I. Cronenberg’s Crash and the Demons of Archness

This article was not prompted by critical study in film pornography whose license Linda Williams renewed ten years ago with her brave safari, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible.” Instead, this backward glance to Radley Metzger’s soft-core sex films turned initially on my irritated reaction to David Cronenberg’s Crash (1996). There is one sequence in particular that illustrates what’s wrong with this film and how it’s typical of the sex habits of current commercial cinema. The story has downshifted from elliptical exposition to caesura, the camera hangs remotely in the middle distance of its cool regard. The spectacle it takes in is intimate: two principle characters, husband and wife, having sex in their high-rise apartment. Catherine (Deborah Kara Unger) is sprawled on her side naked, clutching a pillow to her breasts as James (James Spader) takes her from behind and the side. The actors barely move in pantomiming the act. The supplement, Unger’s voice, is what counts—it progressively takes over the scene. As her excitement rises, it lowers in demand for erotic details about Vaughn (Elias Koteas), the crash cultist whom James has just met and with whom he has, as yet, no sexual relation.

The demons of archness possess the scene, the specter cast over combined details here: idiot modesty with a pillow, Unger’s gaspy-growly delivery, a homoerotic-autoerotic declension of perversities, virtual immobility in a sex scene. Cronenberg sets Crash’s agenda of faux-porn outrages then and there. Accordingly, a man who never resists a rhyme, Cronenberg repeats this trope in a later scene. Right after she has learned everything she wanted to know about Vaughn—first-hand in the backseat of his black Lincoln—Catherine is positioned similarly in bed again, purring contentedly as James lovingly caresses her welts and bruises.

Heatedly (but briefly) debated in the popular press, Crash’s hollowed-out provocations exemplify Nineties Cronenberg of schoolboy vainglory, reduced to calculating erotic effects to decorate increasingly feeble films. The vanity is woefully misplaced and unbecoming an aging filmmaker with his kind of schlock-iconoclast history as he tries and fails to get up some scandal again. Crash plays so tiredly to commercial cinema’s habit of grasping for programmatic sex that it flocks with Paul Verhoven’s Showgirls (1996). Worse than that, the film is so faint in conception that it also shrinks to a Verhovenesque grasp at erotic novelty. This should embarrass Cronenberg, who once effortlessly matched George Romero’s scary intensity. No one is disappointed when a Verhoven, or an Adrian Lyne, slips out another stale sex wafer (what is more predictable a cookie than Lyne’s Lolita [1997]?). But Crash is annoying because it betrays Cronenberg’s corrosive imagination; it manifests a depressing deflation of the director who made Videodrome (1983) and Dead Ringers (1989).

It was Crash, then, that prompted me to remark that we need a Radley Metzger revival to put things in perspective. My sarcasm cut two ways. If remembered at all, Metzger is recalled as the late-Sixties’ preeminent charlatan of soft-shaft kitsch-eroticism. So, it ridicules Cronenberg—deservedly—for re-treading an already risible and thirty-year-old sexual coding to trick out a movie. But it also insults Metzger by accusing him of Cronenberg’s vanity, stiffness, and cynicism. On reflection (and this is where the writing started), memories of Metzger are fonder than that. There was a sweet squirm, an undressed pleasure in the surprises his sexual sleighs once let loose. Metzger performed tender testing of the limits of sexual permission that was, in the 1960s, a bit giddy with adventure. As superficial and inadvertently funny as Metzger’s films seem today (and seemed even then), there was no disgust or anger mixed with the sex, as there was, for example, with Bob Fosse’s nastier mainstream charlatry in Sweet Charity (1969), exactly contemporary with Metzger’s signature film, Camille 2000 (1969). Metzger’s movies may have been stupid but they cast no bitter seeds, unlike the infinitely smarter but poisoned Star 80 (1983) which
marked the end of Fosse's career.

Metzger had only a slender memorable phase, 1966-1973. But for these years he largely defined a moment of screen-sex experiment in commercial feature films. Metzger served as a threshold, an interval between the gray grunge of Fifties-early Sixties exploitation films and the grim-hard-sex-cinemataph deeply creased the Seventies with Behind the Green Door (the Mitchell Brothers, 1971) and The Devil in Miss Jones and Deep Throat (Gerald Damiano, 1972). Though for the short season of "porno chic" it seemed otherwise, hard-core cast a pall over screen sex in that decade. It eclipsed not just Metzger but most of the sexual testing of the late-Sixties screen. Deep Throat ended the fantasy of erotic films that were regular movies only with sex—it did not begin it. 3 It was Metzger's films, not Damiano's, that nurtured that fantasy, that sketched its lines, and that attracted attention to it. The inversion of much received opinion I am suggesting goes beyond saying—as many have—that Metzger's luxuriously lighted 35mm soft-core features were "better" than the 16mm blow-ups of plotless dungeon-dark productions hard-core features foisted on viewers. There was a wider and ineluctable attitudinal shift at work in The Devil in Miss Jones when Damiano sends its heroine literally to hell—twice.

Born to filmmaking on the other side of the Deep Throat divide, Cronenberg was, from the start of his commercial career, beginning with Shivers (1975) and Rabid (1976), kindred to Damiano's cinema of sexual punishment. Dark suspicion, disgust and loathing of sex are the core of Cronenberg's filmmaking as with Damiano's, and as it also generally was at the core of porn films—at their best and at their worst. This is a ground tone and feeling that they shared, and freely exchanged—Crash is just an idiotic latecomer. In the wake of all that, nothing of Metzger's memory should have remained. Almost nothing does. 4

II. METZGER REVIVED, A SIXTIES SWINGER AMONG THE EURO-HORRORS

My sarcasm toward Crash was, nonetheless, a bit disingenuous for I had already heard that a mild Metzger revival was underway. Over the last two years, his signature titles have been video-retrieved on tape and DVD. Some turn up on the Canadian "Showcase" cable station (which features art films) and several have been revived for occasional theatrical screenings. 5 The minor Metzger renewal extends as well to appreciation appearing on web sites, including a long, intelligent and informative career interview. 6 Furthermore, Metzger is not alone among disreputable filmmakers of the Sixties to enjoy a revival. There is a parallel refurbishing of a group of obscure European erotic-horror directors like Jess Franco, Jean Rollin, Walther Borowczyk, Jose Lorroz and their precursor, Mario Bava, who launched modern Italian horror movies—and the cult of Barbara Steele—with La Maschera Del Deminio (Black Sunday/Mask of
the Demon, 1960). At one remove, subsequent Bava films, like Sie Donne Per L’Assassino (1964), godfathered the plot-concepts and style Dario Argento still deploys today. There is now a British journal devoted to these and other horror genre filmmakers, Necronomicon, and a British book by Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, Immortal Tales: Sex & Horror Cinema in Europe, 1956-1984 has charted their careers and films (including an appreciative appendix essay on Metzger).7

Obvious problems of genre, nationality, and lineage immediately loom when I even suggest any correspondence between these European horror directors and Metzger. And this is what I am doing, suggesting a sort partnering of horror and sex films reaching back from the Seventies into the Sixties. The Europeans were arguably the bastard offspring of British Hammer horror movies. They spanned the decade between Hammer’s rise in the late Fifties and the Seventies’ independently produced American horror films of George Romero, Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, and early Cronenberg, which were themselves precursors of John Carpenter’s Halloween (1978) and the “slasher films” to follow. Metzger was, in contrast, a slick erotic-film director who engendered the Euro-style that Just Jaekin capped with Emmanuelle (1974).8

The solution to the obvious problem of dubious parallels has two intertwined parts: one concerns directors’ ambitions and intentions; the other, their positions in the industry. First, as Tohill and Tombs clarify, the European filmmakers often considered themselves art-film directors. In the cases of Jean Rollin and Warren Borowczyk, they consciously attached to the Surrealist tradition. Second, Tohill and Tombs show how the directors fit into an independent production world where low-budget soft-core sexed-up horror provided the channel for their ambitions. They did marginally successful work, for a time, and arguably kept a certain stubborn auteurist integrity until most were sucked into hard-core pornography as a result of market shifts in the Seventies. Simply put, the simultaneously advantageous and perilous position of Euro-horror films was that they bordered the European erotic cinema of the Sixties. So, as Tohill and Tombs show anecdotally, it was virtually preordained that Euro-horror be absorbed into the porn-film when it broke out in the Seventies, just as soft-core sex films were.

The peculiarity of low-budget horror as a genre for auteurist and/or art film readings remains a critical question. Robin Wood’s efforts to furnish a serious account of Seventies independent American horror films along auteurist lines has proven durably influential in drawing serious attention to horror films conventionally dismissed as just disreputable.9 However, the scope of application Wood’s model allows beyond those American independent horror films is uncertain.10 The problems with the model become pressing once one beholds the shortcomings of the Sixties European horror directors, so obvious when the films are compared to Hammer’s Terence Fisher or to Romero or Hooper. The defense of Euro-horrors, to which Tohill and Tombs lend cautious sympathy, and to which contributors to Necronomicon are openly dedicated is, so far, not persuasive when tested against the films themselves.

No such defense is to be made here for Metzger because no critical recuperation should be sought. Metzger reflected a different attitude, one that does not elicit critical revision and always resisted criticism in the first place. Metzger has no depths or even intentions for a critic to plumb. Everything about his films suggests a cinematic swinger happily cobbled together a format in which to be sexy. There is little to indicate an aspiring auteur in friction with a genre. Rather, Metzger’s films are exactly what they look like today and what they did when they were made: naively glossy, gauche, pleasure seeking, and dispensable. They are commercial erotic filmmaking with a coat of European style. Metzger mixed that coat from art-film colors and codes. If there is no need to revise Metzger critically, however, there is perhaps a need to understand his place in screen sex’s recent evolution. The Metzger revival is hardly illuminating on this point and is mildly perplexing. It could be attributed to any number of factors but none of them leads to a sense that a critical reevaluation is underway. The most likely explanation is a postmodern ironic nostalgia for the many visible cultural remains of the Sixties and Seventies falling along a spectrum running from The Brady Bunch to Star Trek also comes upon and absorbs Metzger’s Camille 2000. Perhaps recycling of his kitsch-eroticism allows some momentarily to re-fantasize an erotic kitsch-luxury different from the sexually nervous decades that followed. Any contemporary cult appropriation of Metzger is probably
understood just as well in conjunction with Austin Powers, The Spy Who Shagged Me (1999) as through contact with Boogie Nights (1997). Differences between Michael Meyers’s toothsome Austin and the erstwhile Calvin Klein underwear-boy Mark Wahlberg should not, in any case, be exaggerated. Even the casting of quasi-mummified Seventies stars has close parallels: one offers the ruin of Robert Wagner as Dr. Evil’s major domo, the other the husk that was Burt Reynolds as a porn director. The Spy Who Shagged Me even boosts an emblematic asset from Boogie Nights, actress Heather Graham. Wallowing in the erotic kitsch of the recent past does not give rise to discriminations, as these films attest. It generates indifferent blends of whatever ironies drop out of the past.

On the other hand, repeated declarations of Metzger’s “genius”—meaning really his (largely mythic) visual “elegance”—are inevitably made at the expense of contemporary direct-to-video porn. This forms a serviceable contrastive motif behind his reclamation. Spun around it, moreover, is the enduring fantasy of upcoming full-dress production of porn features that fluoresced when Last Tango in Paris (1972) coincided with “porno chic.” A decade later, Brian de Palma was still playing to it when he declared his purpose with Body Double (1984) was to make a $24 million porn film. Most recently, the diverting pre-release media coverage of Eyes Wide Shut (1999) echoed its barely submerged recurrence through rumor that Stanley Kubrick would bring a full-court, star-dressed sex film to the local multiplex and that, if anyone was game, Nicole Kidman was. Indeed, Kubrick himself originated the myth of the prestigious porn feature by concocting the legend of Blue Movie, his never-made collaboration with Terry Southern, whose novel Candy exemplified the Day-Glo porn spirit of the Sixties. It is possible that Metzger is being revived today as the period’s popular forerunner of professionally produced and crafted sex films running up to the great disappointment (in retrospect) when hard core movies arrived instead. I am more convinced, however, that an ironic-nostalgic delection in Metzger as erotic kitsch drives his current restoration. It is a detached regard for an odd and funny example of Sixties bad taste—Metzger as the egg chair or lava lamp of screen sex—that appropriates his films now.

III. OUT FROM SEX EXPLOITATION

Historically, Metzger’s production circumstances shed a somewhat different light on his career than critical revision promises. Parallels with the European horror directors and their production conditions clarify a market-created genre shift. In practical terms, when Metzger guided erotic cinema away from exploitation formulas and toward an art-cinema format and the film-exhibition mainstream, it was because the market opened opportunity to him and not because the skies parted and he had an artistic vision. Metzger started his career at the edges of exploitation-film. After apprenticing as an editor at an art-film distributor, he set up as an importer-distributor of European horror and sexy art movies. It took him half a decade to recreate himself as a director until, between 1966 and 1974, he annually produced, in Europe, a professionally mounted feature to which he proudly attached his name. Then, in the same period as the European horror directors, the mid-1970s, Metzger too was drawn into hard-core porn and he signed his films “Henry Paris” until 1985.

Exploitation films assumed their classic industry profile in the late Twenties and Thirties at the edges of the studio-dominated exhibition system. But exploitation films took increasingly uncontrolled roles after World War II when Hollywood distribution began to shrink following the break up of vertical integration. Essentially filling a growing product gap left in less lucrative orphaned exhibition circuits, exploitation films mainly consisted of cheap genre movies, like American International Pictures’s regular output in the Fifties. Less stable independents, however, marketed movies on sensational claims that their stories and images were untouchable by mainstream filmmaking. The movies themselves, most often inept melodramas or phony exposés, or last-dregs films noir seldom met these claims. Into this domestic production mix fell imported films like the Euro-horror and Euro-sex movies, the latter detritus following in the wake of European art cinema. The model Metzger developed gradually veered toward the Euro-sex movies he imported and distributed through his Audubon Films, but he also imported horror films.

Where Metzger most differed from horror filmmakers like Rollin becomes clearer if we locate where
he intersected with them in the market nexus. As other horror auteurs did before and after them, Bava, Rollin, Borowczyk, et al, seized on horror as a gothic form, often as a vehicle of character subjectivism: dream sequences abound in these films and give rise to their erotic passages. Atmospheric stylization shrouds the sexual images in these films so pervasively that sex slips in under gothic mystification. The genre affords highly stylized eroticism mixed with blood and bondage, dreams and tombs, but even the best Euro-horror are locked into the lower-end exploitation market. There is always a sense of doom, the bad gestalt of exploitation cinema, around their work.13

Although he started in an analogous place in New York exploitation films, Metzger drifted upward through the mid-1960s as he linked up to art-film formulas. The pastiche of erotic kitsch that Metzger composed gained a sheen never imagined by other American exploitation directors. By the decade’s end, Metzger films orbited in a higher zone of the exploitation market adjacent to art cinema itself. Being self-financed and self-distributed, he had freedom to adapt his films to approximate art films’ look and finish, and the independence to set his own strategy and pursue it. But despite his production and distribution independence Metzger navigated—rather than controlled—the exhibition environment, and never deluded himself into believing himself a film artist. Metzger remained commercially and politically narrow. Commercially, he elevated the sex exploitation film a few notches at a time just so he could venture ahead in erotic content while still booking his movies in comparatively reputable theatres; politically, he stayed a few steps cautiously behind what the censors and police would permit. Metzger’s sensibility likewise remained, it should be emphasized, purely opportunistic and whatever charm or artistry his films possess is coincidental. Anything but a consciously “transgressive” or “liberationist” figure (despite casually peppering his films with female and male bisexuality), he devoted himself wholly to the marketability of sex and packaged artsiness. Metzger was an erotic charlutan with no mission but securing his market niche. But he was a very happy charlutan. In that over-furnished chamber of Sixties pop culture where James Bond and Hugh Hefner were icons of daring pleasure and classy taste, Metzger could be imagined a fellow traveler in sexual adventure. Although it may have been the absence of American competitors as attentive to decorating the alcove Sixties pop culture offered him, Metzger was at ease with his kind of cinema.14 Within these constraints, then, he succeeded, at least briefly, in defining American soft-core sex cinema. He did so by recycling European models. Shooting in Europe with European crews (extraordinary for American exploitation productions) was Metzger’s core production strategy. His deviation from the exploitation films in the main, however, consisted less in where he shot and whom he hired as technicians than in his direct borrowings from art cinema’s plotting, style, and erotic sub-codes.

IV. A Formalist’s Eroticism

Nothing would have worked for him had Metzger not also been, in his peculiar way, a formalist filmmaker. He gained insight into the sex appeal of European art films that serious film critics of the time rarely recognized: many of these serious films were erotic in a specific and reproducible manner. How Metzger became an erotic formalist is suggested by a crucial early phase of his career. He entered the film industry as an editor for independent distributors, joining the editors’ union while recutting the first faintly sexy film of the post-war era, Neorealist Giuseppe de Santis’s Bitter Rice (1948) for U.S. distribution. After a stint in the Air Force, he returned as an editor “versioning” imports and cutting trailers for Janus Films while piecing together a failed first feature Dark Odyssey (1958). Working with Roger Vadim’s And God Created Woman (1956) and films by the likes of Antonioni, Malle, Bergman, Truffaut and Resnais at his day job, Metzger gained a familiarity with art cinema. At Janus, too, he met his partner, Ava Leighton, whose promotional elan and adept booking tactics were, Metzger acknowledges, critical to his success.15

On the side, he and Leighton bought a French film, Mademoiselle Striptease, which they recut, dubbed and retitled The Nude Set (ca 1960). A comedy about a provincial French girl who goes to Paris and does a short topless bit, the film was common case of Americans packaging a European production as a sex exploitation film. With its success, Leighton and Metzger set up Audubon Films and added sexual inserts to other imports, Twilight Girls (1961), The Fourth Sex (1961), and Sexus (1964), and pre-Hollywood Elke
Sommer vehicles like *Sweet Ecstasy* (1962), and *Daniella by Night* (1963), modelled on Vadim’s Bardot vehicles of the late Fifties. Metzger also reshaped horror films, including Jack Curtis’s *The Flesh Eaters* (1964), and a French film by Michel Gort which he released as *I Spit on Your Grave* (1965). These moments of tangency with Euro-horror were mediated through the exploitation film market as were the sex-film imports. Leighton’s success selling their genre adaptations and Euro-sex imports nudged Metzger back into directing to top up their supply of similar product.

Many commentators have noted that the French, Italian and Scandinavian art films of the Fifties and Sixties possessed greater sexual freedom than contemporaneous Hollywood films. Critics claimed that this heightened eroticism suited their general thematic maturity. Because art films were psychologically deeper and fuller, eroticism played a larger yet integral part in them. These were critical arguments mounted to defend art films against the condemnation they frequently encountered in the U.S. Critics rarely dwelled on formal specifics of how art cinema’s eroticism operated because when sex was discussed, defense rather than analysis shaped the critical purpose. Committed to thematic interpretation, critics ignored the *stylistic how*, the filmic coding, of screen eroticism in art cinema. Unlike these critics, Metzger seized on these films with narrow purpose: to retool defensible screen sex into a commercial format. His insight propelled him toward a working director’s formalist’s eroticism. The new sexual freedom in European films was, in reality, highly circumspect and decorous. Erotic stylizing mattered in European art films far more than ‘explicit’ images or acts. Having made the distinction and located the Europeans’ stylistic usages, Metzger started to isolate them and to replicate the art film’s erotic subcodes. He gradually also parted with exploitation plotting and exposed and started to fold his films into art cinema’s more intimate and episodic formats.

By the time he had made his third feature, *The Alley Cats* (1966), Metzger had rebuilt his narrative carriage around a female protagonist. Whole sequences revolved around the spectacle of her arousal and climax. Still, he remained a sex exploitation filmmaker. Metzger was not interested in just an isolated erotic passage (as was the case with Bergman or Resnais). He was seeking erotic scenes as the whole focus of his films. As he put it himself, “Once you had the elements that would qualify as an erotic movie, nobody cared about anything else you did” (Morris). So he began to expand and exaggerate erotic stylization and to push it to excess, a process epitomized by *Camille 2000* (1969) and *Lickerish Quartet* (1970). This isolation and expansive aggregation of the art film’s eroticism is the essence of Metzger’s kitsch eroticism. I mean by this expression a local application of Clement Greenberg’s definition of kitsch as deracinated aesthetic effect lifted from hard-won forms and modes of expression—here art cinema—and replanted as isolated effects.

**V. A Woman’s Face: Performing Sex**

In 1962, when Metzger returned to directing for the first time since *Dark Odyssey* (1957), his failed first feature, he picked up crew from an Elke Sommer film and began laying down the basics of his production style: shooting in Europe with local crews and doing post-production at facilities he owned in New York. *The Dirty Girls* (1962) was reasonably successful and, after some delay, he followed it with *The Alley Cats*. The former film’s narrative, still modelled on the prostitution exposé, remained cautiously close to American sex exploitation films of the period, although his upper-class European settings affected both its look and characterizations. *The Alley Cats*, belying its title, owed far less to U.S. models and focused on episodes from the sex life of a well-to-do young woman not wholly unlike the heroine of *Le Amiche* (1955). The third effort, shot in color, was the first fully recognizable Metzger film, *Carmen Baby* (1967). Like the films to follow, it has a reputable literary source that Metzger follows faithfully and mangles with poor dialogue and acting. The film has handsome, leisurely exteriors that give it the appearance of touristic luxury, an effect which is quickly dispelled in badly directed interior sequences.

Unable to manage dramatic scenes, Metzger resorts to two types of interior staples. The first is the Playboy-mansion styled orgy. *The Alley Cats* already experiments with a nightclub scene where one woman performs gleeful S&M on whimpering men in the backroom while a lesbian cruises the heroine,
to her humiliation, out on the dance floor. The
more elaborate Carmen, Baby setpieces look
like a “swinger scene” in a mid-Sixties Holly-
wood film (and even as late as the hard-core The
Opening of Misty Beethoven [1976] Metzger is
still evoking the same era with the same type of
scene). Characters at the orgy in Carmen, Baby
keep their clothes on but mill about looking
ready for anything. What they get is the fully
clothed Carmen’s dance with a long-necked
Chianti bottle writhing atop a piano, a per-
formance of slender allusion to an outrageous
insertion which the viewer never sees. The other
setpiece is a twosome sex scene shot through a
long row of large colored-glass snifters with the
couple. Carmen and a “rock star” styled like a
Vegas lounge lizard move gingerly behind the
glasses through a series of very slow tracking
shots accompanied by a soundtrack resembling
poorly dubbed Righteous Brothers. The pas-
sage ends with a close-up on their intertwined
feet.

Inept as its erotic stylization was, Carmen,
Baby was a successful sex film—without any
actual sex—and this greatly impressed Metzger.
In this respect, it behaved exactly like any ex-
plotation film, promising without delivery, but
its location shooting suggests what a Hollywood
film with Mediterranean locales might be like
it pretended to be a sex film—perhaps a bizarre
late-1960s remake of Roman Holiday. In 1967,
that genre ambivalence sufficed to put Metzger
ahead of his competitors in placing his films in
theaters. He had discovered that arty stylization
could pass as a sex scene. On the other hand,

Carmen, Baby was too linear a drama for Metzger’s limited talents. The film afforded no way to exploit
his strengths as an editor and little chance to show the advantage of European cinematography. More
importantly, while he did stylize sex scenes, Metzger could not sustain erotic interest, with the laughable
results of Carmen, Baby’s pas de deux. Metzger had already done better in one passage in The Alley Cats,
with a relaxed lesbian encounter handled through a single sustained close-up on the heroine. This was an
erotic subcode that he would soon rediscover and develop.

A plot model was provided Metzger by a Danish black-and-white import he and Leighton acquired
from Denmark. The film also reviewed the full range of art cinema’s erotic coding and Metzger proved even
more closely attentive than he had been. I, a Woman (1968), starring Essy Persson, was directed by Mac
Ahlberg from an autobiographical novel by Siv Holm. When re-viewed today (it too has been recently
revived), Ahlberg’s film seems more like an art film than an erotic film. In fact, in the short interval before
I Am Curious (Yellow) (1967; U.S. release, 1969) broke down legal barriers, I, a Woman defined the erotic
film by jettisoning exploitation plots and assuming an art-film model. The expedients seem simple: implant
erotic experience in the subjectivity of its protagonist and use art-film narrational procedures to de-linearize
the plot. The sex would then become integral to the character and plot and one could dispense with a story destination. In this case, flash-back narration modelled on Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* provided the autobiographical form which Ahlberg appropriated, while carefully underlaying the heroine’s sexuality by isolating it in the erotic passages. He also recognized that sparing use of solo classical instrumental music (an art-film styleme) under a sex scene could simultaneously ignite it and keep it decorous. However, the most important code Ahlberg isolated from art-cinema was sex performed by a woman’s face.

In *I, a Woman*, Persson’s face is the sole locus of erotic interest. The sex scenes center on her face framed in long-take, tightly angled close-ups lighted to sculpt her features. Ahlberg avoided cutaways, so Persson’s face is abstracted. There are no shots of bodies in erotic motion, no metaphors, and virtually no nudity. But all the sexual passages are long and Persson pantomimes expressly enough to signify she is passing from excitement to prolonged orgasm. Similar performative and lighting subcodes can be found in Malle, Resnais, Vadim, Antonioni, and Bergman.\(^\text{18}\) *I, a Woman*, and Metzger’s quick adaptation of them mediated these subcodes to a mainstream cinema’s erotic repertoire.\(^\text{19}\)

Ahlberg’s direction and Persson’s performance isolate these subcodes and *I, a Woman* makes these passages the whole point of the film. The plotting ensures that whatever happens between the erotic sequences would serve as filler. The expedients of implanting the erotic subcode seem simple but require plotting and narration to be negotiated carefully so that the sex almost stands alone. The disjunctive time-signatures of Ahlberg’s film and its episodic organization, framed by the heroine’s successive lovers, lent it a serial narrative each segment of which pivots on the highly dilated erotic passages. These then become a virtually free-standing point of the whole film.

None of this was lost on Metzger. While still dubbing *I, a Woman* in Paris, he rushed his own Persson film, *Therese and Isabelle* (1968), into production. He based it on Violette Leduc’s autobiographical novel, reverted to black and white, hired a German crew and French composer Georges Auric. Imitating the flashback strategy that Ahlberg had used, (with a technique resembling Resnais’s rather than Bergman’s), the time frames are more fluid and the flashback cues are associative rather than progressive. There are no more than half a dozen sustained scenes in the film. Instead, the adult Therese (Persson) wanders around
her old and deserted boarding school as tracking shots, bracketing montages, and flash-cut sequence shots convey the elliptical story of her schoolgirl affair with Isabelle. The affair has just three sustained erotic scenes but over one hundred meditative minutes and many teasing flash-cuts prompting the viewer to anticipate them.

*Therese and Isabelle* is Metzger’s closest approximation of art cinema but the very proximity reveals its measure as erotic kitsch in ways his later, more flamboyant films do not. Metzger’s touristic eye sees locations for their Marienbad-like gardens and architectural details—for luxury and decoration. This is supposed to be a woman’s forlorn memory of her much younger self’s first love, but Metzger cannot resist pictorialism and facile metaphor. As Therese’s mother says (in voice-over), “It is a school, not a prison,” Metzger breaks a tracking shot to insert a close-up of Therese’s face framed behind a tight window lattice. Auric’s music is overblown and Metzger ladles it on as an erotic indicator under voice-overs from the novel that suffuse the sex scenes with absurdly ‘literary’ erotic paraphrase.

Unlike Persson, plain and a bit solemn, the actress who plays her lover Isabelle, Anna Gael, is a predictably pouty blonde. Unlike *I, a Woman*, *Therese and Isabelle* does not so much simulate art cinema as it isolates the burnished look, elaborate editing, and erotic performance coding. Ahlberg had reviewed for Metzger what art cinema could offer an erotic filmmaker and the American, the only American erotic film director with insight into Ahlberg’s construct, now set about isolating and expanding the subcodes. He masters the use of Persson’s face as locus of sexual performance and Metzger discovers how to extend the erotic scenes without resorting to cutaways. He also devises two other set-ups of his own that hereafter become mainstays of all his erotic scenes. The first is shooting sex off a distorting or miniaturizing surface—here it is a black vase. The other is shooting the sex scene in a very studied long-shot composition. In this film, Metzger uses a long shot with a pool of water forming the lower half of the frame, the lovers flat again the transecting borderline. The passage is taken at night and strikingly underlit. This is the kind of passage that made Metzger seem unusually “stylish” and tasteful. It was this studied and formalist approach to erotic action that made its expansion into long, lingering scenes permissible.

*Therese and Isabelle*, then, allowed Metzger to find his way toward a ‘European’ kind of fragmentary story, which freed him fully from exploitation narrative formulas. Metzger’s kitsch eroticism was now, in fact, formed. What also seemed ‘European’ and sophisticated about Metzger’s new plotting is that, in contrast to the exploitation films that preceded *Therese and Isabelle*, its plot requires neither crime scenario nor horror’s dreams and ghosts as pretext for sexual imagery. Where Metzger’s soft-core films suggest a threshold to some (not most) hard-core films is that the plot does not oblige women to be punished for pursuing desire. Sex is no longer bound up with crime nor with mysteriously deranged states in order to release desire. No vampire or ghost implants it.
VI. METZGER'S CLIMAX

In the two films that follow, Camille 2000 (1969) and The Lickerish Quartet (1970), Metzger reaches his epitome. He also reverts to the worldly cynicism surrounding the lovers of The Alley Cats. The barriers between his lovers serve a plot purpose: to isolate eroticism from decadence and cynicism alike, and to open the way toward Metzger's preferred later scenario in which sex serves as escape from inauthenticity. His Camille, Marguerite, dies at the end of Camille 2000, as a romantic heroine reconciled to love. Sex is a solemn, consequential business, especially for the woman. Metzger's heroines are perfect and sincere. But they are also 'artists' of sex and their embrace of tyro male lovers leads to perfect devotion the lovers cannot keep. In Camille 2000, sex does not win out, but it is sex which launches the lovers into a struggle. If Metzger's grafting of his commercial desire for sexual passages to art-cinema plotting forges an implausible vehicle of kitsch eroticism, the plot program he devises was likewise naive, foolish and pretentious. But it occasioned a jolting relocation of erotic desire in popular Sixties cinema, removing it from crime and transgression, and making it the subject for stylistic experiment and surprise.

Metzger never could sustain his experiment for a whole film. His tour de force, Camille 2000 is also the most ridiculous of his films, in short, the triumph of his 'sensibility.' It was inevitable, given his inclinations toward flamboyance, that a now-confident Euro-focused Metzger would try to make a film skirting the manner of Fellini. The first two sequences deliberately invoke some conjured memory of La dolce vita (1959). The setting is Rome and Metzger simulates the stereotypes of architecture, extras, and costume that Fellini's film seems to have imparted to a score of imitative Italian films in the Sixties. Returning to color, and employing the cinematographer who would shoot The Garden of the Finzi-Continis (1971), Ennio Guarnieri, Metzger opts for a slow, voluptuous exposition. This is trickled out in varied
installments, including an opera segment in which the hero, the newly arrived youngster Armand (Nino Cortuono) contacts Marguerite (Daniele Gaubert), as it were by sight line. Although still unable to handle scenes or actors persuasively, Metzger hides his inability at least half the time now. Almost no scene comes on screen without busy crosscutting, or scenic distractions. And Metzger has largely dispensed with the need for acting: his performers have gained the high-gloss of fashion models that one often finds in Italian and French films of the period, and the large cast spends much of their time posing at parties.

Soon enough, the viewer recognizes that these parties are progressing toward orgies of increasing decadence, from the upper-class garden party through several rock ‘n’ roll soirees, to a S/M theme orgy. The film, however, never deviates from the safety of Playboy-styled mid-range glamour-sex, and Metzger treats all this as backdrop, at least until the near the end. The last episode of this type is a long coda styled on the high-stake card game Sean Connery’s James Bond plays with Goldfinger. A vengeful Armand, who has lost Marguerite to the rich Gaston (Roberto Bisacco), vindicates himself by besting Gaston in a hand of banco.

Metzger fixes his attention on the long twosome sex scenes, which display his optimal visual stylishness. In the first, Armand and Marguerite clutch supine across the clear plastic furniture in her white-on-white bedroom as the camera tracks slowly along a set of overlapping mirrors. The multi-split-screen effect is Carmen, Baby meets Lady from Shanghai. The second is shot from an overhead angle in long shot to catch the lovers’ squirming languor before cutting to a long-held close-up of Gaubert’s face. A more expressively erotic actress than Persson, her performance exemplifies the erotic subcode of the woman’s face. But Metzger cannot trust the coding or resist a visual metaphor, adding a flower to the image and, as things heat up, rhythmically pulling focus between the actress and the bloom. It is a moment of vulgar delirium that, together with the overhead shots, make this the prototypical Metzger sequence, the apotheosis of his kitsch-eroticism. The ludicrous ruin Metzger makes of Gaubert’s performance—whose vocalized ecstasy is run through a reverb unit—snatches the absurd from the jaws of an arty-erotic triumph.

Recovery comes later, as Metzger approaches his lovers from afar. Seated on a chair pressing Armand beneath her in a darkened, white-curtained room, Marguerite writhes slowly as the distance closes with a gliding dolly shot that ends with a deft cut as she leans backward into her climax, and into her close-up. It is the Camille and Armand in her mirrored bedroom (Camille, 2000, Radley Metzger, 1969).

Leaning back, way back, Danielle Gaubert is ready for her close-up (Camille 2000).
singer moment where Metzger’s luck with his cinematographer, the plainest choice of a gliding track, and his most graceful actress come together.

The plot soon contrives to separate the lovers, though not before a long fun-filled tourist montage on the beach when Armand’s father arrives to break up the affair. The film declines pitifully because Metzger still has no notion of how to stage a drama and the catastrophe of Camille 2000 ensues. When Gaston forces Marguerite to endure watching Armand embrace a blonde in a faux-torture cell at the S&M party, one of the worst sequences Metzger ever shot, the film descends into bathos. There is still a half-hour to run, enough for the Bond-derived card game, a final bitter encounter, and deathbed reconciliation between the lovers. As these scenes unwind, one can watch Metzger’s command over this kind of filmmaking, which he did so much to define, dribble away. The peculiar glory of Camille 2000 is that at the same time Metzger mastered the soft-core sex film and made it his own, he creates the worst kind of Sixties film, memorable for its gaucherie. It is this that makes Camille 2000 exemplary of the pretenses of a certain kind of popular filmmaking that evolves out of art cinema.

The last film Metzger directed in his short popular reign is also his most underrated. Lickerish Quartet (1970) is an unacknowledged remake of Pasolini’s Teorema (1968). A stranger—in this case is a beautiful young woman picked up at a carnival—intrudes on a wealthy husband, wife, and son living in an ancient, extravagant villa. As the film begins, the family trio is watching what appears to be a silent b&w porn loop. The father insists, the mother tolerates, the son objects. Metzger inserts symbolic close-up shots of torture and martyrdom from a Catholic medieval tapestry decorating the villa into the loop. While they are trying to watch, the petulant son and the father break into a fight that only ends when they decide to visit the carnival. There they pick up the young woman (modeled on Louise Brooks) and the quartet returns home. As the foursome begins to watch the porn loop again, one notices that it is now shot and cut somewhat differently. The visitor soon removes her black wig and now is revealed to look just like the blonde prostitute in the loop while her trick begins to resemble the father.

Like Pasolini’s visitor, the circus woman seduces each member of the family—starting with the father. In the film’s signature scene, the father and visitor roll around his library floor printed with a dictionary. Using jump-cuts and zooms, Metzger has her rapidly finger to sexual terms, as the couple rolls around. With all its clever affectation, the sequence has no erotic energy (and no erotic performance). The portentous shots of the torture tapestry, and even later a dungeon, come to nothing. Eventually, skipping the mother, the visitor gets to the son, and their alfresco lovemaking supposedly secures their freedom from the gloomy and decadent parents.

Although critically praised, Lickerish Quartet was Metzger’s least successfully erotic film, and his first commercial disappointment. The tottering balance of kitsch-sex and artsiness tipped over to pretension. The art cinema took its measured revenge on the interloper. Metzger makes the error of depending on his actors to carry dialogue, which
soft-shaft opportunism

...confused oedipal subplot — ostensibly to make a "theatrical" statement. Seeking an air of mystery beyond talents, Metzger forgets the viewer came for sex — and a certain giddiness. The Pirandellian conceit (i.e., the characters turning up inside the porn loop) is especially unsuccessful. Whereas a slightly blurred b&w sex scene should almost always assure a frission of excitement, Metzger holds the shots too long and stages the loop action too awkwardly for the device to work.

While the film could also be regarded as an early response to hard core porn films (already a specter on his horizon), Metzger neglects a single sequence indicating his own contrasting erotic spirit. Instead, into this self-reflective piece he places an unpersuasive youth-cult love story: the sexual expert initiates the boy and thus regains her own innocence. They find themselves a convenient, totemic tree against which to consummate their love. By the time this ending has arrived, however, it is too facile and obvious even for a Metzger film. Worse, their supposedly ecstatic lovemaking is too morose to break out of the film's depressed infatuation. What Metzger had often enough done well enough before — surprise the viewer and bring him/her close to a woman's ecstasy — he neglects even to attempt here.

VII. Become Paris: Sliding Toward Obscurity

Metzger belatedly attempted a serious political film with Little Mother (1972), a biography of Eva Peron. While he briefly entertained hopes for a legitimate career on the basis of his independent successes, these hopes proved false. Unable to enter the mainstream, he saw the sex exploitation market slipping into hard-core porn. There is little sex in Little Mother, barely a remnant, and what there is is surprisingly cruel and aytical for Metzger. Instead, there are long speeches as the heroine passes through the last long day of her life as the progressive and sympathetic "mother" of the Argentines, intercut with scenes of her past, a fragmentary biography prompted by sounds or sights in her present. If Metzger intended to start over again as a different kind of filmmaker, as he had beginning with The Dirty Girls a decade before, Little Mother made a promising start. This is his best-edited film and, for the first time, he manages to match the performance and script to his abilities. But Little Mother failed commercially and time was running out for Metzger. Then there was Score and, generally, the collapse of the special sector of the exploitation market soft-core films like Metzger's had carved out and that he and Leighton had negotiated to such advantage. That collapse was foreclosing on their enterprise.

In retrospect, Score has been regarded as a brave precursory experiment in gay-themed filmmaking (as Therese and Isabelle also is now) since the sex is bisexual. The sole developed erotic sequence (which is very long) crosscuts between male-male and female-female encounters. However, for the rest of the film, the performances and dialogue are clumsy even for Metzger although the film is based on a well-regarded play (which is recalled for introducing Sylvester Stallone to New York audiences). There would be just one
more 35mm European production, *The Punishment of Anne* (1974), before Metzger retreated to Super-16 and hard-core porn films. Metzger became ‘Harry Paris.’ Although as Paris he was consistently more successful than most of his American and European porn-making colleagues, Metzger slid away from any critical regard and out of normal theatres, passing into the obscurity from which Williams, for one, rescues his later films. However, the minor Metzger revival so far remains restricted to his pre-1974 soft-core films.

**VIII. Afterwards – Critics and Conclusion**

Although this article does not intend more than to situate Metzger’s brief florescence as the leading American soft-core director in the setting of marginal independent productions and descriptively to revisit the films that set his reputation, two remarks offer themselves in conclusion. The first is the speculative claim that in isolating and deploying certain erotic subcodes learned from art cinema’s representations of sex, Metzger’s films imparted these subcodes to innumerable commercial films thereafter, down to recent films like *Angel Heart* (1987), *The Big Easy* (1987), *Poison Ivy* (1992) and *Bound* (1997). These subcodes underwrite films like those made by Cronenberg, Lynne and others, films like *Crash* and *9 1/2 Weeks* (1986). The later is the closest to Metzger’s style, symptomatically dividing fascination between furniture and flesh, and organizing its narration into serial setpieces. Soft-core sex films never entered mainstream cinema as a genre but their influence has a far reach. The differences between most commercial films and *9 1/2 Weeks* and its direct-to-video sequels, between cycles like Zelman King’s *Red Shoe Diaries*, and between studio films like *Basic Instinct* and neo-exploitation direct-to-video ‘erotic thrillers’ are sufficient to indicate that while soft-core has been variously revisited, it is largely as direct-to-video genre filmmaking (and requires a separate discussion). Commercial features have merely blurred differences between the format Metzger devised and the mainstream. The deployment of erotic subcodes—the special and studied set-ups of a *Camille 2000*, the sex performed by a woman’s face, almost-motionless intercourse, etc.—is restricted to single segments embedded in otherwise normative narratives.

Hard core porn films devised different codes that Williams and others have critically isolated and interpreted and that have surprisingly little to do with their soft-core precursors. But this is precisely the point: soft-core sex films were not precursors of hard-core in most respects, and definitely not in the critical matter of sexual imagery. Hard-core codes have yet to enter mainstream films. Despite claims that porn films influence commercial features, the opposite is more obviously the case (e.g., hard-core is full of crude parodies of mainstream films). Nor are hard-core porn films likely to affect features in the near future for obvious reasons. The genre-specific purposes they serve—to get the sex act on screen in the form of a “proof” it’s really happening—militate against both narration and erotic spectacle as Metzger conceived, and as mainstream films continue to conceive it. The collapse of Metzger’s own filmmaking imagination after 1973 suggests this strongly. While *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* has moments of rough wit, the requirement to race from one thumping sex scene to another precludes the expectant reception, the rapid meditation of women’s faces, or elaborated staging (and occasional surprises) that Metzger prized in his soft-core work.

The sexual performance by a woman’s face was installed in soft-core as the sign of sex happening. This performance-close-up subcode is what *I, a Woman* isolated from art cinema and Metzger developed. The subcode does appear in hard-core films, as in the early case of Marilyn Chambers in *Behind the Green Door*, but as supplement. The subcode belongs to a fictional mode, it cannot offer proof of acts or pleasures and proof is the defining problem of hard-core pornography. A woman’s face does become a telling transfer of fictive erotic coding from Sixties soft-core to the commercial cinema of the next decades where the play of her face is paramount. The woman’s face, long a fetish-sign of the cinema, the sign of emotions in so many respects, remains today the site-fetish of erotic coding. Her transport expressed on her face, singled out by the camera, isolated in space and time, specially lighted, held in long takes, is a key sexual sign of mainstream films today. This is to say, perhaps, that virtually all sexual representation in mainstream cinema shares the same kitsch eroticism, looped in an endless, recursive reactivation of Essy Persson’s two screen performances.
A concluding remark concerns the odd nostalgia for Metzger expressed inside the specialized film-culture of pornographic cinema, which has its own critics. From the start in the 1970s to contemporary Internet discussions, porn critics have placed Metzger apart as an erotic-film “auteur.” This has had to do with Metzger’s relatively developed craft, his luxury in design and locations, and his comparatively attentive regard to performance. He brought the American erotic films into an ersatz-European elegance and this earned him the reputation for “genius” — but genius is what he never possessed. What Metzger did possess was a native connection to cinema itself. His films may be bad commercial movies, bad art cinema, and silly sex cinema, but Metzger made actual 35mm movies. His supposed successors are Andrew Blake, The Dark Brothers, and a few others who tend to extravagant costume and set designs and whose sound, editing and photography have a finish unusual in video-porn. But the claims made on their behalf are badly misplaced. None of these directors derive from filmmaking the way Metzger’s films do. These pornographers are really still photographers, designers of tableaux and inserters of close-ups who have abandoned narrative filmmaking to pursue the ‘logic’ of hard-core whose destination has always been the tableaum-core, not the ‘scene.’ Especially when they most suggest Metzger in design and technical polish, they must obviously prove that the thread between narrative cinema and pornography, the kind of thread than runs between both exploitation films and art cinema to Metzger, snapped in the early 1970s.


3 In the epilogue chapter of the new edition of Hard Core, Williams (1999, 296-300, note 28) reaches this conclusion. But the unrevised original chapters of her book proceed on the assumption that hard-core films of the Seventies and Eighties achieved the “classical” phase of erotic cinema and as such bear comparison with other sorts of feature filmmaking. In what follows, I pursue, albeit from an odd angle, what I regard as a sharper insight she proposed three years later (see Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” Film Genre Reader II, edited by Barry Keith Grant [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998], 140-158; originally published in Film Quarterly, 44, no. 4 [Summer 1991]: 2-13). Williams argues that that porn films, melodramas, and horror films are specialized genres, body films, whose performative excesses deform film-narrative norms.
4 The accusation of sexual disgust is Robin Wood’s fiercest and truest charge against Cronenberg (American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film, edited by Wood, et al [Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979], 23-25), though he never makes a connection to Seventies porn films. Williams (1999, 98-100) briefly touches on Damiano’s The Devil in Miss Jones before passing to the more famous Deep Throat for sustained analysis. What Williams does not sufficiently acknowledge, however, is that, this antic erotic comedy is untypical of the 1970s porn cycle. Damiano’s more characteristic punishment and damnation of his characters, in Miss Jones, and in his subsequent films, notably The Story of Joanna (1975), though rather extreme, should be regarded as symptomatic of the darkness that hovers over hard-core. This impression differs from what a recent revisionist film, Boogie Nights
(1997), projects so cheerfully and affectionately. *Boogie Nights*, in its way, took the place of the biography of the Mitchell Brothers prepared for Cronenberg by screenwriter Norman Snyder, previously co-writer of *Dead Ringers* (1989). The Mitchells' *Behind the Green Door* was the third film that, along with the two by Damiano, launched 'porno chic' and the feature boom. It starred Marilyn Chambers as the kidnapped centerpiece of an orgy. Chambers is the actress Cronenberg tellingly cast as the lead (indeed the infecting sexual monster) in his second feature, *Rabid* (1976). A Mitchell Brothers biopic by Cronenberg, which would necessarily have ended in their real-life fratricidal horror, would have closed the horror-porn circle I am drawing around Cronenberg. In its place, as it happens, Cronenberg made *Crash*.

5 For example, at Rice Media Centre (Rice University), June, 1999.
8 It was Jess Franco, maker of *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970), who took up directing the *Emmanuelle* franchise later in its sleazy hard-core phase.
11 Southern co-wrote *Dr. Strangelove* (1963). Because he was a writer of some repute, *Candy* was a minor scandal but of the kind one found around *Evergreen Review* and its parent Grove Press, publishers of *The Story of O* but also of Marguerite Duras and Samuel Beckett. The avant-garde, in other words, intersected with pornography at Grove. Unsurprisingly, it was Andy Warhol who finally made a film called *Blue Movie* (1968), which was regarded as a porn film and accordingly banned.
13 All that was a part of their charm. Perhaps, in the last resort, the ego ideal of such filmmakers might be producer Val Lewton in the 1940s. But it was very rare in the Fifties and Sixties for a horror director to mount the poor regard that low-end genre cinema entailed. Still, a few managed it as the AIP house director Roger Corman did with his Edgar Allen Poe cycle. Its culmination, *Masque of the Red Death* (1964), bears signs of Corman's interest in Ingmar Bergman without embarrassment. *Masque* is a kind of accommodation between horror and *The Seventh Seal*. Corman eventually became Bergman's American distributor as well as, and more famously, an early patron of the New Hollywood in the 1970s.
14 Metzger did have one notable competitor in Russ Meyer, whose style and spirit were as proudly primitive-American and working-class vulgar as Metzger's was pseudo-Euro-sophisticated and faux-elite. No one simultaneously transcended and retained the essence of pre-feature American sex cinema of VFW stag reels the way the director of *Mud Honey* (1965), *Faster Pussycat, Kill! Kill!* (1966) and *Vixen* (1968) managed. In one of the great comic aberrations of the New Hollywood, Meyer was
contract by Twentieth-Century Fox to make Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (1970), The Seven Minutes (1971) and Blacksnake (1973), the latter of which Meyer had to buy from Fox to release independently. It is a pre-Mandingo political film with interesting parallels to Metzger’s almost-simultaneous Little Mother (1972).

13 This succession of events is Metzger’s own (see Gallagher) and is a bit different from other accounts (see Morris). Leighton remained Metzger’s professional and life partner until her death in 1987. Metzger stopped directing sex films shortly after she contracted cancer and the two of them searched the world for alternative treatments and they made a cycle of alternate-medical videos that Metzger continued for some years after.

16 The quantity of writing published in the late 1960s and 1970s dealing with the new style of sex on screen is startling when one recalls how few film books overall were then being published. The smartest and most durable titles in English are Raymond Durgnat, Eros in the Cinema (London: Calder and Boyers, 1966) and Durgnat, Sexual Alienation in the Cinema (London, 1972) and Parker Tyler, Sex, Psyche, etcetera in the Film (New York: Horizon, 1969). For the more commonplace, see Thomas Atkins, Sexuality in the Movies (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1975).

17 Greenberg himself says: “the precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from its devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, converts them into a system and discards the rest.” Obviously, I take the view that art cinema approximates a “fully matured tradition” of filmmaking among whose “discoveries” was a new integral eroticism. Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston: Bracon Press, 1961), 10.

18 The subcode just described could be traceable to the famous passages featuring Hedy Lamar’s (then Keiser) face in Gustav Machaty’s Ecstasy (1933).

19 The first such passage in I, a Woman is a masturbation scene, shot in a blotchy mirror accompanied by a solo violin, played in another room by the heroine’s father. Within a year, Mark Rydell used the same set-up in The Fox (1968), directing Anne Heywood in what is, effectively, an impersonation of Essy Persson. The film, which was critically well regarded, indicates how readily mainstream films picked up this erotic coding.

20 This adaptation of Jean de Berg’s novel, The Image, was made in both hard-core and soft-core versions. I have seen neither. Williams does not remark on which version she analyses, though she places her discussion of the film in the hard-core period (1999; 199-201; 222-225).

21 There are several questions that would have to be addressed. The most general is how to regard-direct-to-video as a market equivalent to historical exploitation cinema. One of its obvious features is the brevity of its genre cycles, notable in the short life of the erotic thriller, and the function of direct-to-video sequels of feature films, both of which recall exploitation filmmaking.

22 Metzger’s films, in contrast, are formatted so that sex scenes pivot narrative, essentially treating other kinds of scenes as filler and passages of erotic expectation. One subcode that Metzger, oddly, never used (because the Europeans did not) is the lap-dissolve/superimposition sex sequence which Hollywood filmmakers took from avant-garde filmmakers like Carolee Schneeman, and initially deployed in Corman-produced “psychedelic” films like The Trip (1967), and in Easy Rider (1967).