

# Hard To Dismiss: The Archival Value of Gay Male Erotica and Pornography\*



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RÉSUMÉ Dans cet article, l'auteur soutient que les documents érotiques et pornographiques gais forment une partie importante du patrimoine documentaire gai. Il suggère qu'en l'absence d'autres documents gais, lesbiens, bisexuels et transgenres – qu'ils aient été supprimés ou détruits – ces documents ont pris une valeur encore plus grande en tant que « documents de substitution » pour décrire l'expérience des hommes gais

- \* The title of this paper is a playful allusion to Tom Waugh's seminal text, *Hard To Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film From Their Beginnings To Stonewall* (New York, 1996). I must begin by acknowledging Verne Harris, whose paper "The Archive is Politics," presented at the National Archives of Canada on 2 April 2003, first spurred my current research on queer archives. Earlier versions of my text, which were titled "Hard to Archive: Preserving Gay Male Erotica and Pornography in Canada," were presented at several conferences: the Association of Canadian Archivists' (ACA) Conference, Kingston, Ontario, 22 June 2007, in a joint-session entitled "On Becoming Witnesses to the Past: Selective Memory, Archives, and Society," with Katherine Lagrandeur, Library and Archives Canada (LAC); the Ottawa Historical Association (OHA) lecture series, Ottawa, Ontario, 11 October 2007; the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Archives, Libraries, Museums, and Special Collections (GLBT ALMS) Conference, New York City, 10 May 2008, in a joint-session entitled "Sex in the Archives," with Jack van der Wel, Director, Internationaal Homo/Lesbisch Informatiecentrum en Archief (IHLIA-Homodok), Amsterdam; and the Canadian Communications Association (CCA) Conference, held during the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario, 29 May 2009, in a panel entitled "Mainstreaming Pornography/La pornographie régularisée," with Alison Beale, Simon Fraser University, and Rebecca Sullivan, University of Calgary. I would like to thank the following people whose inspired comments and annotations have proven to be most valuable: Harold Averill and Alan Miller, volunteers with the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA); Robert Windrum, former general manager of the CLGA; Greg Bak, Michael Dufresne, Katherine Lagrandeur, Martin Lanthier, Kara Quann, Johanna Smith, and Marie-Josée Tolszczuk, Library and Archives Canada; Michael Graydon, doctoral candidate in sociology, University of Ottawa; Amber Lloydlangston, assistant historian, Canadian War Museum; my friend Darren MacKinnon; Laura Madokoro, doctoral candidate in history, University of British Columbia; Nick Nguyen, archivist, NATO archives; Robert Mainardi, *The Magazine*, San Francisco, who facilitated contacts for permissions to use the images in this article; and Dennis Bell, Athletic Model Guild, who graciously allowed the use of the images that appear in this text. I would also like to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers, who provided insightful comments and suggestions for further reading. And finally, I would like to thank Carolyn Heald, general editor of *Archivaria*, for her sound editorial assistance.

en Amérique du Nord au vingtième siècle. L'auteur affirme que les documents érotiques et pornographiques gais rencontrent la définition des documents d'archives, telle qu'élaborée par Schellenberg, et tout au cours de l'article, il montre comment ces documents ont effectivement une valeur durable qui prend à la fois la forme d'une valeur de preuve, d'information et de recherche. Il aborde le sujet en présentant le contexte historique qui a mené à la création des archives gais au Canada, comme les Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) à Toronto, qui ont le mandat de conserver les documents érotiques et pornographiques gais. Ensuite, en présentant l'évolution des documents à partir des toutes premières revues culturistes américaines (surnommées « magazines beefcake ») jusqu'aux ressources Web récentes, il donne des exemples de leur valeur de preuve et d'information. Dans la dernière partie de l'article, qui traite des efforts nord-américains pour censurer ces documents, il soutient qu'en tentant de censurer, de masquer ou de modifier ces documents, les censeurs ont ajouté un autre niveau d'information et une valeur de preuve additionnelle aux documents, et il donne des exemples de types d'information qui y sont inscrits.

**ABSTRACT** In this article, the author argues that gay male erotica and pornography is a critically important part of the gay male documentary heritage. He suggests that in the absence of other queer records – which were either suppressed or destroyed – in some ways, these documents have gained an even greater value as the “surrogate records” of the twentieth-century gay male experience in North America. The author states that gay male erotica and pornography meets Schellenberg’s definition of an archival record, and throughout the article, he demonstrates how these materials do have an enduring value, which is at once evidential, informational, and research-based. He begins by presenting the historical context that led to the creation of queer archives in Canada, like the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto, which have a mandate to preserve gay male erotica and pornography. Then, in his discussion of the evolution of the records themselves from the earliest American beefcake magazines to recent Web resources, he reveals examples of their evidential and informational nature. In the last part of the article, which deals with North American efforts to censor these materials, he argues that the attempts to censor, mask, and otherwise alter the originals have added another level of informational and evidential value to the records, and he provides examples of the types of information embedded therein.

## Introduction

Since time immemorial, human beings from all societies have been drawn to, and taken pleasure in, artistic representations of explicit sexual activity. Palaeolithic cave-paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, the Biblical “Song of Solomon,” Greek sculpture, the Roman frescoes at Pompeii, the Indian *Kama Sutra*, and the Japanese *shunga* are just a few examples of works that have celebrated human sexuality in all its diversity. But the production, preservation, and accessibility of such documents have always been subject to the social mores of any given society, at any given time. The more a society has sought to become the guardian of its citizens’ morality, the more it has insisted on repressing any movement perceived to run counter to its moral agenda.

Among the most extreme examples are: Florentine society under the influence of millennialist priest, Girolamo Savonarola (1490–1498); English society under Oliver Cromwell (1649–1660); Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich (1933–1945); and Afghan society under Mohammed Omar’s Taliban rule (1996–2001). In a sense, a critical examination of the history of eroticism in a given society exposes that society’s alternating periods of sexual permissiveness and repression.

Significantly, it was during a period of sexual repression that the Victorians made the first recorded use of the newly coined English word, *pornography* (1857). The word reveals through its etymology the great social discomfort English society felt toward sexuality, at a time when archaeological digs were unearthing more and more Roman works of art they considered to be offensive. The word derives in part from the Greek *πόρνῆ* (*pornē*), which initially meant “to pay,” “to buy,” or “to purchase,” and which, through subsequent metonymic use in ancient Greek, came to refer to the people one would buy as sexual slaves, or prostitutes. The Greek word *γράφω* (*graphō*), which originally meant “writing,” and then “field of study,” supplied the suffix of the neologism. The literal meaning of the word *pornography*, then, would be akin to “the written record of the prostitutes.”<sup>1</sup> The word has consistently been defined in a very pejorative way: “[t]he expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature and art”<sup>2</sup>; “[t]he explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, films, etc., intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings”<sup>3</sup>; and “[s]exually explicit material that sometimes equates sex with power and violence.”<sup>4</sup> The word stands in stark opposition to another word created by the Victorians, *erotica* (1854), which derives from Eros, the name of the Greek god of sexual love, and which has come to mean literature or art “of or pertaining to the passion of love.”<sup>5</sup> The contrast between these Victorian additions to the English language – the depreciatory *pornography* and the more affirmative *erotica* – reflects the tension between the abhorrence of, and respect for, human sexuality. This tension is still very much evidenced today as the lines between pornography and erotica are constantly blurred, subject as they are to a very personal interpretation of what constitutes smut or art. (It is not within the purview of this text to attempt a clear distinction of the two.)

1 *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED], vol. VII, p. 1131, s.v. “pornography.” See also “Pornography – Podictionary 943,” *Podictionary – The Podcast for Word Lovers*, <http://podictionary.com/?p=1756> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

2 *OED*, *ibid.*

3 *Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, 2002, n.p.

4 *Canadian Dictionary of the English Language*, 1997, p. 1069.

5 *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. I, p. 970; *OED*, vol. III, p. 274, s.v. “erotic.”

As the cultural inheritors of the Victorians, many Western democracies, including Canada, continue to hold a somewhat guarded view of erotica and pornography. Despite the generally perceived openness toward sexuality since the so-called “Sexual Revolution” of the 1960s, graphic depictions of human sexuality, and indeed nudity itself, still continue to be the subject of much controversy.<sup>6</sup> In this light, graphic depictions of a sexuality perceived to run counter to heteronormative standards – especially gay male sexual activity – are particularly divisive.<sup>7</sup> In fact, explicit depictions of gay male sexuality have been steadily vilified and attacked by social conservatives and religious fundamentalists.<sup>8</sup>

On the surface, gay male erotica and pornography does not seem to serve any other purpose than to titillate and arouse its intended audience. But upon closer examination, it reveals an unexpected wealth of information that is all too often overlooked. The main argument of this article is that gay male erotica and pornography is indeed an archival record very much in keeping with Schellenberg’s definition<sup>9</sup>: it has a value that extends beyond its original purpose, one that is evidential, informational, and research-based. To make this point, the article will begin by providing a brief overview of the historical context that led to the creation of archival institutions in Canada, such as the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto, whose mandate includes the preservation of gay male erotica and pornography. This contextualization should provide information on how these types of documents have come to be collected by various research institutions. Then, the article will attempt to draw out the evidential and informational value of these records by examining their context of creation from the early American beefcake maga-

- 6 Consider for example the public reaction to the 1990 portrait of former Justice Minister Kim Campbell, standing bare-shouldered and holding her legal robes in front of her; or the public calls for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to fire media personality Sook-Yin Lee for appearing in John Cameron Mitchell’s sexually explicit film, *Shortbus* (2006); or the controversy surrounding Martin Gero and Aaron Abrams’s film, *Young People Fucking* (2007), which figured prominently in the Canadian federal government’s debate to curtail funding for works deemed to be offensive.
- 7 It is interesting to note that not all representations of queer sexual activity are considered the same way. Although the producers of erotica and pornography aimed primarily at a heterosexual male audience have tended to steer clear of graphic depictions of gay male sexual activity, lesbian sexual activity has long been one of its favourite sub-genres. And in much the same way, graphic depictions of sexual activity involving pre-operative, male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals have found a special niche in that industry (marketed either as “trannie” or “she-male” pornography), whereas female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals have seldom – if ever – appeared in that market.
- 8 The most common argument advanced by these groups is that gay male erotica and pornography depicts a sexuality that is “unnatural,” “perverse,” and “inherently evil,” which threatens the very fabric of the family and society at large. They also voice the concern that this type of pornography can be used to lure or recruit heterosexual males to the “gay lifestyle.”
- 9 Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1956).

zines to current Web resources. The final section will present an overview of the efforts of Canadian and American legislators to censor these records; the article will assess the impact of these policies on the production of gay male erotica and pornography in North America, chiefly by exposing the evidential value embedded in the censored and altered records themselves. It is hoped that this critical examination will help bring a group of exceedingly marginalized and neglected documents into the larger archival discussion, thus helping to recognize gay male erotica and pornography as significant archival records.

### **A Genealogy of Queer Archives and Gay Pornographic Collections in Canada**

On 14 May 1969, a full month before the Stonewall Inn Riots in New York City, Bill C-150 (*Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1968–69*), an ambitious omnibus bill that included a provision to decriminalize homosexuality in Canada, was passed by the Liberal government of the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Reflecting on the proposed legislation two years earlier, as Minister of Justice in the Cabinet of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, the future prime minister famously asserted “there’s no place for the State in the bedrooms of the nation.”<sup>10</sup> At a time when homosexuality was still very much considered a criminal offence, a pathological perversion, and an abomination to God, Trudeau’s bold political statement placed homosexuality squarely in the public space, consequently inviting public debate on an issue that had seemed irrevocably decided. While a number of homophile organizations were already in existence in Canada prior to the passing of this legislation, the decriminalization of homosexuality fostered a climate in which more and more queer Canadians felt they could speak openly about their own sexuality, in their own voices, without fear of incarceration or other forms of legal reprisal. In a very concrete way, the passing of Bill C-150 contributed significantly to a discursive shift that effectively located homosexuality within the broader realm of the emerging civil rights movement.<sup>11</sup> “The love that dare not speak its name” has now been a vocal participant in discourse on homosexuality in Canada for more than forty years.

Trudeau’s statement regarding the “bedrooms of the nation,” however, goes

10 Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Minister of Justice, interview in Ottawa, 22 December 1967, quoted in John Robert Columbo, *New Canadian Quotations* (Edmonton, 1987), p. 311.

11 As Nikki Sullivan observes, Kobena Mercer has argued that the emergence of the gay liberation discourse in the late 1960s was largely inspired by the African-American civil rights movement of the time, and that the idea of “gay pride” itself was ultimately derived from “Black pride.” Sullivan states that according to Mercer, this debt to the African-American community “has never been explicitly acknowledged.” Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York, 2006), p. 67.

beyond the idea of a discursive space for queer people. Whereas homosexuality had been officially subject to universal condemnation in Canada prior to 1969, the legislation made it possible for queers to have legal sexual relations by providing them with a physical space for this activity, namely the privacy of their own bedrooms. For a segment of the population historically denied entry in a number of “rooms” (State Rooms, Church Rooms, Military Rooms), Trudeau’s statement symbolically provided the one amenity Virginia Woolf once advocated for women, namely a room of their own.<sup>12</sup> Having secured one physical space,<sup>13</sup> queer Canadians were able to look beyond the bedroom and to think of taking their rightful place in other rooms in Canada.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, gay-rights advocates and liberationists, social activists, and scholars began to examine the holdings of Canadian archival institutions for records documenting the history of homosexuality in Canada. From a purely theoretical perspective, the archives was a vital room to examine: an archives, after all, is an institution that acquires, preserves, and diffuses discourse, primarily from one physical space. A critical study of alternative sexualities in the archives would necessarily reveal both the discursive and the physical space, which had historically been allocated to queers in Canadian society. Not surprisingly, these early researchers soon confirmed that the archival space in general did not hold much in the way of records documenting the lives and daily activities of the Canadian queer population. The absence of these records in the physical space also pointed to the absence of these voices from the discourse on sexuality in Canada. In other words, this early research revealed the lack of queer representation in both the physical and the discursive space.

In 1987, Canadian sociologist Gary Kinsman published what is widely considered to be the first critical examination of the history of homosexuality in Canada, *The Regulation of Desire – Sexuality in Canada*.<sup>15</sup> In detailing his research methodology, Kinsman begins by acknowledging a very serious problem with sources and interpretation. He writes:

12 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London, 1929).

13 For an enlightening epistemological discussion of queer space, see Éric Dupont’s critical review of the Queer Sites Conference, which was held in Toronto in 1993. Éric Dupont, “Lost in Space: Quelques concepts clés de la théorie queer,” *Surfaces* III (1993), <http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol3/dupont.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

14 One of the anonymous peer reviewers of this article makes a very intriguing and persuasive point: s/he suggests that an alternate reading of these reforms would make the reverse argument, namely that the legislation was in fact a regulatory response to the growing presence of openly queer people in society, and an overt attempt to confine homosexuality to the limited private sphere of the bedroom.

15 Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire – Sexuality in Canada* (Montreal, 1987). A revised and expanded version appeared a decade later as *The Regulation of Desire – Homo and Hetero Sexualities* (Montreal, 1996).

Because of the socially organized “private” or “personal” character of intimate sexual relations there has been little public record of same-gender sex aside from the “deviant” or “criminal” behaviour found in police records, government reports, newspaper articles, medical and psychiatric discourse, and sex advice literature. Since same-gender eroticism was stigmatized, historically valuable diaries and letters have not been preserved. The voices of those people engaged in same-gender sex have thereby been silenced.<sup>16</sup>

Kinsman concludes that in the absence of surviving personal records, researchers interested in queer studies in Canada have often had to rely solely on public records, which necessarily document only the official version of this issue. Reading these public records “against the grain” has allowed researchers to catch only an indirect glimpse of the everyday lives of queer Canadians in the past. But at the same time, the biased archival account has also spurred researchers to seek out the personal papers of queer people and the records documenting the collective activities of the community itself, all in a conscious effort to ensure that archives as bodies of knowledge also reflect knowledge of the body.

Clearly, early queer researchers were discouraged with their findings regarding the flagrant under-representation of queers in Canadian archival holdings: gay and lesbian materials had often been deemed by archivists to be of little or no historical value<sup>17</sup>; some intimidated queer people avoided the creation and the preservation of their own records for fear of public recrimination.<sup>18</sup> For these and other reasons, Canadian gay activist James (Jim) Egan (1921–2000) deplored what he considered to be the conspiracy of silence that had effectively robbed homosexuals of their history and of the evidential value of their lives.<sup>19</sup> Subsequent gay scholars and archivists have come to see the systematic exclusion of gay and lesbian records from Canadian public archives as a striking example of Foucault’s ideas on power relations at play, with

16 Ibid., p. 66.

17 There is much anecdotal evidence in the profession to suggest that archivists routinely segregated records of a homosexual nature from the fonds they were processing, and returned these materials to the donors or to their heirs. For instance, one archivist with whom I spoke remembers processing the collection of a prominent Canadian politician who was married with children, and discovering in the fonds love letters exchanged with another young man. She subsequently informed his heirs of the existence of these documents, and they demanded that the compromising records be returned to them for destruction. On this topic, Steven Maynard speaks of the “conscious and unconscious suppression of lesbian/gay materials in mainstream archives.” Steven Maynard, “‘The Burning, Wilful Evidence’: Lesbian/Gay History and Archival Research,” *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), p. 196.

18 On this topic, see Estelle Freedman, “‘The Burning of Letters Continues’: Elusive Identities and the Historical Construction of Sexuality,” *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 9 no. 4 (Winter 1998), pp. 181–200.

19 Donna Jean MacKinnon, “Taking Pride in Homosexual History,” *The Toronto Star* (19 June 2003), p. J04.

evidence that the discourse on homosexuality was deliberately being dominated by the State.<sup>20</sup>

It is not surprising that many queer people continue to have an inherent mistrust of the State; since public archives are, by definition, institutions that fall under the purview of the government, the mistrust that many queers have toward the State has often carried over to these institutionalized extensions of government. That these institutions are generally perceived as having failed to document the lives of sexual minorities further reinforces the perception that public archives are historically institutionalized instruments of State-sponsored oppression. In a significant shift of power relations, the people whose records were once not preserved now themselves choose to withhold their records from being deposited in public archives. This choice becomes a politically empowering act, which enables members of the queer community itself to decide the ultimate fate of its own records. Its continued wariness of State archives has simply driven the community to establish its own specialized research institutions dedicated to the preservation of records dealing with alternative sexualities in Canada, such as the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto<sup>21</sup> and the Archives gaies du Québec (AGQ)<sup>22</sup> in Montreal.

But perhaps most importantly, by removing themselves from the public archives arena, these specialized research centres have been able to challenge, to deconstruct, and to redefine what an archival institution should be in order to meet the needs of the queer community they strive to document. For example, the CLGA has adopted a total archives approach, which has allowed it to deal with an impressive range of queer documents in all media: textual, photographic, documentary art, cartographic, architectural, audio-visual, and digital. Additionally, its recognition that some specialized gay and lesbian artefacts and publications were being lost because they were not being collected by mainstream libraries and museums, prompted the archives to become an integrated knowledge-based institution, whose core mandate is to function as archives, library, *and* museum. Such a vast mandate has enabled the CLGA to acquire important, non-traditional records that most other archival institutions had dismissed as ephemera or marginalia. These include various three-dimensional objects that are clearly inscribed with political and/or social meaning, such as buttons and pins; t-shirts (like the “Squeeze a Fruit for Anita” t-shirt

20 Consider also Derrida’s thinking about Archives and the State: “There is no political power without control of the archives.” Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996), p. 4.

21 Founded in 1973. See Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA), <http://www.clga.ca/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

22 Founded in 1983. See Archives gaies du Québec (AGQ), <http://www.agq.qc.ca/>, (accessed on 23 August 2009).

produced to protest the visit of Anita Bryant<sup>23</sup> to Canada in 1978); banners from AIDS marches; uniforms for all-queer sports teams; and even board games like “Gay Monopoly” (produced briefly by the Parker Sisters, who were successfully sued for copyright infringement).

In addition to the collection of artefacts, the CLGA has also acquired a wide range of publications and print materials. Reference books, pulp fiction, novels, and other literary works are located in the James Fraser Library; other small print materials such as leaflets, broadsheets, pamphlets, political tracts and manifestos, scripts, chapbooks, off-prints and zines, are part of the monographs collection; and newspapers, newsletters, journals, and magazines are housed either in the general periodical collection or in the LGBT periodical collection, the latter being the largest of its kind in the world.<sup>24</sup> There is no question that the artefacts and publications in the CLGA collection are in and of themselves historically significant. The fact that few queer private archival records have been preserved over time, however, has given these traditionally non-archival materials an added evidential value. In some cases, they have even become the “surrogate records” of otherwise undocumented activities in the queer community in Canada.

The CLGA holds one of the most significant collections of gay male erotica and pornography in the world. These materials in various media – including magazines, erotic novels (also known as “one-handed novels”), photographs, and film – began to arrive soon after the creation of the CLGA in 1973, as part of the private archival materials donors were transferring to the institution. Rather than disposing of these records, the CLGA quickly recognized the informational nature and the evidential value of these documents, and chose to include them in its extensive holdings.

The CLGA’s acquisition and preservation of erotica and pornography is hardly precedent setting. Archives, libraries, and museums throughout the world have done so for many years. For example, the Bibliothèque nationale de France has been acquiring erotic and pornographic works since the reign of Louis XV. These materials, which include the sexually explicit works of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) and Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), were considered licentious or obscene<sup>25</sup> and were thus kept under lock and

23 A former Miss Oklahoma (1958) and a spokesperson for Florida orange juice, Anita Bryant launched the highly successful “Save The Children” campaign in the United States, arguing that because homosexuals cannot procreate, they must necessarily recruit children. Protests against her visit to Canada were organized between January and September 1978 in Toronto, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Moose Jaw, and London.

24 See CLGA website, <http://www.clga.ca/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

25 The etymology of the word *obscene* itself is uncertain, but one possible origin of particular interest is the Latin theatrical expression *ob scena*, which literally meant “off stage.” See Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London, 1992), p. 25. On a purely etymological level, the use of the word *obscene* to designate pornographic works

key in a separate forbidden section of the Library, known as “L’Enfer” (Hell). In much the same way, the former National Library of Canada (now part of Library and Archives Canada), had acquired some erotica through its legal deposit system; this material was likewise kept under lock and key in a separate space known as “the Cage.” It is interesting to note that in both cases the libraries kept records that were generally considered to be controversial or highly likely to offend, yet at the same time made access to these documents very difficult, if not practically impossible. The act of banishing these records quite literally to “Hell” is, in a very Freudian way, the physical manifestation of the conscious suppression of sexual desire in human society: simply stated, another example of the physical space mirroring the discursive space.

A critical review of recent Web literature suggests that this trend toward secrecy has begun to shift, as archives, libraries, and museums gradually become more open about their erotic and pornographic holdings, and are making them known to the public. In October 2002, for instance, the Museum of Sex (MoSex) opened its doors in New York City, and it has since presented a number of explicit exhibitions on all aspects of human sexuality.<sup>26</sup> That same year, the National Library of Australia announced plans to collect adult Web sites and to add them to its National Collection of Electronic Publications.<sup>27</sup> Since 2004, the Cornell University Library has included the full text of a “Guide to the Collection of Heterosexual and Gay Male Pornographic DVDs [ca. 1997–2003]” on its website.<sup>28</sup> Two years later, the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto, made available to researchers the “Sexual Representation Research Collection,” which encompasses more than one thousand pornographic films, erotic fiction from the 1940s and 1950s, and hundreds of computer disks of Web content.<sup>29</sup> From December 2007 to March 2008, the Bibliothèque nationale de France opened the gates of Hell and hosted an exhibit of materials from its forbidden section, titled “*L’Enfer de la Bibliothèque, Éros au secret*” (The Library’s Hell, The

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would reinforce the idea that these materials need to be relegated to a separate physical space.

26 Museum of Sex (MoSex), <http://www.museumofsex.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

27 Paul Osborne, “Library to Collect Web Porn,” *The Age* (27 August 2002), <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/08/26/1030053027856.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

28 Cornell University Library, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, “Guide to the Collection of Heterosexual and Gay Male Pornographic DVDs [ca. 1997–2003],” collection no. 7703, <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMM07703.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

29 John Intini, “Rated ‘X’ For Extremely Educational,” *Macleans.ca* (7 May 2007), [http://www.macleans.ca/culture/media/article.jsp?content=20070507\\_105096\\_105096](http://www.macleans.ca/culture/media/article.jsp?content=20070507_105096_105096) (accessed on 6 September 2009). See the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/content/view/284/1809/> (accessed on 16 September 2009).

Hidden Eros).<sup>30</sup>

One could argue that this relaxed attitude toward erotic and pornographic records stems at least in part from the realization that these documents offer a rich new field of study, in that they deal with a complex interplay of discursive taboos that extend far beyond the ordinary pale of explicit sexuality: as Eric Schaefer suggests, erotica and pornography deals with the three Ps, “politics, power, and pleasure,”<sup>31</sup> and as such are much more than just “dirty” magazines and films. In the academic milieu, a number of university departments now offer multidisciplinary course work on pornography or “porn studies,” whether it be in English, film studies, gay and lesbian studies, psychology, or women’s studies.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, the CLGA is far from being the only knowledge-based institution to acquire and preserve erotica and pornography. But its collection is of particular interest to researchers for at least two reasons. First, it is composed almost exclusively of records that depict a queer (in this case, mostly gay male) sexuality, thus becoming a valuable addition to queer textual studies or to “homotextuality.”<sup>33</sup> Second, because the CLGA has been acquiring these records for more than thirty-five years, the collection has grown to be one of the most important of its kind in the world. Given these facts, it is only appropriate to examine these records more closely to determine exactly what kind of archival value they hold.

## From Beefcake to Carnalpedia

### *The Emergence of the American Beefcake Magazine*

Gay male erotica and pornography has always been one of the most heavily censored types of documents in existence. For this reason, prior to the decriminalization of homosexuality in Canada, the underground images in circulation were seldom preserved, given their incriminating nature, and they have become exceedingly rare.<sup>34</sup> Researchers interested in the early history

30 John Lichfield, “Sex Please! (We’re French): Paris’s Dirty Secret,” *The Independent* (3 December 2007), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sex-please-were-french-pariss-dirty-secret-761348.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

31 Eric Schaefer, “Dirty Little Secrets: Scholars, Archivists, and Dirty Movies,” *The Moving Image*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2005), p. 89.

32 Joe Jablonski, “Porn Studies Latest Academic Fad,” *Accuracy in Academia* (October 2001), [http://www.academia.org/campus\\_reports/2001/oct\\_2001\\_4.html](http://www.academia.org/campus_reports/2001/oct_2001_4.html) (accessed on 23 August 2009).

33 For an introduction to homotextuality as a tool of literary criticism, see for instance Terry Goldie, *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (Peterborough, 2003).

34 Tom Waugh, professor of film studies at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema (MHSoc) at Concordia University, has researched the topic of illicit or underground gay pornographic

of gay male erotica and pornography in Canada have often had to rely on a select group of homoerotic works that were commercially available at the time, namely physique magazines, also known as beefcake magazines.

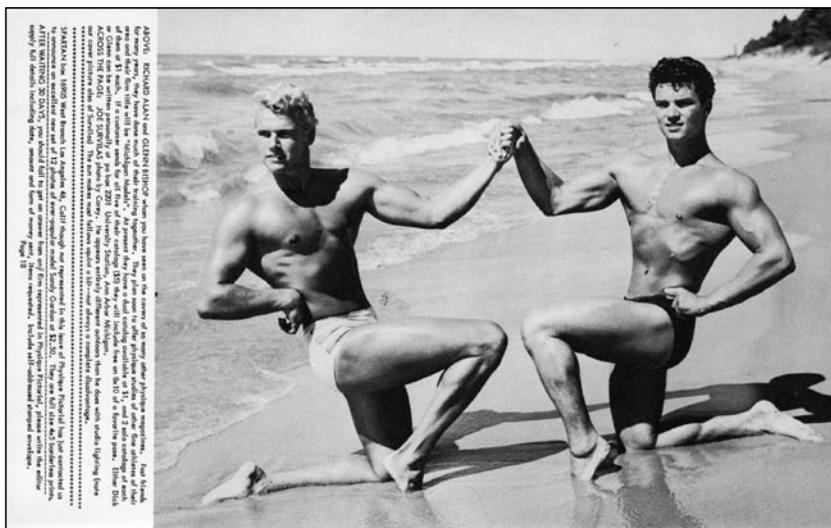
Bernarr Macfadden (*né* Bernard Adolphus McFadden, 1868–1955) founded *Physical Culture*,<sup>35</sup> one of the earliest physique magazines, in 1899. A famous American nutritionist, bodybuilder, and author, Macfadden intended his publication to be a celebration of healthy living, with plenty of photographs of fit, muscular, young men – including Macfadden himself – posing with very little clothing.<sup>36</sup> Given *Physical Culture*'s subject matter, the magazine attracted a huge homosexual following, much to Macfadden's distress, leading him to disparage his gay readers as "painted, perfumed, kohl-eyed, lisping, mincing youths," and urging his other male readers to beat them up.<sup>37</sup> In the wake of *Physical Culture*, dozens of physique magazines, all of them modelled on their predecessor and aimed at a heterosexual male audience, began to flourish in the first half of the twentieth century. By the end of the Second World War, gay photographers had begun to produce their own beefcake magazines.<sup>38</sup> In 1950, Bob Mizer (1922–1992) founded *Physique Pictorial*,<sup>39</sup> the very first physique magazine intended specifically for a gay audience. Much like the other beefcake magazines on the market at the time, *Physique Pictorial* celebrated the aesthetic of the male body, often by directly comparing the young male models to works of art from the Greco-Roman, Neo-

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images at the international level. See Tom Waugh, *Hard To Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings To Stonewall* (New York, 1996); Tom Waugh, *Out/Lines: Underground Gay Graphics From Before Stonewall* (Vancouver, 2002); and Tom Waugh, *Lust Unearthed: Vintage Gay Graphics from the DuBek Collection* (Vancouver, 2004).

- 35 Published monthly in New York City from March 1899 to ca. 1952. In 1950, the title was changed to *Macfadden's Health Review*.
- 36 One of the most famous models featured in *Physical Culture* was Charles Atlas (*né* Angelino Siciliano, 1892–1972), who won the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man contest, organized by Macfadden in 1921 and 1922, and who developed a popular mail-order body-building course, advertised notably on the back pages of children's comic book magazines.
- 37 David Bianco, "Physique Magazines," *PlanetOut History*, <http://www.planetout.com/news/history/archive/09271999.html> (accessed on 27 August 2008).
- 38 In Canada, Alan B. Stone (1928–1992) was one of the most celebrated of these early gay photographers, and he was a frequent contributor to many physique magazines. With some thirty thousand negatives, three thousand slides, fifteen hundred colour photographs, and fifteen hundred contact proofs, his fonds is among the most significant holdings of the AGQ.
- 39 Published quarterly from November 1950 to 1990. One of *Physique Pictorial*'s most famous models was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who posed for Bob Mizer in 1975. Bob Mizer's work served as the basis for an award-winning, semi-biographical film by Canadian writer and director Thom Fitzgerald. See *Beefcake*, dir. Thom Fitzgerald, with Daniel MacIvor, Joshua Peace, and Jonathan Torrens; Alliance Independent Films, 1998, 97 min.

Classical, or Renaissance period. By casting his models in the familiar poses of Atlas with his globe, or Poseidon with his spear, or Roman centurions with slaves, Mizer could cunningly suggest that the nudity or partial nudity of his work was justified, in that it was integral to the work itself, that is to say that, it was inherent to the aesthetic of the age depicted in the photograph. Still, Mizer was steadfastly aware of the strict laws against obscenity, and he made sure that all of his models' private parts were hidden from view, concealed either by the mandatory posing pouch or by various props or other body parts.



**Figure 1:** Photograph of models Richard Alan and Glenn Bishop. Photographer unknown. Published in *Physique Pictorial*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer 1955), p. 18. Reproduced with permission of Athletic Model Guild LLC.

There is a very strong current of homoeroticism in *Physique Pictorial*. Unlike most photographs in other beefcake magazines at the time, Mizer's models are often in close physical proximity, often touching or even holding hands. What Mizer and others skilfully do is ensure that the composition of the photography is framed within well-established and respected aesthetic conventions. A photograph of two men in trunks, holding hands on the beach (see Figure 1), calls attention first and foremost to the symmetrical composition of the shot, and not to any lascivious or perverse connotations. Even the most prudish and virulent critics in 1950s America could not censor this photograph or others like it, simply because it had some artistic merit. That is not to say that they did not try. The censors kept a very close eye on *Physique Pictorial* because they considered it to be lewd and uncouth, and they moni-

tored the magazine for “excessive genital delineation,”<sup>40</sup> among other things. Even if officially the magazine presented aesthetic images of healthy young men, in the spirit of *mens sano in corpore sano*, it still had a strong counter-cultural or subversive sub-text that was fairly obvious to its gay readership. The aesthetic, symmetrical shot of two men holding hands on the beach was still a sexually suggestive work, even if it hinted only broadly. Other photographs also offered gay men a glimpse of what was then often only a utopian fantasy, namely a domestic partnership. *Physique Pictorial* sometimes published photographs of male couples doing the most mundane chores together, like washing the dishes or bathing.

*Physique Pictorial* emerged in the very repressive society of 1950s America, at a time when there were no positive images of homosexuality. As Vito Russo demonstrates, the public perception of homosexuality had largely been informed by Hollywood, the great maker of myths, and these images were far from flattering.<sup>41</sup> More often than not, gay men were mercilessly stereotyped as swishy, effeminate, limp-wristed, lispng sissies. A perfect example is Bert Lahr’s Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, who sings, “Yeah, it’s sad, believe me, Missy/ When you’re born to be a sissy/ Without the vim and verve,” and “I’m afraid there’s no denyin’/ I’m just a *dandy* lion” (with a limp-wristed gesture accompanying the word “dandy”)<sup>42</sup>; and who finally meets the wizard after having gotten “a permanent just for the occasion.”<sup>43</sup> After the introduction of the Hays production code in 1930, gay men on screen assumed a new and more sinister identity as perverse, immoral, and slimy villains,<sup>44</sup> although they were highly ineffectual and usually got themselves killed in the end. Peter Lorre’s character Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon*<sup>45</sup> exemplifies this new stereotype. In a very subtle way, *Physique Pictorial* subverted the stereotypes and offered gay-positive images of masculine, virile, handsome men in strikingly intimate poses with other equally masculine and desirable men.

40 Bianco, “Physique Magazines.”

41 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality In the Movies*, rev. ed. (New York, 1987). Russo’s work was made into a documentary film. See *The Celluloid Closet*, Lily Tomlin, nar.; Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, dirs.; with Tom Hanks, Whoopi Goldberg, Susan Sarandon, Harvey Fierstein, Tony Curtis, and Shirley Maclaine; Brillstein-Grey Entertainment, 1995, 101 min.

42 Chapter 31, “If I Only Had The Nerve,” *The Wizard of Oz*; Bert Lahr, actor, Victor Fleming, dir.; with Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley, Billie Burke, and Margaret Hamilton; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939, 103 min.

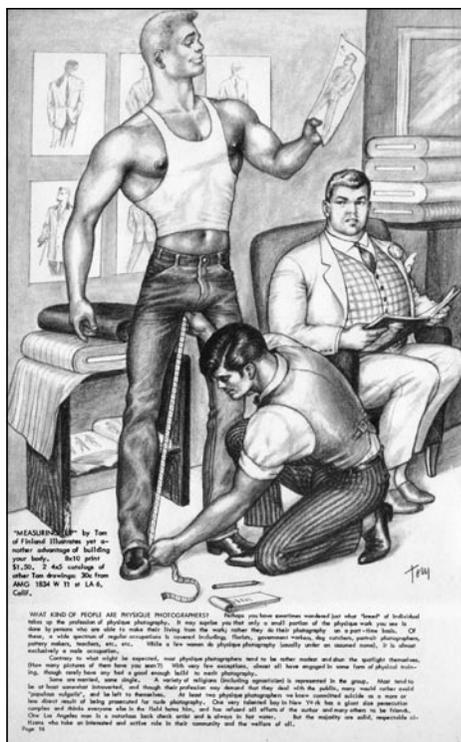
43 Chapter 37, “Surrender, Dorothy!,” *The Wizard of Oz*, Bert Lahr, actor.

44 Chapter 6, “Queen Christina,” *The Celluloid Closet*.

45 Peter Lorre, actor, *The Maltese Falcon*, John Huston, dir.; with Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, and Sydney Greenstreet; Warner Bros. Pictures, 1941, 101 min.

**Figure 2:** Drawing by Tom of Finland. Published in *Physique Pictorial*, vol. 9, no. 4 (April 1960), p. 16. Reproduced with permission of Athletic Model Guild LLC.

The early work of artist Tom of Finland (*né* Touko Laaksonen, 1920–1991),<sup>46</sup> which first appeared in the pages of *Physique Pictorial*, sometimes references the perennial sissy stereotype alongside more masculine and rugged men, as in the illustration of a man getting his inseam measured (see Figure 2). But the dandy is not the central focus of this image: he is relegated to the margins of the drawing, and the reader is invited to follow his gaze to the manly men, who are engaged in homoerotic activity.



In this context, *Physique Pictorial* was incredibly important. Given its innocuous marketing, it was readily available in most newsstands and drugstores, and was generally acknowledged to be a magazine concerned with health and fitness. For countless closeted gay men in 1950s America, it often provided them with their only connection to their repressed sexuality. It served as a sexual outlet, at a time when men looking for sexual contact with other men faced the very real threats of physical harm and legal reprisals (persecution and prosecution). But *Physique Pictorial* also offered them some of the only gay-positive images in society at that time, and as a result, it was instrumental in refashioning the gender and sexual identity of many gay

46 In recent years, the work of Tom of Finland has been republished in many different anthologies. Chief among these are Micha Ramakers, ed., *Tom of Finland: The Art of Pleasure* (Cologne, 2002); Dian Hanson, ed., *Tom of Finland: The Comic Collection* (Cologne, 2005); Dian Hanson, ed., *Tom of Finland: The Complete Kake Comics* (Cologne, 2008); and Dian Hanson, ed., *Tom of Finland: XXL* (Cologne, 2009). In addition, the website for the Tom of Finland Foundation contains an on-line gallery of his artwork; see <http://www.tomsparties.com/Galleries/ToF/index.html> (accessed on 27 August 2009).



some sort of tug-of-war. More often than not, the power relations depicted in these photographs are presented mainly as good, old-fashioned male camaraderie and horsing around, involving smiling, wilful, young participants.

One such photo appeared in the Fall 1958 issue of *Physique Pictorial*. It showed a group of college-aged boys clad only in jock-straps, playfully wrestling with an athletic male model standing in a bathtub. Part of the caption which was published with the photograph read, “[w]e understand forcing a boy to take a bath is a common occurrence in the army, reform schools, fraternity houses, etc.”<sup>47</sup> This caption served a dual purpose: first, it was meant to increase the reader’s arousal by declaring that such homoerotic activity was commonplace, and at the same time, it challenged the magazine’s detractors by insinuating that it was merely depicting an ordinary activity in American society.

### ***Redefining Obscenity***

By 1965, changes in North American obscenity laws<sup>48</sup> meant that depictions of the penis were no longer considered obscene, and as a result, the posing pouches in beefcake magazines finally came off. The relaxed attitude toward human sexuality also meant that more and more magazines featuring male nudes began to appear. However, despite this newfound freedom, the new magazines still relied heavily on allusions to classical art. *Baron*<sup>49</sup> magazine, for instance, went so far as to place its photographs of models beside photographs of classical or Renaissance works of art that bore similar poses. These included comparisons of nude models with Michelangelo’s *David* (1501–1504), *The Apollo Belvedere* (350–325 BCE), as well as a tongue-in-cheek comparison of a figure from Lorenzo Maitani’s *Last Judgment* (ca. 1320) to a nude model drinking beer.

It is definitely worth repeating that beefcake magazines and the early pornographic magazines that followed were determined to counter the Hollywood clichés and generally accepted stereotypes about gay men. Issue after issue emphasized the rugged masculinity of their models as they were engaged in the most overtly homoerotic activity. In time, these magazines and

47 *Physique Pictorial*, vol. 8 no. 3 (Fall 1958), p. 7.

48 The most influential decision at the time was *MANual Enterprises v. Day*, 370 U.S. 478, heard by the US Supreme Court on 26–27 February 1962. On 25 June 1962, Chief Justice Earl Warren ruled that beefcake magazines featuring nude or semi-nude male models are not “obscene” within the meaning of 18 U.S.C. 1461, “because, taken as a whole, they cannot, under any permissible constitutional standard, be deemed to be beyond the pale of contemporary notions of rudimentary decency.” See US Supreme Court Center, *MANual Enterprises v. Day*, 370 U.S. 478 (1962), <http://supreme.justia.com/us/370/478/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

49 CLGA holds only a single issue of *Baron* magazine: volume 1, number 1 (1968).

the early film loops that began to appear commercially in the 1960s<sup>50</sup> began steering away from classical mythology in their search for a more American and more contemporary mythology of the masculine male. Once again, they turned to Hollywood and were able to subvert the preconceived ideas of what it meant to be a “real man.” Images of hyper-stylized masculinity in film (e.g., depictions of cowboys and Indians; leather bikers), informed the emergence of these new gay archetypes. By the early 1970s, in the post-Stonewall environment, these new images had almost completely supplanted the previous stereotypes, so much so that they had become new stereotypes of what it meant to be a gay man in America in the 1970s. The gay pornography industry by this time had inadvertently contributed to the typecasting of gay men, who were more or less urged to conform to one of a handful of identities. As beefcake magazines are among the scant surviving gay documentary sources available today, a close reading of these records allows one to trace the emergence and evolution of these idealized, prescriptive looks for gay men.

*Gay Semiotics*,<sup>51</sup> a rare publication from 1977, was designed as a picture book for gay men, advising them on how to dress the part, and how to identify like-minded potential partners. The book begins by identifying the generally accepted archetypes of masculinity in contemporary society, and labelling them accordingly: the archetype of the Western man; the archetype of the Urbane man; the archetype of the Leather man.<sup>52</sup> Then, it presents these looks as they have been reinterpreted by the gay community, complete with the appropriate labelling of all of the constituent parts: the jock with his Adidas sneakers and satin gym shorts; the uniformed man with his work boots and jungle fatigues; and the leather man with his Levis and leather chaps.<sup>53</sup> The clone look, as it came to be known, was embraced by American society by the time of this publication, and it was clearly reinforced by the popularity of the openly gay pop group, The Village People, who helped disseminate it cross-culturally.

In addition to describing how gay men dress, *Gay Semiotics*, as its title implied, helped initiate the gay novice to the intricate, secret code language

50 In addition to producing *Physique Pictorial*, Bob Mizer also directed several soft-core erotic films featuring his nude and semi-nude models. Some of this original footage was incorporated into Thom Fitzgerald’s movie *Beefcake* (1998). In 2004, physique photographer Dennis Bell acquired Bob Mizer’s archival documents and their associated rights, and he has since produced digitally remastered versions of Mizer’s erotic films on DVD for his AMG Film Classics series.

51 Hal Fischer, *Gay Semiotics – A Photographic Study of Visual Coding Among Homosexual Men* (San Francisco, 1977). The complete publication has been digitized and is currently available on the website of the Queer Cultural Center, <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/HalPages/GaySemIndx.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

52 *Ibid.*, Figures 7–9.

53 *Ibid.*, Figures 20, 23–24.

homosexual men had been using for years to communicate with each other. The book explains that specific articles of clothing, particularly handkerchiefs, are important signifiers.<sup>54</sup> The handkerchief comes in a bewildering array of colours, each one associated with a specific sexual activity or fetish: among the countless examples, light blue indicates fellatio, fuchsia indicates spanking, tan indicates cigars, and white indicates masturbation; worn on the left-hand side of the body, it denotes that the wearer is an active participant in that type of activity; worn on the right, it reveals a willingness to be a passive partner.<sup>55</sup> As a pedagogical tool, *Gay Semiotics* helped decode the language that already figured prominently in gay pornography. Today, that language is very seldom used.



**Figure 4:** Drawing by Tom of Finland. Published in *Physique Pictorial*, vol. 10, no. 3 (January 1961), p. 18. Reproduced with permission of Athletic Model Guild LLC.

This celebration of archetypal masculinity gradually led to the introduction of a favourite instrument of contemporary gay male pornography: the subversion of traditional power relations. This trend first emerged in the late

54 *Ibid.*, Figures 1–2.

55 An examination of Web resources has revealed no fewer than seventy-five different handkerchief colours or patterns, often involving subtle shades or nuanced hues of the same colours (e.g., maroon, light pink, dark pink, mauve, fuchsia, lavender, and magenta). See for instance “The Light Blue Hanky Men Guide To The Hanky Codes,” <http://www.lightbluehanky.com/hankycode.htm> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

1960s, when strict controls over erotica and pornography began to wane. Photographers and graphic artists gradually began to homosexualize authority figures, particularly those who had been the most antagonistic to the gay community: police officers primarily, judges, jailors, priests, and high-ranking military officials, among others. The work of Tom of Finland in particular fetishized these authority figures and made them active participants in depictions of homoerotic activity. Among his tamer work is a depiction of an officer shining a sailor's boots (see Figure 4), in a clear example of role reversal. His later work focused more on the police officer as a central participant in homosexual activity, clearly appropriating the image and homosexualizing the authority figure. On a related note, Tom of Finland's work also explored what could be termed "interpenetrability," or the politically charged idea that sexual roles during intercourse (active or "top," and passive or "bottom") could be challenged and subverted, leading to greater sexual versatility, or even to gay sexual democracy.<sup>56</sup>

By the early 1980s, gay pornography had gained an even more important standing for many gay men. The emergence of affordable technology meant that videocassette recorders were more accessible to the average person, and consequently, the pornographic film industry boomed. At the same time, the appearance of the AIDS virus and the ensuing public health crisis encouraged many gay men to turn to pornography as a safer alternative to actual sexual contact. AIDS had a huge impact on the production of gay pornography; movie studios quickly realized that gay men were particularly at risk of contracting the illness, so they made a concerted effort to educate their viewers through graphic depictions of safer sex. Riskier behaviour, such as ejaculating during fellatio, was no longer depicted on screen or in magazines, and all models wore condoms during intercourse. This was in sharp contrast to the producers of heterosexual pornography who still allowed their models to ingest sperm, and who seldom showed the use of condoms, unless it involved anal intercourse, thus helping to perpetuate the myth that vaginal intercourse was safer than anal sex.<sup>57</sup> The disease had a considerable impact on the

56 Some authors, like Christopher N. Kendall, Dean of Law, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, have taken issue with this position. Inspired by the pioneering work of American anti-pornography feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine A. MacKinnon, Kendall argues that gay male pornography contributes to sexual discrimination, by casting its models in the traditional patriarchal roles of "penetrator" and "penetrated," or "male" and "female," and that "[a]t its core, gay male pornography is, quite simply, homophobic." Christopher N. Kendall, *Gay Male Pornography – An Issue of Sex Discrimination* (Vancouver, 2004), p. 129.

57 Within the past decade, some producers of gay pornography have begun to fetishize risky sexual behaviour, in reaction to years of safer sex presented on film. Studios like Treasure Island Media, Hot Desert Knights, and Eurocreme now routinely show their models engaging in unsafe sexual activity like "barebacking" or "raw sex," euphemisms for unprotected

aesthetic of male models in pornographic magazines and film. For much of the 1970s, gay pornographic works had fetishized a hairy body as the quintessential masculine ideal, and depictions of sweaty, grimy, hairy men had been highly valued. In the 1980s, concern with what lay hidden beneath the surface translated into the need to depict clean, healthy bodies. As a result, the hirsute models made way to shaved, waxed, or naturally smooth bodies that allowed one to see no visible sign of Kaposi's sarcoma (KS) or other HIV-related infection. Gay male erotica and pornography serves yet again as a "surrogate record" to document another poorly recorded aspect of the gay male experience. It provides important information on how the gay community responded to the public health crisis caused by the advent of AIDS.

In the 1990s, the obsession with masculinity and the clear loathing linked to any association with the effeminate, continued to be central concerns of gay pornography. An examination of the tag lines of popular gay men's magazines, the short descriptive phrases found above or below the title and used to market the publication, is most revealing. *Playguy* billed itself as the "magazine for men who like things manly"<sup>58</sup>; *Honcho* proclaimed itself to be the "magazine for the macho male"<sup>59</sup>; *Stallion* labelled itself "the new breed of rugged male"<sup>60</sup>; and *Bear* used a pun to describe itself as "masculinity ... without the trappings."<sup>61</sup> It was as if the pornographic industry believed it needed to reassure gay men that if they bought these magazines, they were not weak pansies or fairies, but they were manly, macho, rugged, and masculine. A quick survey of gay pornographic titles at a local newsstand in Toronto confirmed that today magazines do not employ tag lines, presumably because homosexuality is now a little more socially accepted than it was a mere ten years ago.

Contemporary gay male pornography continues to question the authority society has invested in its hyper-masculine figures. Nowhere is this more obvious today than in pornographic parodies of popular Hollywood film. The hyper-stylized, glossy images of Hollywood masculinity have become the fodder for equally hyper-stylized, glossy gay pornographic spoofs. A promotional photograph for *Catalinaville*<sup>62</sup> shows a muscular model named Steve Rambo – an obvious reference to a popular Sylvester Stallone character – clutching a gun, standing in a river, his clothes drenched and clinging

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anal intercourse.

58 CLGA, Cover, *Playguy*, vol. 2, no. 18 (1977). *Playguy* has been published since 1972. *Playguy*, <http://www.playguy.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

59 CLGA, Cover, *Honcho*, vol. 2, no. 16 (August 1979). *Honcho* has been published since April 1978. *Honcho*, <http://www.honcho.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

60 CLGA, Cover, *Stallion*, vol. 2, no. 7 (November 1989). *Stallion* was published from April 1982 to June 1993.

61 CLGA, Cover, *Bear* 23 (1993). *Bear* was published from 1984 to 2000.

62 CLGA, *Skinflicks*, vol. 17, no. 6 (December 1997), p. 61.

to his body, in a pornographic take on the adventure movie.<sup>63</sup> Other recent examples based on hyper-masculine roles or situations, include spoofs of the James Bond franchise (e.g., *License To Thrill* and *Thunder Balls*),<sup>64</sup> as well as a take on a Steven Spielberg film (*Shaving Ryan's Privates*),<sup>65</sup> and a parody of a Francis Ford Coppola masterpiece (*The Cockfather*).<sup>66</sup>

In the twenty-first century, gay male erotica and pornography continues to thrive, particularly in the Web environment. Specialized file sharing sites modelled on YouTube<sup>67</sup> are remarkably popular. Chief among these is the Canadian-based XTube,<sup>68</sup> which features sexually explicit video clips divided into several categories, and aimed at a very broad audience, encompassing all sexual orientations. These clips include industry-based professional video, as well as user-generated, DIY (“do-it-yourself”) content. Other similar pornographic file sharing sites include PornoTube<sup>69</sup> and Livesex.Com,<sup>70</sup> as well as the exclusively homosexual GayTube.<sup>71</sup> Thanks in part to sites like these and to recent technological advances, it is now possible to download pornography onto iPods, iPhones, cellular phones, and other similar handheld devices. In March 2009, a new Wiki-based Web encyclopaedia on human sexuality, Carnalpedia, was launched. It accepts user-contributed content to hundreds of pages in nine different categories, including “porn stars” and “porn films.”<sup>72</sup> And there is even an on-line, gay pornographic video game called “Kingdom Cum,” hosted on the popular gay social networking site, Squirt.<sup>73</sup> The medium has certainly changed since the early days of the beefcake magazine, but the message remains much the same: these documents continue to demonstrate an enduring value that is clearly evidential, informational, and research-based. The challenge of ensuring the long-term preservation and accessibility of these records is in many ways no different from the issues archivists already face in dealing with most other digital records. However, because these documents continue to be regarded as historically worthless, they are less likely to be identified as archival, and consequently they run a much greater risk of being lost forever.

63 *Catalinaville*, Josh Elliot, dir.; Catalina Home Video, 1998, 120 min.

64 *License To Thrill*, Bill Hunter, dir.; Fox Studios, 1994, 84 min; *Thunder Balls*, Thor Stevens, dir.; Fox Studios, 1998, 120 min.

65 *Shaving Ryan's Privates*, Edward James, dir.; Erotic Men Studios, 2002, 71 min.

66 *The Cockfather*, Csaba Borbely, dir.; Man Size, 2006, 96 min.

67 YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

68 XTube, <http://www.xtube.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

69 PornoTube, <http://www.pornotube.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

70 Livesex.Com, <http://livesex.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

71 GayTube, <http://www.gaytube.com/> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

72 Carnalpedia, <http://www.carnalpedia.org/> (accessed on 25 August 2009).

73 “Kingdom Cum,” *Squirt*, <http://www.squirtgame.com/index.html> (accessed on 27 August 2009).

### Censorship of Erotic and Pornographic Records

It would, of course, be fallacious to believe that the evolution of gay male erotic and pornographic records occurred without any political backlash or attempts at censorship.<sup>74</sup> The “Golden Age of Pornography,” which extended from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, witnessed the first concerted efforts to ban pornographic documents outright. This was a time marked by the proliferation of pornographic images in print and on film, combined with the increased commercial availability of these materials and a gradual cultural shift from the underground to the mainstream.<sup>75</sup> The growing visibility of gay male pornography in Canada inevitably attracted the attention of politicians, clergy, and law enforcement officials who began to seek stricter controls against these materials. They recognized fairly early on that up to ninety percent of gay male pornography in Canada was imported chiefly from the United States.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, their efforts focused primarily on Canada Customs, and on the concern that this agency was not doing enough to prevent the entry of obscene materials into Canada. At the same time, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) began raiding the homes of gay men across Canada and seizing items from their private pornography collections. The raids occurred mainly in 1979 in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Saskatoon, and in all cases, the RCMP was looking for films produced by Falcon Studios, All-American Studios, and Brentwood Studios, all of them American producers of mainstream, gay pornographic films. The raids were accompanied by intimidation and blackmail: in at least one case, the RCMP threatened a gay man with the loss of his job and criminal charges, but they stated that no charges would be laid against him if he supplied the police with the names and addresses of his gay friends. Moreover, the RCMP indicated that they were particularly interested in obtaining the names of high-ranking people such as politicians, business-

74 For an excellent introduction to censorship in Canada, see Janine Fuller and Stuart Blackley, *Restricted Entry: Censorship on Trial* (Vancouver, 1996); and Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, and Lise Gotell, *Bad Attitudes on Trial: Pornography, Feminism and the Butler Decision* (Toronto, 1997).

75 For instance, prior to the release of the 1971 gay pornographic film, *Boys in the Sand*, director Wakefield Poole took out full-page advertisements in such mainstream publications as *The New York Times* and *Variety*, which also published critical reviews of the film. See Jenni Olson, *The Queer Movie Poster Book* (San Francisco, 2004), p. 54. In terms of heterosexual pornography, consider the mainstream public reception and commercial success of films like Gerard Damiano’s *Deep Throat* (1972) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), Artie and Jim Mitchell’s *Behind the Green Door* (1972), and Just Jaeckin’s *Emmanuelle* (1974). The release of all of these films occurred at a time when there was a more mainstream acceptance of pornographic films, sometimes referred to as “porn chic.”

76 This was also one of the significant findings of the *Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution in Canada* (Ottawa, 1985).

men, and town officials.<sup>77</sup>

During much of the 1980s, the Canadian federal government, not unlike its American counterpart, began to pay closer attention to the availability of pornography. This proved to be a most contentious issue for both Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, as it was for American President Ronald Reagan. *The Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution in Canada*, also known as the Fraser Report, was released in the spring of 1985. Not unlike the *Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (also referred to as the Meese Report), released in the United States a year later, the Fraser Report was highly critical of pornography. Much of the ensuing legal debate in Canada centred on what constituted obscene materials, and what limits, if any, could be imposed on these materials without challenging the notion of freedom of expression as guaranteed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The debate was particularly volatile because the terms *pornography* and *obscenity* themselves had been open to a very subjective interpretation, involving notions of “community standards” and “private morality.” Given this situation, gay pornography was almost always deemed to be obscene, because the sexuality it depicted was in and of itself judged to be contrary to community standards. As a result, customs officials unfairly targeted gay pornography entering Canada from the United States. Even though gay pornography accounted for only approximately ten percent of all pornographic materials imported into the country, according to estimates provided by Canada Customs officials, it accounted for anywhere between twenty and seventy-five percent of all pornography seized and detained at the border in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>78</sup> This undue attention extended well beyond pornography, and other mainstream publications featuring gay or lesbian themes were routinely seized at the border. These included such critically acclaimed literary texts as *Trash* (1988) by Dorothy Allison, *Surprising Myself* (1987) by Christopher Bram, *Querelle* (1947) by Jean Genet, *The Price of Salt* (1951) by Patricia Highsmith, *A Place I've Never Been* (1990) by David Leavitt, *Desert of the Heart* (1964) by Jane Rule, and *Teleny* (1893), a novel attributed to Oscar Wilde. Also targeted were copies of *The Joy of Gay Sex*, even though its heterosexual counterpart, *The Joy of Sex*, was freely available in most bookstores across the country.<sup>79</sup>

The American publishers of gay male pornography followed this situation closely. For them, Canadian businesses represented a lucrative market,

77 Paul Trollope, “Porn Raids Sweep Country,” *The Body Politic* 53 (June 1979), p. 9.

78 Kendall, *Gay Male Pornography*, p. 175.

79 Titles taken from Electronic Frontier Canada/La frontière électronique du Canada, *Canada Customs Hit List*, “A Small Sampling of Publications Seized or Detained by Canada Customs,” <http://www.efc.ca/pages/chronicle/customs.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

and they voluntarily self-censored their publications in order to ensure that their magazines could safely be imported into Canada. Two important self-censorship techniques were employed: the first simply involved not printing any potentially offensive material, leaving empty space on a page; the second involved blacking out any parts of the magazine the publishers thought might be deemed offensive by Canada Customs officials. By censoring, deleting, masking, and otherwise altering these documents, the publishers embedded – albeit inadvertently – yet another level of evidential and informational value within these records. The following section reveals the type of information that can be gleaned from an attentive reading of these documents.

The Canadian editions of gay male pornographic magazines differed significantly from their original American versions. For the most part, publishers targeted explicit depictions of oral-genital contact and anal intercourse. Often, the end result was blacked out images. Blacking-out did not completely mask the offending images, and in the right light, one could still make out the censored photographs or words. In some cases, up to twenty pages of a single issue could be affected, and the blacking-out of an entire page was a fairly common occurrence.<sup>80</sup> The publishers generally erred on the side of caution; so much so, that the self-censorship was often more extreme than what Canada Customs might have warranted. These included the blacking-out of the anus, even in drawings, while leaving the erect penis uncensored.<sup>81</sup> In some cases, the blacking-out of photographs had nothing whatsoever to do with the depiction of sexual activity, but more with the fear of prosecution from companies whose logos were featured in the photographs. For example, censors blacked-out the logo of a well-known motorcycle company that appeared on the t-shirt of a partially nude model.<sup>82</sup> This was akin to the generic disclaimers that frequently appeared at the beginning of gay pornographic films featuring uniforms, where producers felt compelled to state: “All uniforms depicted in this video do not necessarily [*sic*] reflect the sexual orientation of that particular uniformed profession.”<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps more interesting was the self-censorship of sexually explicit comic strips in these magazines. In some cases, black dots were placed over some parts of the images that might be considered offensive, but the dots certainly did not prevent the reader from understanding what was being depicted in the drawing.<sup>84</sup> And more curiously still, the text in the speech bubbles, which essentially described what was happening in the panels, remained uncensored. Of course, the opposite sometimes occurred, where the sexual activity that

80 See for example CLGA, *Stars*, vol. 5, no. 8 (October 1991), p. 82.

81 See for example CLGA, *Stars*, vol. 5, no. 2 (April 1991), p. 26.

82 CLGA, *Honcho*, vol. 14, no. 8 (August 1991), p. 64.

83 *Back to Basics*, Mark Ludwig, dir.; South Beach Video, 2003, 91 min.

84 See for example CLGA, *Torso*, vol. 3, no. 2 (August 1984), p. 34.

was graphically depicted in the comic strip was cleared, and it was the speech bubbles that were censored.<sup>85</sup> One could argue quite strongly that this form of censorship could invite the readers to imagine much more offensive dialogue in these empty bubbles than the intended original dialogue.

American publishers did not limit their self-censorship to photographs and drawings; by the mid-1980s they were also censoring parts of the text. The publishers used a variety of censorship techniques on explicit short stories. At first, part of the text was simply not printed in the Canadian edition, leaving empty spaces, and then, any offensive accompanying image or highlighted text was blacked out.<sup>86</sup> A more extreme example is a page taken from a 1992 issue of *Stars* magazine.<sup>87</sup> The last few lines on the preceding page read: “Brad lay there and wondered what was going to happen next. He ...”; the following page is heavily edited. In fact, the first two columns have not even been printed. The text picks up again at the bottom of the third column with the sentence: “When the two stud lovers passed out, Brad got up, took a quick shower and got dressed.” The *entire* description of the sexual encounter had been excised from the text.

An even more disturbing example of self-censorship occurred in the Canadian edition of a 1986 issue of *Inches* magazine. The original American version included a letter to the editor from a twenty-two-year-old African-American male who explained that he and his lover would like to engage in anal intercourse but wondered how to avoid the risk of being infected with the HIV virus. The editor’s response states that while there is no way of eliminating the risk of contraction, condoms have been shown to reduce the risk of transmission. The editor adds that a much safer alternative to this high-risk activity is the use of sexual toys. In the Canadian edition of the magazine, neither the letter to the editor nor the editor’s response was printed, leaving an empty space on the page.<sup>88</sup> As this one example illustrates, even public health information was subject to the ruthless self-censorship of publications like these.

Self-censorship continued unabated until at least 1992. That year, the Supreme Court of Canada heard the case of Donald Victor Butler, the owner of Avenue Video Boutique in Winnipeg, who had been charged five years earlier with 250 counts of selling obscene material, possessing obscene material for the purpose of distribution or sale, and exposing obscene material to public view, contrary to section 159 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*.<sup>89</sup> In

85 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 5 (November 1984), p. 33.

86 See for example CLGA, *Stars*, vol. 1, no. 10 (October 1992), p. 29.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

88 *The Body Politic* 131 (October 1986), p. 10.

89 The pornographic materials in question were aimed primarily at a heterosexual male audience.

handing down its decision in *Queen v. Butler*, the Court ruled that the obscene material was protected by the guarantee of freedom of expression as inscribed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. But at the same time, the Court declared that the obscene material that depicted acts of violence or cruelty in a sexual context, or that featured non-consensual sex, or that otherwise dehumanized men and women, was proscribed by the Charter's guarantee of sex equality. The Court incorporated into its decision parts of the anti-pornography civil rights ordinance, which had been drafted by American feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon in 1983. Donald Butler was eventually acquitted of 242 of the charges against him, and ultimately convicted on eight of the original charges.<sup>90</sup> The ruling was substantial in that it helped clarify the definition of obscenity in Canada and allowed pornography to be judged by an equality-based analysis, rather than on a community standards basis. Very soon after this ruling, American publishers abandoned their self-censorship practices.

Throughout the 1990s and despite the new harms-based approach as defined in the Butler case, many lower court judges in Canada continued to apply the ambiguous "community standards" test to materials that were deemed to be obscene, and Canada Customs continued to seize and to detain queer materials at the border, regardless of whether they were pornographic or not. In particular, materials that were destined for Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium in Vancouver were routinely detained at the border, while shipments containing the same materials were often delivered without any interference to various other bookstores in Canada. In 2000, the Supreme Court of Canada heard the case of *Little Sister's v. Canada*. The appellants in the case argued that the Butler sex-equality test was not appropriate for gay or lesbian pornography, because by nature this type of pornography depicted same-gender sexual activity, and it could therefore not present the subjugation of one sex by another. The Court rejected this argument and ruled that the Butler approach could also protect gays and lesbians from materials that depicted violence, cruelty, and dehumanization in sexual relations.<sup>91</sup> However, the Court did rule that Canada Customs had for years unfairly targeted Little Sister's, and it characterized Canada Customs procedures as "'difficult to understand', 'arbitrary', 'deficient', 'unreasonable', 'haphazard', and susceptible to 'incor-

90 *R. v. Butler*, [1992] 1 S.C.R. 452; 27 February 1992; docket no. 22191. Judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada, <http://csc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1992/1992scr1-452/1992scr1-452.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

91 *Little Sisters [sic] Book and Art Emporium v. Canada (Minister of Justice)*, 2000 SCC 69, [2000] 2 S.C.R. 1120; 15 December 2000; docket no. 26858. Judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada, <http://csc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/2000/2000scc69/2000scc69.html> (accessed on 23 August 2009).

rect application’.”<sup>92</sup> Although the Little Sister’s case was heard in 2000, materials destined for the bookstore are still regularly held at the border, and Little Sister’s remains embroiled in a legal battle with Canada Customs.

## Conclusion

In this all too brief study of gay male erotica and pornography, the author has only been able to provide a very cursory overview of these easily dismissed records, and much more could have been said about them. In and of themselves, these documents form a crucial part of the gay male documentary heritage, and the fact that very few other gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered records have been preserved has given gay male erotica and pornography an added evidential, informational, and research-based value. They are transgressive records that have challenged the negative stereotypes about gay men and presented alternatively gay-positive images in order to refashion gender and sexual identity roles in society; they are prescriptive records that have encouraged the emergence of a very restrictive clone look for gay men; they are empowering records that have subverted power relations and made us question the authority society has given to its idealized, hyper-masculine figures; and they are social records that have allowed researchers to trace societal attitudes toward homosexuality, pornography, and censorship. Clearly, in light of these findings, there can be little doubt that gay male erotica and pornography has opened up the discursive space for gay men, by offering them richly layered records, couched in both an overt and a coded language. We can be grateful to knowledge-based institutions like the CLGA, among many others, for having recognized the archival value of these documents when they first began acquiring them, for rescuing these records from oblivion, and for continuing to make them available to new generations of researchers.

92 Kendall, *Gay Male Pornography*, p. 17.