (BAR hereafter), 1 November 1972, p. 44.
2. A notable exception is Strub, 2013.

3. The archival lives of pornography are expansively theorized elsewhere (Dean et al., 2014; Hilderbrand, forthcoming).
4. Hay co-founded the Radical Faeries.
5. From an oral history interview with Hal Call by Dennis Saxman, 30 August 1995 (Saxman, 1995). Transcript pages 3–4, courtesy of San Francisco GLBT Historical Society (hereafter SFGLBTHS).
6. Such forms of ‘contact’ are theorized in Samuel Delany’s influential account of by-gone porn theatres in New York City (1999).
7. For prior interconnections between gay publishing and politics see Hilderbrand, 2013; Johnson, 2010; and Stein, 2004.
8. Harold L. Call Papers, Coll. 2008-010. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles (hereafter cited as Call Papers), Box 4, Folder 40.
9. These venues include the EOCC, the Nob Hill Cinema (still open), the Spartan Theater, the Tea Room Theatre (still open), and the Turk Street Follies (Hernandez and Tudor, 1978).
10. Numerous clippings reporting on these uses appear in the Arlene Elster papers, Collection 2002–11, SFGFBTHS, Box 1, Folders 1–2. See also Johnson (2014).
11. Call Papers, Box 4, Folder 40.
12. As an exhibition venue, the Cinemattachine was operated by a board called The Seven Committee and combined the logics (and space) of Call’s Adonis bookstore, his Grand Prix erotic still and motion picture business, and the membership-driven Mattachine Society. Various permit applications, membership forms, and promotional materials I’ve encountered in the archives seem to blur the distinctions between the various entities as much as they go to pains to distinguish them.
13. A municipal judge ruled that the screening space (500 square feet) fell below the size necessary for a theatrical permit (1500 square feet or more) (Anonymous, 1974).
14. Advertisements, *BAR* 25 July 1973; *BAR*, 6 March 1974; and *BAR* 20 March 1974.
15. Undated flyer, Cinemattachine folder, Sex Clubs and Bathhouses Ephemera collection, SFGLBTHS.
16. Call Papers, Box 4, Folder 40.
17. The brochure states, ‘the “sex for recreation” principle becomes ever more valid alongside the “sex for procreation only” limitations of the past on a planet which is becoming so over-populated and despoiled that future human existence is severely endangered.’
18. Ads in summer 1975 make a point that film collectors could buy 8 mm and Super 8 films at the Adonis. Advertisement, *BAR*, 12 June 1975 and 10 July 1975. In the 1980s, the Adonis was rebranded as Adonis Video.
19. Advertisement, *BAR*, 21 February 1973. In fall 1977 the Cinemattachine began using 16 mm projection. Cinemattachine flyer, October 1977. Unless otherwise indicated, flyers are from the ONE Archives Cinemattachine subject file.
20. Advertisement, *BAR*, 8 August 1973. Emphasis in the original.
21. Los Angeles-based filmmaker and activist Pat Rocco similarly made both gay male erotica and newsreels (Strub, 2012).
22. Advertisement, *BAR*, 20 February 1974.
23. Collection of the ONE Archives.
24. Cinemattachine flyer, 1978.
25. Release from Sexual Tensions seminar, 27–28 July and 6 August 1974; Glory Holes and Public Sex events: 20–13 September and 11–13 October 1974. Advertisements in *BAR*,

- 26 June 1974 and 18 Sept 1974, and undated Cinemattachine flyers. A photo of the Glory Holes and Public Sex live act appears among the plates in Sears, 2006.
26. Undated Cinemattachine flyers.
 27. Undated Cinemattachine flyer.
 28. Letter from Hal Call to Dorr Legg, 22 January 1976. Cinemattachine subject files at ONE Archives.
 29. In 1976, ONE's public programs included overtly erotic events, such as a sadomasochism symposium featuring gay porn director and star Fred Halsted. S-M Symposium, 1 February 1976. Cinemattachine subject files at ONE Archives.
 30. Advertisement, *BAR*, 10 May 1979 p. 35.
 31. Gayle Rubin (2011) has been the most important chronicler of the radical sex culture in San Francisco, as well as an important early theorist of the period's sex panics.
 32. Hal Call, Open Letter to members of the Cinemattachine, 12 March 1979. Cinemattachine subject files at ONE Archives. See also Anonymous, 1979.
 33. Cinemattachine flyer, 1978.
 34. See Tsang, 1981 for an anthology of writings on this issue.
 35. Drought Party to Help Squeeze Anita, 18 May 1977 and Wild Auction benefit for Bay Area Committee Against the Briggs Initiative (BACABI), 5–8 October 1978. Cinemattachine flyers, 1977 and 1978.
 36. Cinemattachine flyers, 1979.
 37. From oral history interview with Hal Call by Dennis Saxman, 30 August 1995 (Saxman, 1995)–
 38. The AIDS epidemic witnessed the simultaneous closure of many public sex venues and the explosion of safe sex in the form of watching pornography. The Circle J, as suggested by its name, was reportedly a bastion of masturbation more than other forms of sex; indeed, during the AIDS crisis, Call banned all other forms of sex on the premises and even stopped screening scenes with anal sex (White, 1986: 14; Sears, 2006: 312; see also Szymanski, 2005).

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