

# UNDER THE COUNTER

## Britain's Trade in Hardcore Pornographic 8mm Films

Oliver Carter

# Introduction:
## *Tonight at 8*




Trafalgar Square, London. One of Sir Edwin Lutyens' fountains expels water. Cut to an amusement arcade where two men and a woman play one of the many games. The shaky handheld camera pans to the right, showing the one-arm bandits and slot machines that line the wall. It pans back to the men and the woman, who leave the arcade arm-in-arm, revealing it to be a casino – likely in Leicester Square. This is confirmed when the threesome walks past the Café de Paris, which once sat beside Leicester Square on Coventry Street. They look in the window, pointing and smiling; the camera pans up to confirm the location, the bright lights of the sign flashing. It cuts to the marquee for the Prince of Wales Theatre, also on Coventry Street, where *Way Out in Piccadilly* is showing, starring the popular British entertainers Cilla Black and Frankie Howerd. This production opened on 3 November 1966, closing in July or August 1967, after Black was replaced. The camera pans down, showing the threesome strolling past the theatre. One of the men stops and points out a picture of Cilla Black, possibly suggesting the similarity between the short haircut of the anonymous woman and that of Black's. They laugh and walk on; the camera slowly moves right and focuses on a board reading '*Tonight at 8.00*'.

Another cut: now, the feet of the threesome are shown. They seem to be slow dancing together, moving around in a circle. The camera pans up, revealing that the men are groping the woman and removing her tights; the location appears to be a flat or a bedsit. While one of the men and the woman kiss, the other strips her. Now naked, the men playfully push each other away, competing for her attention. They climb on the bed and dance, shaking their penises up and down. The woman attempts to give oral sex but is unable to. A sudden cut – now they are all laying on the bed. One man is masturbated by the woman, while the other male masturbates the woman as he pleasures himself. Another cut – now a close-up – and, as the woman gives oral to one male, the other licks her nipple. A chair is brought into shot. The woman kneels as one man enters her from behind, and she gives the other oral sex. The camera zooms, showing a close-up of vaginal penetration. It zooms out to a medium long-shot, then

FIGURE 0.1: Screenshots from *Tonight at 8* (1966–67). Author's personal collection.

zooms again, but this time to a close-up of oral. Once again, it zooms out as they begin to kiss; it is possible that he may have ejaculated, but this is not clear. Suddenly they move to the bed, bodies intertwining, and the woman lays on one of the men while the other penetrates her. After the male withdraws, the camera zooms in again, seeming to indicate that he has climaxed inside her. The film ends abruptly, cutting to black.

In the British pornography trade, *Tonight at 8* (1966–67) would have been referred to as a roller because of how the reels rolled when played back on a projector. Rollers were black and white – sometimes colour – 200ft 8mm or Super 8 films produced in Britain. They are typically ten to twelve minutes in length and depict hardcore sex. Outside of Britain, such films were termed loops, stags or smokers (Di Lauro and Rabkin 1976). *Tonight at 8* (1966–67) stands out from all of the rollers I have viewed while researching this book. First, it evokes the moment when London was said to be 'swinging' (Mort 2010), and free love became part of the counter-culture movement (Albury 2018). Second, the opening narrative of *Tonight at 8* shares similarities with a police statement given by a female roller performer named 'Christine' while being interviewed for her involvement in the Watford Blue Movie Trial, a legal case I discuss at length in Chapter 4. A runaway from Northern England, Christine described how she met a man named Danny in the Playland amusement arcade, located in Piccadilly Circus. After spending the night with Danny, they met again the next evening in the same location, where he asked Christine to appear in a 'blue movie' for a payment of £10.[1] Christine agreed, and Danny made the arrangements. They both walked around the West End until their meeting with a man named Johnnie took place at the Pronto Bar, again in Piccadilly Circus. Shortly after meeting, Johnnie took Christine and Danny to a studio basement in Kings Cross, where she made an unnamed roller directed by a man named George.

Christine's statement highlights some of the methodological challenges when investigating this illicit trade, relying on sources with questionable reliability. Although her statement appears intentionally vague and elusive, Christine's account of making her first roller evokes the opening scenes of *Tonight at 8*, meeting in an amusement arcade and wandering around the West End until later having sex in a studio basement. Christine's statement is from 1973 and is obviously not describing the making of *Tonight at 8*. Nevertheless, it still highlights the role of the West End's association with vice (Mort 2010) and the roller trade, a relationship I explore in the next chapter. The performers in *Tonight at 8* are anonymous, and it is not clear who produced the film.[2] It is possible to narrow the date of production to between November 1966 and July 1967, as indicated by the theatrical run of the show *Way Out in Piccadilly*, showing how footage can often reveal clues about their clandestine origins.

According to the Adult Loop Database, a useful but often inaccurate online resource that catalogues small-gauge pornographic films, it is distributed by the label Climax. Between 1966 and 1972, Climax released around 200 individual titles and was the most dominant brand in the market. As rollers were under the counter, illicit goods circulating in the backrooms of Soho bookshops or sold via mail order, they were either printed using amateur or semi-professional technologies rather than in professional labs, resulting in limited prints. My inability to locate a copy of *Tonight at 8* possibly indicates that the film had a small print run, and few copies now survive. The source for the images used in Figure 0.1 is a poor analogue transfer that was likely duped from a videotape to DVD and encoded as a digital file. A copy exists in the Kinsey Institute's archive in Indiana, which houses a collection of approximately 361 rollers; to my knowledge, no other institutional archive holds rollers.

Despite the Obscene Publications Act 1959 outlawing the distribution of hardcore pornography in Britain, there existed a thriving economy, producing and distributing hardcore pornographic films, photographs and illustrated magazines (Hebditch and Anning 1988: 212). Like rollers, photographs were referred to as Soho Postcards and illustrated magazines were known as Soho Bibles or Soho Typescripts (Wickstead 2020), emphasizing the significant role Soho played in this economy. Although some have referred to this economy as nothing more than a 'cottage industry' (Sutherland 1982: 4), this book attempts to assess its scale and reach, focusing specifically on the roller market. Emerging when debates around permissiveness were prominent, at least 46 British labels made and released rollers between 1960 and 1979. As the labelography at the end of this book shows, I have traced over 1000 individual films produced in Britain during this period; there were likely more, but their small print runs mean that some will not have survived.

*Tonight at 8* also illustrates how the content of rollers contrasts with the typical British stereotype of prudish attitudes towards sex and sexuality (Marwick 2007: 171) and, as Schaefer (2005: 92) suggests, such early pornographic films can serve as 'documents of seduction and sex at the height of the sexual revolution'. Beyond their significance as an overlooked part of British film history, they matter because of their production context. For instance, rollers were often made with semi-professional filmmaking equipment by non-professionals, and the films were developed and printed in clandestine circumstances. Their legal context provides further understanding of the attempts to legislate and control hardcore pornography in Britain, while the entrepreneurial activities of those who made rollers serve as a window into the hidden enterprise cultures (Williams 2006) active in this period.

Over the past several years, there has been a renewed interest in the historical foundations of the pornography business. Before this, studies of the business were

often 'insider accounts', such as autobiographies and biographies, 'journalistic snapshots' or 'anecdotal glosses' (Schaefer 2005: 86). Many works from the 1960s and 1970s were nothing more than an excuse to publish pornographic content. Such sources are not without value. For instance, Taylor (1970) provides a helpful insight into changes in pornography policy and serves as a fascinating time capsule of this period. However, it is easy to see that the book uses the text as an 'alibi' (Waugh 1996: 219-27) for the explicit images and illustrates the demand for hardcore pornography. According to Heffernan (2015: 38), earlier academic studies of hardcore pornography neglected to place 'economics at centre stage in the historical narrative'. Alilunas (2014: 63) points out that this work tended to focus on the textual features of the films, acknowledging that such an approach was necessary, particularly in the context of an anti-pornography discourse. For Alilunas, this has meant that 'industrial questions (and histories) have tended to receive the least amount of attention'.

Foundational studies on the history of the pornography business include the work of Slade (2000) and Schaefer (2002; 2005; 2007), whose writings have been particularly inspirational for my study. More recently, a number of studies have appeared that explore the history of adult film in America (Heffernan 2015; Alilunas 2016; Church 2016; Gorfinkel 2017; Strub 2011). Many of these observe the relationship pornography has with technology, economics and legalities, but focus on the American context. Outside of the United States, there has been comparatively little attention given to the histories of pornography in other countries, particularly in the post-war period. Sweden is an exception, with Larsson's (2016) study of 8mm Swedish pornography in the 1970s and Arnberg's (2010; 2012; 2017) work on Swedish pornographic magazines. There has also been interest in the German pornography business, particularly the mail-order entrepreneur Beate Uhse (Heineman 2011) and the beginnings of the Italian industry (Maina and Zecca 2021).

In regards to Britain, there exists a modest but significant corpus, mixing popular scholarship, biography and academic research. These tend to situate British hardcore pornography film making alongside the British softcore sex film (Sheridan 2005; McGillivray 2017) or wider British film history (Sweet 2006: 291). Others place British hardcore amongst the broader phenomenon of hardcore pornography. For example, Hebditch and Anning's (1988: 212) invaluable *Porn Gold* occasionally discusses the clandestine nature of British hardcore pornographic film production, conducting interviews with key producers from the period, such as Mike Freeman, Lasse Braun and Hans Moser as part of their investigation into national pornography industries. Flint (1999: 95–116) gives a historical chapter on the development of British pornography, and Thompson (2007) offers a chapter on 8mm British films, reviewing a small sample from the

1960s and 1970s, but shows little interest in their production or distribution. Journalistic work makes an important contribution, with Tomkinson's (1982) investigation into London's Soho pornography business mainly focusing on pornographic magazines, while Cox et al. (1977) discuss the relationship between the corrupt Obscene Publications Squad and Soho's pornographers. These sources have been valuable starting points for this research, though, as Alilunas (2016: 29) observes, they often 'lack citation or supporting evidence and can lead down twisting paths in the search of factual confirmation, or, worse can transmit inaccurate information'.[3]

In academic literature, one can find mentions of the post-war British pornography industry in Hunter (2013: 116–22), who draws on interviews with Mike Freeman and Lindsay Honey when briefly discussing the place of hardcore production within wider British 'trash' cinema. Similarly, Chibnall (2003: 45–47) contrasts elements of the film *Get Carter* (Mike Hodges 1971) with the British hardcore pornography business. Over the course of three pages, Chibnall identifies some of the leading players, such as Ivor Cook (who he incorrectly spells as 'Cooke'),[4] Evan 'Big Jeff' Phillips, John Lindsay and George Harrison Marks, and the police corruption in Soho that allowed them to operate but does not provide sources for his research. Both Hunt (1998) and Smith (2005) discuss the wider cultural context of the 1970s and the growth of the business, with the former briefly mentioning hardcore filmmaker John Lindsay. Inaccuracies are not exclusive to non-academic sources, with Thompson (1994) identifying John Lindsay as a softcore pornographer and, similarly, Upton (2016) also suggests that Mike Freeman was producing softcore pornography on home video. As this book will show, both claims are mistaken. Separately, these sources offer useful titbits of information about aspects of the British pornography business, but collectively they help to construct a timeline of how an economy came into existence and developed prior to the liberalization of pornography after the BBFC's re-evaluation of the Restricted 18 certificate in 2000 (Petley 2011; Perkins 2012; Hunter 2014).

Although this book focuses on the years 1960–84 and particularly 8mm film, it would be inappropriate not to acknowledge that Britain's economy of hardcore pornography existed prior to the 1960s. Stoops (2018) provides essential historical background for *Under the Counter*, piecing together Britain's pornography trade between 1900 and 1945. Using records from the courts and government combined with newspaper reports, Stoops uncovers a hidden trade that operated on a transnational scale, distributing pornographic commodities. This study gives a broad social history of the trade, providing the context for the post-war trade I discuss, which focuses more on the entrepreneurs who made and distributed hardcore pornographic films.

## *Pornography as an alternative economy*

An interest in the economics of pornography has been longstanding and has preoccupied scholarship too. Over the past ten years, several studies have emerged that seek to demystify and document the industrial context of pornography, such as Sullivan and McKee (2015) and Voss (2012), amongst others. These call for an engagement with ideas from political economy, highlighting how this approach can be productive for considering issues relating to cultural labour, policy/regulatory matters and other aspects of the 'nature of work under late capitalism' (Berg 2014: 75). However, the majority of these studies focus on the contemporary pornography industry. Some of the historical work discussed in the previous section has attempted to place a political and economic lens on the historical foundations of the contemporary pornography business, engaging with its technological (Alilunas 2016), legal or regulatory (Arnberg 2012; Strub 2011) and distribution contexts (Heffernan 2015; Larsson 2016). I have attempted to situate my own work amongst these debates, taking a cultural and economic approach to historicizing the British hardcore pornographic film business between 1960 and 2000, focusing specifically on the practices of entrepreneurs who actively produced and distributed such material in Britain when it was prohibited by law. Initially, I imagined this book to take the reader through the years 1960–2000, when it was a criminal offence to distribute hardcore pornography in Britain. Upon writing, I quickly realized that the weight of my research had generated enough material for multiple volumes.

Because of this, I concentrate on the years 1960–84, specifically exploring the production and distribution of rollers in an alternative economy, but also considering the emergence of home video in the late 1970s. In *Under the Counter*, I expand on previous work I have produced exploring alternative economies (Carter 2018a), where I studied the fan enterprise surrounding a particular cycle of European cult cinema known as the *giallo* – Italian post-war thrillers – arguing that 'fantrepreneurs' within an alternative economy used new technologies to produce artefacts that are distributed as commodities or gifts. To achieve this, they circumvented rules and regulations, such as laws and policies. These spaces are liminal, enabling experimentation and innovation until regulators find a way to control their activities, often resulting in an ongoing battle between the entrepreneurs and the regulators. Here, my use of the word 'alternative' is not intended to refer to radical or counter-cultural practices. I instead use it to indicate a different, or separate, economic space.

A focus on the radical dominates economic geography's approach to alternative economies, studying how alternative economies operate outside of the capitalist mainstream. Here, scholars explore varying forms of economic exchange and differing approaches to labour, organization and property (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Academics have been critical of this position, suggesting that alternative economies are perceived as 'utopian experiments' (North 2007: xxii) that fill the gaps left by capitalism and therefore reinforce exploitative capitalist practices (Samers 2005). I find such ideas helpful in exploring the political and economic conditions that enable alternative economies to form. In the case of the pornography business, entrepreneurs have historically operated across 'both legal and financial grey zones' (Larsson 2015: 223). This is due to restrictive regulatory frameworks and the reputation pornography has for being a 'controversial economy' (Cannatelli et al. 2019). In this book, I use the concept of an alternative economy to indicate the existence of a distinct economic space between formal and informal media economies (Lobato and Thomas 2015). It is often referred to as a grey economic space, which Roodhouse (2013: 16) defines as a market where practices are 'considered illegal but socially acceptable'. In criminology, the term 'twilight zone' has been used to describe 'the area where the legal and underground economies intersect or overlap' (McCarthy 2011: 26). I suggest that the British hardcore pornography business existed in an alternative economic space due to the activities of different entrepreneurs who manipulated the law to be able to produce and distribute their commodities. My focus, then, is on the practices of these entrepreneurs.

Central to this idea is how entrepreneurs spot inconsistencies in regulation and circumvent them, allowing for their commodities to be sold by lessening the threat of prosecution. Leeson and Coyne (2004: 4) define this process as 'evasive entrepreneurship', where entrepreneurs devote 'resources and efforts in evading the legal system' for their economic benefit. In Britain, the pornography business was tightly regulated under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. However, the vagueness of this highly criticized regulation (Robertson 1979; Woozley 1982) meant that it was open to interpretation. As Smith (2007: 54) argues, 'regulation and calls for censorship have not been simply repressive but have also been productive and an essential part of the material conditions in which pornography has developed in the UK'. To do business, entrepreneurs worked this messy regulatory framework to their advantage.

I show how entrepreneurship in an alternative economy is complex and multilayered, with a range of economic actors performing different roles. For example, I draw on Schumpeter (2017), who sees the entrepreneur as a key player in economic development, mainly through their willingness to disrupt and innovate by creating new markets. Technology plays a vital role in this process. Coopersmith (1998: 95) suggests that accelerated technological change has always 'shaken the [pornography] industry […] forcing companies to reinvent themselves to survive'. Occasionally, new technologies catch regulators by surprise, falling outside of regulatory control and, until they catch up, entrepreneurs exploit such loopholes, as my discussion of home video in the conclusion to this book illustrates. Through their use of amateur and semi-professional filmmaking processes, these early innovators were – unbeknownst to them – creating

a new market not only in Britain but one that also extended transnationally to parts of Western Europe and the United States.

Schumpeter's conceptualization of the entrepreneur has received criticism. For instance, Baumol (1990: 894) points out that entrepreneurs do not 'always follow the constructive and innovative script' Schumpeter proposes. Instead, Baumol sees entrepreneurs as opportunists who take different roles, engaging in productive, unproductive and disruptive practices. He recognizes that entrepreneurs do make productive contributions to society and the formal economy but also acknowledges that they are often involved in activities that offer 'questionable value to society' (Baumol 1990: 897), such as criminal or legally ambiguous enterprise. Later chapters explore how opportunistic entrepreneurs expanded the market, taking over from early innovators and motivated by the possible high profits offered through making and distributing pornography. Some are 'pariah capitalists' (Gertzman 1999), sharing similarities to the opportunistic black marketeers who profited from wartime rationing (Roodhouse 2013), while others adopt a moral discourse (Becker 1966), justifying their entrepreneurship as a way to bring change to a repressive system of censorship. Some exhibit the Thatcherite 'entrepreneurial spirit' well in advance of the enterprise culture agenda of the early 1980s (Gray 2002).

While the entrepreneurs I discuss share many similarities with the criminal entrepreneurs of which Hobbs (1988; 1995) writes, engaging in violence and other immoral acts, I also show how their participation in an alternative economy often blurs the boundary between criminal and lawful practices. Pornographers were not the only economic actors manipulating laws for their benefit. Rule enforcers, particularly the police, were equally entrepreneurial. Becker (1966) and Hobbs (1988) both identify the entrepreneurial qualities of police work, with the latter noting how detectives regularly skirt the boundaries of legality when making a case or to enhance their position in the force. I suggest that members of the Obscene Publications Squad, an arm of the Metropolitan Police who enforced the Obscene Publications Act 1959 in central London, were instrumental to creating an institutional framework (North 1990) for the alternative economy. In the 1950s, officers implemented a corrupt licensing system to control the distribution of hardcore pornography in Soho (Cox et al. 1977; Tomkinson 1982). This enabled pornography entrepreneurs to do business with the approval and protection of the police, inadvertently leading to the growth of Britain's pornography trade.

As North (1990: 3) writes, institutional frameworks are the 'rules of the game' that provide the incentive for trade. I argue that their interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 provided the framework for the alternative economy, using a combination of what North calls formal and informal constraints to guide entrepreneurs. As I show in the opening three chapters, this authorized hardcore pornography production and distribution, albeit under certain constraints,

resulting in the growth of a transnational economy. Following the removal of the licensing system, Chapters 4 and 5 show how police and prosecutors shifted positions, using the law entrepreneurially to raid, arrest and prosecute pornographers. In response, pornographers attempted – unsuccessfully – to create a formal institutional framework for hardcore in Britain. *Under the Counter* explores this relationship between entrepreneurship and institutional change, highlighting, as North (1990) points out, how institutes continually evolve.

Given pornography's move from a physical commodity to an immaterial, digital commodity that is distributed, or streamed, for free via tube sites such as PornHub and xHamster, it may seem that this distinction has little purchase in the contemporary moment. However, as Alilunas (2016) observes, histories of the pornography business can further our understanding of new developments, such as how previous attempts to censor pornography relate to the control of 'online harms' or how new technologies enable entrepreneurial activity via income-generating content subscription platforms. *Under the Counter* highlights the ongoing challenges of regulating pornography and how entrepreneurs find ways to do business in the face of such uncertainties.

## *Investigating the illicit*

As McKee et al. (2020) find, defining pornography is notoriously difficult as the term has no singular meaning. Kendrick (1987: 31) sees pornography as a 'battlefield', naming an 'argument not a thing'. McKee et al. (2020: 1088) also note that Kendrick's definition calls into question debates around 'social and cultural relations of power'. Like Church (2016), I too use the term pornography rather than adopting recent suggestions to use 'adult film' (Church and Schaefer 2018: 142–43). While I see the adaptability and value of this, I adopt the broader term of pornography as it allows for the inclusion of other commodities produced and distributed by entrepreneurs alongside films, such as photographs and typescripts. To give further definition, I turn to Slade's (2000: 16) view of pornography as a 'market driven commodity' where artefacts are produced and distributed to meet market demand. As already identified, my focus is on the production and distribution of hardcore pornography, rather than the more licit form of softcore. Like the word pornography, hardcore is equally loaded. Simply put, hardcore pornography is the representation of 'non-simulated sex acts' (Schaefer 2005: 81) and, as Williams (1989) and Kendrick (1987) both point out, has been othered through numerous obscenity trials, raising questions about its social value and place in society. Therefore, an understanding of the law and its application is integral to any analysis of the pornography business. It can reveal past attempts to regulate

and define pornography, and how these provide the structural conditions for trade. Moreover, such attempts to regulate often leave a trail of resources that researchers can draw on to document the business. I now briefly reflect on how I carried out the research for this book, considering the challenges faced when investigating illicit practices.

The methodology for this research draws on Kuhn's (2002) ethnohistorical study of 1930s' film audiences and their memories of cinema-going. She identifies the challenges of communicating with mature participants who have difficulties with recollection, a common issue I faced when conducting primary research for this project. According to Kuhn (2002: 6), ethnohistory can consist of 'ethnographic description and interpretation alongside oral historical inquiry and the historian's traditional source materials'. My adaptation of this approach included conducting semi-structured interviews with those involved in the industry from the 1960s to the present day, resulting in a total of 42. These consist of producers, distributors, performers, solicitors, collectors and casual workers. It proved impossible to interview officers involved in the Obscene Publications Squad, and only one retired Metropolitan Police officer agreed to share their broader experience of police work during the 1970s. Following Kuhn, I attempted to conduct a series of interviews with each participant, finding that this built trust and allowed time for memories to be rediscovered. Most of these have been with males, highlighting the gendering of the economy and the difficulty of locating females involved in making pornographic films. Some of these interviews were filmed and, with the permission of the interviewees, were used to make the six-part documentary series *Sexposed* (Simon Fletcher 2018).

Conducting the research for this book has been fascinating but frustrating. As the formative years of Britain's alternative economy of hardcore pornography can be traced back to the 1950s, its clandestine conditions have made it difficult to track down those involved. This may partly explain why there has been limited academic research on the subject. Many of those who participated in the economy operated under different names or have since changed their names through marriage or deed poll; others have passed away. Several interviewees repeatedly told me that I was 'five years too late', missing an opportunity to engage with many of the older Soho crowd who took delight in recounting their experiences. For those I was able to track down, and it often took years to locate some of the names I identified, many refused to take part, stating that they had moved on with their lives and did not wish to reconnect with their past. Others did not respond.

Although those involved in the making of rollers are nameless, there being no credits or attempt to document their production, it has been possible to identify people through media reportage, legal documents and other related ephemera. It regularly felt uncomfortable trying to discover these performers' contact details

and I was conscious of intruding on their privacy. I found that many had left the business and moved on with their lives. For those I located and contacted by email or letter I found that few were willing to talk, making me realize that researching pornography's histories requires sensitivity and the building of trust. Because of this, I am very selective when choosing whose names to reveal in this research, especially with performers, even though they may be identifiable through public documents. Those I name either gave their permission, are already known for their involvement in pornography, have been identified in other academic research or have died. Some names have been changed at the interviewees' request to protect their identities and, on some occasions, I only give a first name or a surname.

At the heart of this book is an eight-hour semi-structured interview with Michael Freeman, who died in 2021. Freeman, formerly known as Michael Muldoon, was involved in the economy from 1964 to the early 2000s. He provided an invaluable first-hand account of the early years of the economy, through to the re-evaluation of the R18 certificate in 2000, when he produced his final films. My interest in the economy came from reading a series of self-published autobiographies titled *I Pornographer* by Freeman (2011). Freeman's claims seemed outlandish and exaggerated, telling stories about making rollers against a backdrop of police corruption and the London's underworld. Newspaper archives at the British Library corroborated many elements of Freeman's stories, and this method of triangulation became a crucial part of my methodology. Around this time, a documentary was being made about Freeman's life, titled *Hardcore Guaranteed* (Simon Fletcher 2019). Simon, the director, had also read *I Pornographer* and was equally fascinated by Freeman and wanted to document his life while he was still alive. Freeman agreed. Simon and I began a productive working relationship, collaborating on *Hardcore Guaranteed* and co-conducting numerous interviews, many of which are referred to throughout this book. Simon tracked Freeman down, discovering that he was living in exile in Southern Italy and, in April 2016, conducted a series of on-camera interviews. Following this, I undertook three phone interviews with Freeman and we conversed via Facebook Messenger, where he added first-hand detail to my ongoing discoveries.

The second part of my ethnohistorical approach involved archival research, locating various documents and artefacts that aid the historicization of the alternative economy. As highlighted by Williams (1989) and Dean et al. (2014), the ephemeral nature of pornography presents problems for researchers, as there are few specialist institutional archives to draw on, especially in Britain. Therefore, researching the historical foundations of the pornography business becomes a scavenger hunt, accumulating a 'critical mess' of material to make sense of (Schaefer 2012: 151). However, as Schaefer (2012: 151) points out, 'fortuitous convergences' often transpire from this. I began my archival research by

attempting to collect a sample of the commodities produced and distributed by pornographers. Initially, this was poorly digitized captures of rollers and VHS films from the *Vintage Erotica* website, a community archive devoted to collecting, and preserving, pornography.[5] After building a physical sample of rollers, I quickly realized that their material properties – the packaging, the film stock – were as equally, if not more, revealing than the actual films (I elaborate on this in Appendix 1). No formal archive of rollers exists in Britain, with the most comprehensive collection being stored at the Kinsey Institute in Indiana, USA. Along with Di Lauro and Rabkin's (1976) film and title index, their database proved to be more exhaustive than the crowdsourced Adult Loop Database,[6] giving likely production dates for many rollers.[7] A lack of archives meant that I either needed to build my own or gain access to private collections, a challenge also acknowledged by Alilunas (2016: 39).

Gaining access to these personal archives relied on building trust with collectors, leading to them acting as 'sponsors' (Walsh 2004: 231), putting me in touch with others in their network and vouching for my integrity. I accessed seven substantial private collections of rollers and their owners kindly permitted me to scan images of boxes and view some of their titles. Once I established my own archive of rollers, I learned how to handle film after finding that titles in poor physical condition could easily be chewed up by a projector. This emphasized the precarity of these materials and led me to the purchase of a domestic 8mm scanner, allowing a sample of titles to be digitized in compressed high definition for closer analysis; 16mm films were professionally scanned. Many of the screenshots included throughout *Under the Counter* are taken from these scans. I reluctantly followed Kennedy and Davis' (2013) and Waugh's (1996) approach of distorting the faces of performers to protect their identities out of legal necessity.

Second, I turned my attention to media reportage, collecting magazines, articles from newspapers and relevant television broadcasts. Newspapers played a vital part in documenting the development of pornography in Britain, particularly with it being an ongoing subject of public interest. I sourced 829 newspaper articles, including articles from the Danish and Swedish press, highlighting the transnational nature of the economy.[8] These were located via microfiche at the British Library, but mainly through the British Newspaper Archive,[9] *UKPressOnline,*[10] the National Campaign for the Reformation of the Obscene Publications Act online archive[11] and the MediaStream service at the Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark. It is worth acknowledging the limitations of such sources. As Franzosi (1987: 6) identifies, 'the validity of newspaper information is questionable', but also points out that 'no data source is without error'. The editorial positions of tabloid newspapers often mean that pornography is portrayed negatively, presenting a skewed picture of events. While it is important

to recognize the weakness of these sources, they still serve as valuable documents for pornography historians and starting points for further research. Magazines and periodicals such as *8mm Magazine*, *Forum*, *Experience, Continental Film and Video Review*, *Video World*, *Late Night Video, Personal Advertiser* and *Exchange and Mart* give further context, often containing interviews with some of the entrepreneurs, advertisements from enterprises and details of 8mm film-making practices.

It was newspapers and magazines that led me to undertake doctrinal research as they regularly made mention of legal cases. According to Hutchinson (2013: 9), doctrinal research is 'used to identify, analyze and synthesize the content of the law'. It involves 'locating cases and statutes, the use of indexes and citators, and the use of computer information retrieval systems such as Westlaw and LexisNexis' (McConville and Chui 2007: 3). This enabled me to understand the complex legal context for British pornography, as well as sourcing legal records that document the trade and the attempts made to regulate it. It also took me to the National Archives in London, discovering that they held many legal documents belonging to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Metropolitan Police. Though not exhaustive, with only documents deemed culturally significant being kept, these document obscenity trials and investigations relating to police corruption and pornography. I scanned over 26,000 pages of legal documents. Three Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were made to open closed files, resulting in one being released, albeit heavily redacted, demonstrating not just the sensitivity of their contents but also the overprotectiveness of reviewers. I also learned that FOI requests can lead to files being closed or opening dates extended, doing more harm than good.

Collectively, these sources enabled me to shed light on this hidden enterprise, allowing me to understand how the alternative economy operated and learn how rollers were produced, distributed and regulated. Furthermore, the wide range and depth of sources have corroborated some of the apparent outlandish claims made by interviewees. As Hobbs (1988: 4) found in his research, 'criminals do lie', particularly in autobiographies and other insider accounts – another source I have sparingly drawn on to fill in any gaps. To address these limitations, I used multiple methods to help verify 'one set of data sources by collecting data from others' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 183) and corroborate my findings. However, I realize that my historicization is based on my own interpretation of the material and the economy's lack of documentation. Like Bosworth (2001), I too draw on Farge (2013), who recognizes that there are always gaps in the archive when carrying out historical research, but it is possible to identify patterns that can be placed in context. Therefore, due to a lack of irrefutable evidence, I identify some of the likely candidates for making and distributing rollers in Britain. If I am wrong, I am happy to be corrected, welcoming future

attempts to piece together the history of this forgotten trade. As Alilunas (2016: 30) highlights, researching pornography is a puzzle and relies on 'trace historiography' to make sense out of what has been left behind: 'the trace historiographer must often examine the smoke rather than the fire to determine how the fire started, what burned, and why'.

## *Looking under the counter*

The opening chapter explores some of the cultural and economic conditions for the emergence of the alternative economy of hardcore pornography, providing context for the chapters that follow. I begin by studying the Obscene Publications Act 1959, the primary legal instrument for regulating pornography in Britain. I suggest the limitations in this legislation presented an entrepreneurial opportunity for pornographers and police, leading to the introduction of an institutional framework for the alternative economy. I then consider the permissive society of the 1960s, showing how cultural shifts and changes in public policy made sex and sexuality a topic of public discussion. I situate Soho amongst this changing sexual landscape, identifying it as the economic centre for pornography distribution in Britain, discussing the key entrepreneurs who ran bookshops in this area, how they operated them and the corrupt licensing system that underwrote the economy. The chapter concludes by looking at how a culture of domestic hardcore production was established, with entrepreneurs selling their photographs and illustrated books to Soho's bookshops.

Chapter 2 considers the technological context for roller production, beginning with an exploration of how rollers fit into Britain's small-gauge film market and wider cultures of pornographic film production. I then move on to look at how small-gauge film technologies presented entrepreneurial opportunities, suggesting that movie-making magazines and handbooks served as instructional manuals for roller makers. Having discussed the conditions for production, I identify the early pioneers of roller production before focusing on the activities of Ivor Cook. I argue that these early entrepreneurs were innovators, creating a market for hardcore film in the alternative economy and, in the case of Cook, expanding its reach beyond Soho to Denmark.

Chapter 3 offers a broader understanding of entrepreneurship in the alternative economy by looking at the activities of Mike Freeman and Evan 'Big Jeff' Phillips. I study how these two pornographers took different approaches to their enterprise, with Freeman relying on his criminality and Phillips drawing on his experience as a small business owner to introduce the first branded label, Climax Films, in 1966. Both brought a commercial mindset to the economy, upscaling production

and distributing pornography transnationally. I argue the Obscene Publications Squad's licensing system was an important factor in this growth, providing an institutional framework for the economy and setting the rules of the game, which Freeman disregarded, and Phillips followed.

Chapter 4 examines the expansion of the alternative economy in the early 1970s, as mail order became the dominant form of distribution, selling rollers and higher quality 8mm films imported from Denmark, which had fully legalized hardcore pornography in 1969. I argue that this expansion ultimately led to its regulation, with the popular press uncovering the Obscene Publications Squad's corrupt activities following an investigation into the pornography trade by politician and moral crusader Lord Longford. To illustrate this, I use the example of a forgotten obscenity trial referred to as the 'Watford Blue Movie Trial' by the popular press, which revealed the entrepreneurial activities of distributor John Darby and roller maker Anthony Collingbourne. Through a close reading of the Director of Public Prosecutions' documents relating to this trial, I show how police and prosecutors used a combination of laws to fill holes in the Obscene Publications Act 1959 and convict those involved. I argue that this case is indicative of a broader attempt to control the alternative economy, ultimately stunting Britain's roller trade.

The final chapter investigates a shift in the economy from production to distribution, as imported 8mm pornography replaced domestic production. Against the backdrop of a constantly shifting moral climate, I consider how John Jesner Lindsay and David Waterfield positioned themselves alongside politicians, anti-pornography activists and the police as moral entrepreneurs. Operating without a functioning institutional framework, I suggest that Lindsay and Waterfield acted as agents of change, seeking to legalize hardcore pornography in order to benefit from it. Central to this pursuit was claiming that their activities were moral and just. Throughout the chapter, I draw on their extensive legal battles to show how the Metropolitan Police responded to their increasingly publicized attempts entrepreneurially, seeking to close the loopholes that allowed Lindsay and Waterfield to do business. I close the chapter by reviewing how this battle of morality resulted in tighter regulation of Britain's pornography business, as the new Conservative government brought in tougher laws.

In the book's conclusion, I comment on the wider significance of the findings from my research into Britain's roller trade, discussing how entrepreneurship is a helpful framework for understanding the political, economic and cultural conditions pornographers operate in. I also consider some of the methodological limitations of the study. After the conclusion, I offer an epilogue that briefly considers the introduction of home video in Britain and the opportunities it created for pornography entrepreneurs. Here, the themes discussed throughout the book

repeat themselves, with pornographers battling with the law and the eventual institution of another law – the Video Recordings Act 1984. But first, I return to the beginnings of the alternative economy, when the Obscene Publications Act 1959 was brought in to help separate artworks from pornography. As I show, the implementation of this controversial law created the material conditions for Britain's domestic trade in hardcore pornography.