

# Legitimate: Jerry Douglas's *Tubstrip* and the Erotic Theatre of Gay Liberation

by Jordan Schildcrout

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From 1969 to 1974, after the premiere of Mart Crowley's landmark gay play *The Boys in the Band* (1968) and before the establishment of an organized gay theatre movement with companies such as Doric Wilson's TOSOS (The Other Side of Silence), there flourished a subgenre of plays that can best be described as gay erotic theatre. While stopping short of performing sex acts on stage, these plays featured copious nudity, erotic situations, and forthright depictions of gay desire. In the early years of gay liberation, such plays pushed at the boundaries between the "legitimate" theatre and pornography, and in the process created the most exuberant and affirming depictions of same-sex sexuality heretofore seen in the American theatre. Some of these works were extremely popular with gay audiences, but almost all were dismissed by mainstream critics, never published, and rarely revived. The most widely seen of these plays was *Tubstrip* (1973), written and directed by Jerry Douglas, whose career in the early 1970s was situated squarely at the intersection of legitimate theatre and pornography. An analysis of *Tubstrip* and its groundbreaking production history can illuminate an important but often overlooked chapter in the development of gay theatre in America.

*Tubstrip* (which can be read "tub strip" or "tubs trip") is a risqué farce set in a gay bathhouse, written by "A. J. Kronengold" and directed by "Doug Richards," both pseudonyms for a single person: Jerry Douglas, a graduate of the Yale School of Drama who later became a popular and award-winning director of pornographic films. Infused with a post-Stonewall sense of gay identity and sexuality, the play ran for 140 performances off-Broadway in 1973, then toured to eight cities over nine months, and opened on Broadway for a five-week run in 1974. By the producer's own estimate, *Tubstrip* played approximately 500 performances to an audience of 50,000. This article argues that this remarkably successful play is emblematic of a significant moment in gay culture, when the fall of stage censorship and the rise of the sexual revolution and gay liberation created an unprecedented surge of gay erotic theatre, beginning with Gus Weill's *Geese* (1969) and David Gaard's *And Puppy Dog Tails* (1969), and reaching its pinnacle with Jerry Douglas's bathhouse comedy.[\[1\]](#)

During the early years of gay liberation, other forms of queer theatre included elements of gay eroticism: Charles Ludlam's *Bluebeard* (1970) and Andy Warhol's *Pork* (1971) reveled in carnivalesque excess and carried the critical imprimatur of hip theatrical art, and British imports such as *Butley* (1972) and *Find Your Way Home* (1973) depicted gay relationships with the bleakness seemingly expected in "serious drama" of the era. In contrast, gay erotic theatre often appropriated light middlebrow genres, such as romantic comedy and farce, to create fantasies of same-sex romance and sexuality. To varying degrees, *Tubstrip* and its ilk imagined the possibility of a happy homosexual and a healthy sexuality based on mutual desire, liberated from the guilt and shame of the closet. Critics of these plays, however, often saw

only lewdness and exploitative sensationalism, which, they argued, did not belong in the legitimate theatre.

The plays of gay erotic theatre may have appealed primarily to gay men who aspired to see their identities and desires, long closeted, finally reflected and affirmed in the culture. Audiences, however, were not exclusively gay, and the battles fought over sexuality and legitimacy in the theatre had repercussions beyond this subculture of gay men who, while marginalized, had a degree of cultural and economic power denied to women and other minority groups. An examination of the “homosexploitation” plays of gay erotic theatre can further illuminate the ethos of the burgeoning gay sexual culture, providing an opportunity not just to indulge in nostalgia for the liberation era, but to reflect on how our experiences and fantasies of sex and romance are constructed in our own cultural moment. *Tubstrip* and other “sex positive” plays of gay erotic theatre invite the audience to find pleasure in theatrical depictions of sexual liberation, which is itself an act of liberation.

### **Frank Queerism: The Intersection of Gay Theatre and Pornography**

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of what we now call “gay theater,” with gay theatre artists—informed by a contemporary understanding of gay cultural identity—creating representations of gay lives, often (but not exclusively) for an audience presumed to be gay. Most historians trace the genre to the seminal work of off-off-Broadway playwrights like Robert Patrick, Doric Wilson, and Lanford Wilson at the Caffè Cino, and then recognize the crossover commercial success of Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band* (1968) as a crucial turning point. While the plays of gay erotic theatre must be understood in relation to these previous gay plays, broader changes in gay sexual culture also influenced their production and reception.

Gay erotic theatre thrived for many of the same reasons as the pornographic cinema of the era, as described by historian Whitney Strub:

A confluence of forces, including gay activism and its push for increased visibility, the rapidly diminishing scope of obscenity laws (historically disproportionately aimed at queer expression), the market demands of a gay consumer base, and the broader spirit of sexual revolution, all worked in tandem to open a new space for gay erotic expression.[\[2\]](#)

While many regarded pornography as both a cause and symptom of the urban decay of New York City in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Strub argues that the supposed “decline” of the city

provided increased freedom for queer people, who were now less subject to such surveillance and control. . . . As the straight, white middle class fled for suburbs specifically designed for procreative heterosexual families, urban opportunities beckoned for gay communities.[\[3\]](#)

The 1969 Stonewall Riots helped to create a more visible political movement for LGBT people at the same time that changes in censorship laws created opportunities for a more visible sexual culture, both gay and straight, on both stage and screen. However, as Elizabeth Wollman notes, “Many members of the commercial theatre industry worried” that sexually explicit theatre productions like *Oh! Calcutta!* (1969)

and *Che!* (1969) “were not terribly distinct from the live sex shows and pornographic films that had begun to proliferate in New York City.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Scholars such as Thomas Waugh have discussed the history of post-World War II gay pornographic films as a progression from beefcake models posing in pouches to softcore gay erotica with full nudity to hardcore narrative feature films with performers engaging in sex acts.<sup>[5]</sup> The emergence of hardcore cinema in the early 1970s precipitated the trend of “porno chic,” which Jennifer C. Nash describes as the “mainstreaming” of pornography, with “elaborately plotted, narrative-driven feature-length films that consciously effaced the boundary between the pornographic and the mainstream,” playing in “regular” movie theatres, reviewed by mainstream critics, and attended by millions of men and women.<sup>[6]</sup> One of the earliest entries in this phenomenon was the feature length hardcore gay film *Boys in the Sand* (1971), directed by Wakefield Poole, a former Broadway dancer. The film became an unprecedented commercial success and made a star out of blond and handsome Casey Donovan.<sup>[7]</sup>

While occasionally intersecting with porno chic, the gay erotic theatre produced between 1969 and 1974 is most comparable to softcore erotica, which did not depict explicit sex acts. Richard Dyer, writing in 1985, endeavored to distinguish between pornography and erotica for gay men, although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and at other times have simply marked cultural privilege, with “erotica” being what Ellen Willis called a euphemism for “classy porn.”<sup>[8]</sup> Dyer creates a distinction by asserting that pornography “is supposed to have an effect that is registered in the spectator’s body,” and this goal dictates the structural form of the genre, since “the desire that drives the porn narrative forward is the desire to come, to have an orgasm.” Pornography, then, is characterized by the way in which its form follows its presumed function, to stimulate not just arousal but physical orgasm. Of course, it’s impossible to determine exactly how a work of art functions in different circumstances with different audiences, but Dyer’s point about narrative structure still holds: the dramatic narratives of gay erotic theatre, while they might arouse, are not structured to bring the audience to orgasm. Instead, erotic theatre places emphasis on the psychological, social, and aesthetic aspects of sex. Nevertheless, productions that offered gay eroticism for a paying audience were often accused of pornographic “gaysploitation.”<sup>[9]</sup>

In a 1977 article titled “Theatre: Gays in the Marketplace vs. Gays for Themselves,” Don Shewey criticized plays, often by straight playwrights, that “exploit gay characters and gay themes for sensationalism or cheap comedy” like *Norman Is That You?* (1970) and *Steambath* (1970).<sup>[10]</sup> But he recognized that this sort of exploitation was different from what he called “semiporno gay celebrations like David Gaard’s *And Puppy Dog Tails*, A. J. Kronengold’s *Tubstrip*, and Gus Weill’s *Geese*,” which he saw as emerging from “the nascent gay activist movement and an increasingly public gay populace.”<sup>[11]</sup> Jerry Douglas recalls that the first play he saw containing nudity and homosexuality was *Geese* by Gus Weill, produced at the Players Theatre in January 1969.<sup>[12]</sup> Consisting of two one-act plays—the first with a male couple, the second with a female couple—*Geese* broke new ground in the depiction of sexuality, with one outraged critic proclaiming the plays to be “shockers even by today’s permissive standards. The dialog is raw and unfettered, and there is emphasis on nudity, including homosexual and lesbian lovemaking.”<sup>[13]</sup> Both plays juxtapose the newfound pure love of a young same-sex couple with the bitter relationships and hypocritical sexual mores of their parents’ generation.<sup>[14]</sup> Critics accused *Geese* of engaging in “fast-buck-ism” and “frank queerism,”<sup>[15]</sup> risking “the reinstatement of stage censorship in New York,”<sup>[16]</sup> and performing “a faggot propaganda piece”<sup>[17]</sup> for an audience of “prurient peeping Toms”<sup>[18]</sup> and “flagrant pederasts.”<sup>[19]</sup>

Gay erotic theatre aggravated the anxiety, always present in the professional theatre, over whether theatre aspires to the “higher values” of art or functions as a commercial product in a marketplace. Were plays such as *Geese* a) sincerely pursuing the cause of sexual liberation or b) offering cheap thrills in hopes of making a profit? The answer, of course, often seemed to be c) both. Wollman asserts that

for every radical committed to using stage nudity toward social change, there were two or three entrepreneurs who were just as interested in the money that could be made by hiring young, good-looking people to show a little skin. . . . Most ended up with feet in both camps.[20]

For example, the program bio of one of the actors in *Geese* states, with a combination of conviction and nonchalance, “Nudity or homosexuality, or whatever, is a product of life and it’s about time it got on the stage.”[21] Not all theatre artists shared this perspective, as evidenced by an actor’s departure from Robert M. Lane’s *Foreplay* (1970), which prompted the *Variety* front-page headline, “Won’t Depict A Nude Homo, Actor Quits.”[22] When industry papers featured banner headlines such as “NY LEGIT GOING SEX-HAPPY” and “NUDITY SELLS TIX?” in 1969, [23] the underlying consternation was the difficulty of objectively distinguishing between theatrical art and exploitative sensationalism in plays as varied as *Marat/Sade*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Fortune and Men’s Eyes*, *Oh! Calcutta!*, *Paradise Now*, *Scuba Duba*, and *Geese*. As British critic John Elsom argued in 1974, “One man’s decadence is another man’s sexual enlightenment.”[24]

Despite negative reviews, *Geese* was commercially successful, playing off-Broadway for 336 performances through November 1969 (and thus during the Stonewall Riots in June), with subsequent productions in Los Angeles and San Francisco. *Geese* was inevitably mentioned as a point of comparison when David Gaard’s play *And Puppy Dog Tails* opened off-Broadway in September 1969. In this domestic comedy, John lives with his lover, a Southerner named Carey-Lee, but his head is turned by a visit from his straight friend Bud, a Navy man with whom he “fooled around” in his adolescence.[25] Forced to choose between the closeted sexuality of his macho buddy and a loving gay relationship with Carey-Lee, John chooses the latter. Most critics derided the play as nothing more than a poor excuse to get “a glimpse of male musculature and—briefly—male genitals”[26] and “a crudely devised apology for the right to be gay.”[27] *Newsday* worried that *The Boys in the Band* had created “an epidemic” of imitators,[28] while *Variety* registered homophobic horror over “a rising tide of limp-wrist-oriented plays.”[29]

Nevertheless, and despite not liking the play, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* acknowledged that *And Puppy Dog Tails* was doing something new, which was reflected in the review’s slightly ironic subheader: “Homosexuals Depicted As Happy, A Novelty.” He wrote, “While we have had scenes before of homosexual sex and even declarations of homosexual love, this is the first play in my experience to show demonstrations of homosexual affection.”[30] He then parenthetically confesses that he found such displays of affection “embarrassing” because of his own “hang-ups.” But the necessity of such displays is precisely the point of *And Puppy Dog Tails*. Indeed, the play is not primarily concerned with the supposed battle between hetero and homo, as certain critics thought, but in the divide between a homosexual culture that eroticizes straightness as a masculine ideal and a gay culture that valorizes a romantic relationship based on mutual desire. Just as John does not need a straight lover, perhaps Gaard’s play did not need the approval of straight critics. *And Puppy Dog Tails* recouped its cost during previews and ran for 141 performances.

*Geese* and *And Puppy Dog Tails* set the stage for Jerry Douglas's entrance into the production of gay erotic theatre. Douglas studied playwriting and directing at the Yale School of Drama before moving to New York in 1960, and he spent the decade writing off-Broadway musicals, directing plays, and serving as the casting director for the Coconut Grove Playhouse. In 1970, he had his first experience directing a play containing nudity, Gerry Raad's *Circle in the Water*, which dealt with repressed homosexuality and sadism amongst cadets in a military academy. Later that same year, he directed his own play *Score*, an example of "bisexual chic" *avant la lettre*, about a sophisticated married couple who compete with each other in seduction, battling for the greatest number of conquests—including those with partners of the same sex.[31] The production, which featured Sylvester Stallone in a supporting role, was dismissed as "one of the rash of sexploitation shows which have followed the easing of stage restrictions here"[32] and closed after 23 performances.[33]

Jerry Douglas's next endeavor was writing and directing the hardcore feature film *The Back Row* (1973), starring Casey Donovan as a New Yorker who attracts the attention of George Payne, a sexual neophyte from Wyoming who has just arrived at Port Authority. The film shows Payne learning "how to be gay," including a meta-cinematic scene in which Payne, having followed Donovan into an adult movie theatre, watches the action on screen and imagines himself and Donovan taking the place of the actors. The scene encapsulates the ethos behind much of Douglas's work: pornography has a pedagogical function, instructing gay men on how to fulfill their desires, not just as a technical matter of physical positions, but by diminishing the inhibitions created by a homophobic society and liberating their erotic imaginations. Douglas used the pseudonym "Doug Richards" for *The Back Row*, hoping to keep his career in porn separate from his legitimate theatre career, but the film became one of his most critically acclaimed and commercially successful creations. Jeffrey Escoffier lists *The Back Row*, which was filmed on location in New York City, as the first of the "homorealist" porn films, which "created a synthesis of a documentary-like view (in this case focusing on the gay sexual subculture) and the more psychopolitical themes of sexual liberation," using "actual locations where public sex took place." [34] Douglas's next work continued his exploration of the gay subculture in one of the emblematic locales of sexual liberation: the bathhouse.

### **The Boys in the Baths: Sexual Exuberance and Romantic Longing in *Tubstrip***

Jerry Douglas recalls that producer Ken Gaston approached him with the initial idea for *Tubstrip*: "I want you to write a play about the baths, and I want it to be a love story." Gay bathhouses like New York's Continental and Everard Baths—colloquially known as "the tubs"—occupied a unique position in urban gay life, which many remember as a sexual utopia.[35] In the documentary *Gay Sex in the '70s*, activist and author Arnie Kantrowitz recalls:

You could do everything. . . . You could eat in the restaurant, you could go swimming in the pool, you could have a massage—to orgasm if you preferred, you could dance on their dance floor, and you could have more sex than most people would consider having in a year.[36]

But Kantrowitz also emphasizes that "Even during the days of the most advanced and reckless promiscuity, it was still a search for someone," and he met his long-term romantic partner at the baths. This combination of sexual exuberance and romantic longing informs both the dramaturgy and ethos of *Tubstrip*.



The play takes place in the central lounge of a popular New York City bathhouse, but the establishment is sparsely attended this particular Tuesday evening because “there isn’t a self-respecting faggot in this city who isn’t home watching the Academy Awards” (16).<sup>[37]</sup> Although it will eventually crescendo into the frenzy of farce, *Tubstrip* begins with a pensive silence, as the young attendant Brian, the play’s main character, sits alone in a suspended bamboo cage chair “in a fetal position. . . his thoughts a thousand miles away” (2)—an image used in much of the publicity for the show [Figure 1]. The opening tableau hints at the journey to come, with Brian leaving the nest of his egg-shaped chair and metaphorically taking flight—but toward what? Brian’s appearance is contrasted with the entrance of a patron named Darryl, emerging naked from the pool (installed below stage level, in the orchestra pit), splashing the audience in the front row. Before the first word is spoken, Douglas’s staging juxtaposes above and below, air and water, the mind and the body, the romantic and the erotic, and (as Darryl tries to gain Brian’s attention by arranging himself in sexually provocative poses) the desired and the desiring.

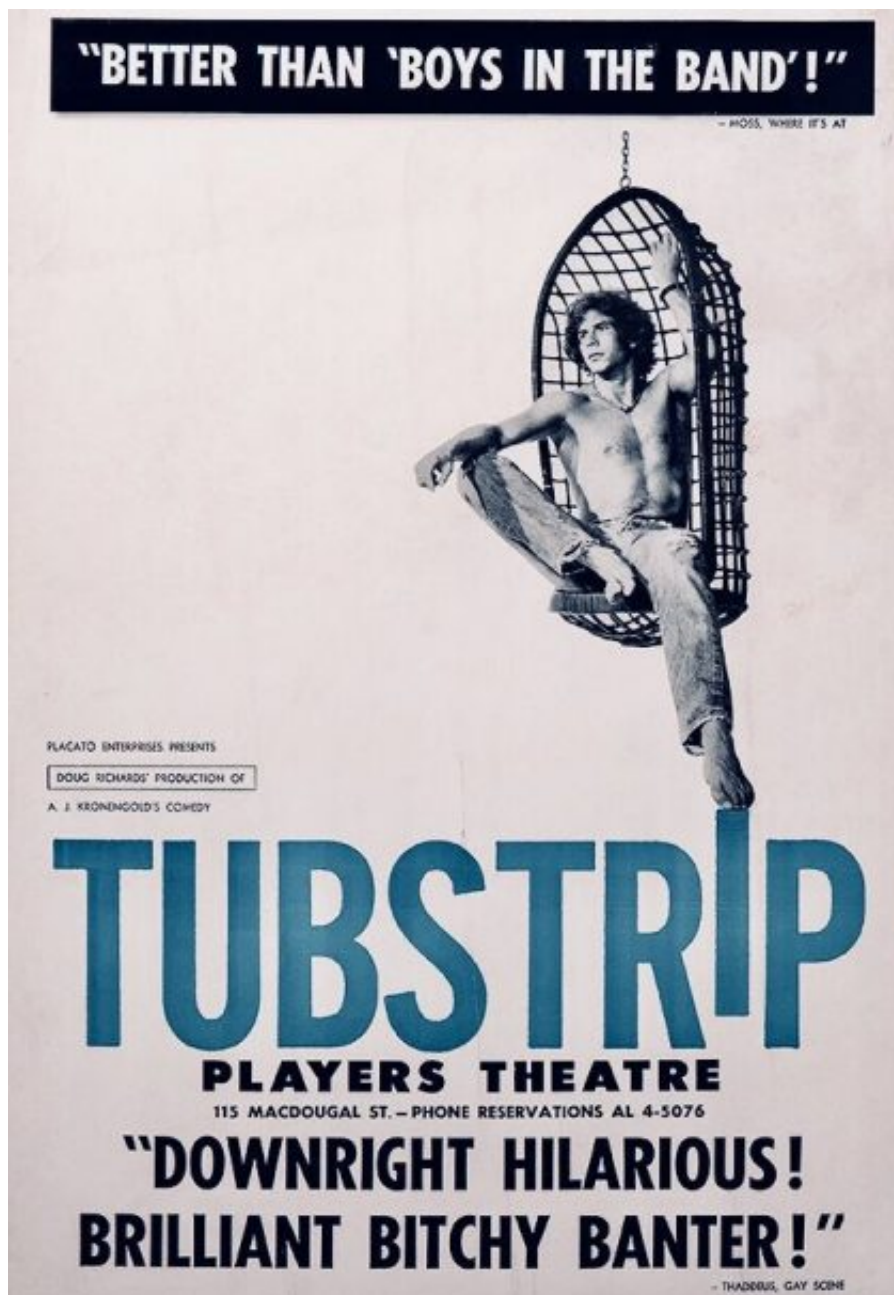


Figure 1. Poster for 1973 off-Broadway production of *Tubstrip* at the Players Theatre, featuring Larry Gilman as Brian. Used with permission of Jerry Douglas, from his personal collection.

Each of *Tubstrip*'s nine characters comes to this bathhouse with his individual sexual and romantic desires, and the play culminates in the formation of different kinds of relationships. The denizens include Richie, a romantic and naïve young man who is searching for his lover Darryl, who has surreptitiously come to the baths in search of sexual variety; Andy, a witty black queen infatuated with Brian; Tony, a sadist, and his lover Kevin, a masochist; Dusty, a sweet-natured hustler; Wally, a middle-aged skin-flick mogul searching for new talent; and Bob, a Viet Nam veteran who knew Brian in high school. The stage is filled with young and attractive actors, almost all of whom, at one point or another, will be naked. Even 59-year-old Wally, although never naked, was actually played by a 26-year-old actor (Jake Everett) who shaved his hair and constructed a "fat suit" for the role. The play presents a fantasy version of a bathhouse; yet, even as it celebrates sexual liberation, *Tubstrip* dramatizes many of the tensions evident in the emerging gay sexual culture, between sex and romance, promiscuity and monogamy, sadomasochism and consent, competition and community.

As Kevin Winkler has noted, the bathhouse was a theatrical space, not just for professional entertainers like Bette Midler, who famously got her start performing at the Continental Baths, but for the men cruising and engaging in sex.

[I]t was always showtime. You just had to find your follow spot, be it in the steam room, the showers, the orgy room, or take your act on the road through the winding hallways. If your act flopped once, you could try it out again right down the hall, altering a bit of business, tightening up your dialogue (or maybe you preferred pantomime), and experimenting with a different characterization.[38]

Much of the comedy of *Tubstrip* comes from an awareness of the theatricality involved both in the presentation of self and the pursuit of sexual fantasy at the baths. The bathhouse, like the playhouse, is a location in which people might wear masks and play roles, but it is also ultimately a place where truths are revealed, and by the end of *Tubstrip*, many of the characters see each other—and themselves—with greater honesty and clarity.

Over the course of its twenty-one months of performances, advertisements for *Tubstrip* proclaimed that it was "Better Than a Trip to the Baths" (indicating erotic pleasure) and "Better Than *The Boys in the Band*" (indicating theatrical legitimacy). The latter boast hints at the extent to which early gay liberation theatre artists were performing in the shadow of Mart Crowley's hit play—and also reacting against it.[39] *The Boys in the Band* presented an ensemble of gay characters—including the bitter host Michael, the "fairy" Emory, the token African American Bernard, and the hustler known only as Cowboy—gathered for a birthday party that implodes in a swirl of alcohol, verbal attacks, and manipulative games. In Act II, characters play a game in which they phone their high school crushes and relive their rejection, while Alan, the play's supposed straight man, denies his homosexuality and flees the party. As J. Todd Ormsbee observes, "The target of Michael's party game is the failure of gay love, its pain and humiliation, perhaps its impossibility." [40] The central plot of Douglas's *Tubstrip* reverses

this dynamic. We learn that Brian, as a gawky high school freshman, had a crush on the macho heterosexual athlete Bob. While he was at war, Bob received letters from Brian, which piqued his sexual interest in a kid he barely remembered. Now Bob, entering the bathhouse in full Green Beret uniform, has come searching for Brian, and he is impressed to find that the “short, skinny, uncoordinated” freshman (89) has grown into a desirable young man. The act one curtain falls on Bob passionately kissing Brian, which Douglas recalls was “daring” for the time.

*Tubstrip* would seem to enact a homosexual wish fulfillment: the handsome straight prince desires the gay boy who was once an ugly duckling. Imagine how different Crowley’s play would be if “nelly” Emory’s high school crush confessed that he desired him in return. But Douglas goes a step further: once Brian learns that Bob is married, closeted, and won’t commit to more than a secret weekend fling with him, he rejects Bob—and also quits his job at the bathhouse. Instead, Brian leaves with the monogamously inclined Richie, who has just broken up with his lover. Throughout the play, the flirtation between Brian and Richie has been boyish and playful, as opposed to a “heavy cruise,” most evident in their second act water fight in the pool. Rather than consummating an affair with the “stud” of his adolescent fantasies, Brian chooses the naïve and sincere young man who perhaps reminds him of himself as that awkward, yearning freshman. The contrast between physical pleasures and emotional fulfillment was also evident in the casting of the roles of Bob and Richie, with Brian rejecting the character often played by porn stars (such as Jim Cassidy and Dick Joslyn) in favor of the character played by actors (such as Tom Van Stitzel) who won critical praise for giving nuanced performances. Hinting at a life of domestic happiness, Brian and Richie discuss cooking breakfast for each other as they head out into the sunrise.

The bathhouse functions in a manner similar to the Shakespearean forest where erotic desire is unleashed and lovers, liberated from social restraints, can meet their proper match. But in order to maintain that romance, the lovers must then leave the forest behind and return to the “civilized” world. (Wally, as the play’s most erudite character, makes this connection, ironically extoling the “midsummer madness” that exists at the baths all year round.) The central plot of Brian and Richie valorizes traditional notions of romantic fidelity, which necessitates leaving the bathhouse, but *Tubstrip* does not condemn characters who remain and seek what we might now call a “no strings attached” hook-up. Bob and Darryl, as the lovers rejected by Brian and Richie, respectively, are quite clear about their longing for purely sexual adventure and variety, and the play ends with them following each other into the steam room. They, too, can have their desires fulfilled at the bathhouse, and the play does not disparage them for doing so.

The character most pulled by the tension between sexual exuberance and romantic longing is Andy, described by critics as “a chatty flirt” and “a black queen” who has some of the play’s best comic lines. Contemporaneous accounts of the baths illustrate the ethnic diversity of the patrons, but Andy is the sole person of color on stage, potentially putting him in the same tokenistic position as Bernard in *The Boys in the Band*. At the start of the play, Andy endures a couple of racist zingers from his friend Wally, but in contrast to *The Boys in the Band*, in which the racial disparagement of Bernard grows uglier as the play goes on, *Tubstrip* shows Andy and Wally moving toward deeper friendship and mutual support. While given to incisive “reads” and witty rejoinders, Andy is not a neutered commentator, but very much part of the sexual action of the bathhouse. His romantic pursuit of Brian and his flirtations with other patrons are often played for comedy, but they are also rooted in his genuine need for affirmation in a community that too often leaves gay black men out of its romantic and erotic fantasies. Most memorably, when Andy feels he is not getting enough attention, he emerges wearing an enormous Afro wig. According to Douglas, Walter Holiday, the actor who played Andy in every performance of *Tubstrip*, contributed a



great deal to the creation of his character, including this visual assertion of Black Power and Angela Davis fabulousness. Andy is dejected when he does not end up with Brian at the end of the play, but his friend Wally assures him that someday he, too, will find love. In a final gesture of bold self-assertion, Andy removes his towel and nakedly strides into the steam room once again.

The possibility of having both sexual variety and romantic fulfillment is realized in the sadomasochistic couple of Tony and Kevin, who also provide some of the play's most sexually explicit sequences. Douglas recalls that one of the greatest laughs of the evening came when Tony, entering in conservative business attire, whips off his Brooks Brothers suit in one swift flourish to reveal the leather harness underneath. Tony then proceeds to unpack his attaché case, which contains a number of increasingly outrageous sex toys, from cock rings and handcuffs to chocolate syrup and bananas. His "pretty-boy" lover, Kevin, soon joins him, and the script shows them as an affectionate and caring couple who enjoy playing the roles of an abusive master and humiliated slave. In this, the play participates in the debate among early gay liberationists over the psychological and political ramifications of S&M, siding with Lyn Rosen's defense of sadomasochism:

Too many people confuse S&M with bad relationships in which one person dominates another or treats another badly. S&M is a sexual act in which both partners treat each other well.[\[41\]](#)

Many of the play's characters do not understand this distinction and show concern over the abuse Tony heaps on Kevin, including handcuffing him naked and face down on the pool table. Good-hearted Richie attempts to "rescue" him from this humiliation, but is taken aback when Kevin exclaims, "Look, prick, you do your thing, let me do mine. Now, fuck off" (76). Later, when Kevin easily slips out of his predicament without a key, Richie is upset to learn that the cuffs weren't actually locked. Kevin explains, as though it should be obvious, "Suppose there was a fire—" (82).[\[42\]](#)

The joke points to Douglas's metatheatrical understanding of S&M as a sexual *act*, complete with its own costumes, props, lines ("Yes, *sir!*") and roles, enacted with the consent of all the performers. Yet *Tubstrip* also pushes at the limits of sadomasochism when the couple involves a non-consenting participant, the hustler Dusty. Unlike the sex worker known only as "Cowboy" in *The Boys in the Band*, Dusty has a name and his own desires, and the audience even learns a bit about his sexual journey.[\[43\]](#) When Wally, one of his clients, spots him in the bathhouse and snarkily berates him for previously passing himself off as straight, Dusty replies with simple sincerity, "I never lied to you. Things change" (45), indicating his growth into gay self-acceptance.[\[44\]](#) He initially agrees to a threesome with Tony and Kevin, but when Tony tries to pierce Dusty's nipple without his consent, a violent fight and then a chase through the bathhouse ensues. While played for farce, this situation also involves a touch of Ortonesque menace, which only abates when Brian, in his authoritative role as bathhouse attendant, puts a stop to the fight and banishes Tony and Kevin from the premises. In a further show of ambivalence about Tony's sadism, the play reveals him to be Wally's psychoanalyst, a member of a profession that, in its role of arbiter of "sanity" and "normalcy," had a history of causing great harm to homosexuals. Nevertheless, the play ultimately shows Dusty to be unharmed, and Tony and Kevin return to their affectionate and mutually supportive romantic relationship.

At the age of 59, Wally is older than any character in *The Boys in the Band*, a play that paints a grim picture of gay men clinging to youth. Wally takes a more philosophical perspective on his status as "dirty

old man,” since, as he explains, “there’s always someone a little older, a little dirtier” (79). Wally is comic because of his grand duchess affectations, and the play creates some farcical bits out of the other characters avoiding Wally sexually, such as when four men come running out of the steam room as soon as Wally goes in (51). One way that Wally deals with this rejection is by retreating into his profession as a pornographer, imagining the world as if it were a movie, commenting on the action around him by proclaiming, “It’ll make a gorgeous film” (28). When he learns that Brian’s high school crush has come to find him, Wally becomes effusive with purple prose: “Childhood Sweethearts—doing it with jock straps and football helmets! Separated by cruel fate—reunited by a twist of circumstance! Love conquers all!” (63). He’s excited by watching and creating fantasies, and his role as voyeur puts him in the same position as the audience. Wally is not “matched” with anyone at the end of the play, but he is not alone, in part because he is reunited with Veronica, his cat who happens to be in heat and has been lost in the bathhouse, adding to the farcical shenanigans.<sup>[45]</sup> Moreover, while his bitchy barbs might indicate his frustration with the sexual competition of the bathhouse, he ultimately achieves a sense of community, exchanging friendship with characters like Andy and Dusty, whom he previously disparaged. In Wally, we see that the bathhouse can facilitate not just sexual encounters, but also friendship and a larger experience of community. The play’s function as “community portrait” is reflected in the photograph featured in the center of the off-Broadway program, showing all nine men (and one cat) as an affectionate ensemble [Figure 2].



Figure 2. Centerfold photo from program for 1973 off-Broadway production of Tubstrip. Back Row:

Jamey Gillis (Tony), Jake Everett (Wally) and Veronica, Larry Gilman (Brian), Tony Origlio (Richie), Richard Rheem (Kevin); Front Row: Bob Balhatchet (Darryl), Walter Holiday (Andy), Jim Tate / Dean Tait (Dusty), Richard Livert (Bob). Photo: Christopher Studios. Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

When *Time Magazine* reviewed *The Boys in the Band*, they highlighted its depiction of “rejection, humiliation, and loneliness,”<sup>[46]</sup> which were presumed to be the lot of all homosexuals, in part because Crowley’s characters assert such generalizations (e.g., “Show me a happy homosexual and I’ll show you a gay corpse”). *Tubstrip* makes no such generalizations, in part because the greater amount of queer representation post-*Boys* relieves it of the burden of representing *all* homosexuals. Instead, Jerry Douglas’s play creates a fantasy in which characters connect—as sexual partners, as romantic lovers, as friends, and as a community. The play does not dwell on the trauma of the closet, no one agonizes over what “made them” gay, no one is forced to pretend to be straight, no one drowns himself in alcohol, and even the characters who do light drugs (pot and poppers) seem motivated by sexual enhancement rather than self-destruction. Like *Geese* and *And Puppy Dog Tails*, *Tubstrip* depicts gay love, sex, and affection (which can be intertwined or not, depending on your desire) as exciting, fulfilling, and achievable. While this might be a sentimental fantasy, it’s a fantasy that proved immensely popular with gay audiences—and affronted many mainstream critics.

### ***Tubstrip* on Stage: Audiences, Critics, and the Road to Legitimacy**

*Tubstrip* began performances at the 199-seat Brecht Theatre in the Mercer Arts Center on 17 May 1973. Suggesting the play’s location at the intersection of legitimate theatre and gay sexual culture, the cover of the program featured a drawing of two nearly naked blond boys, smiling and lounging in relaxed poses. Inside were advertisements for the boutique sex shop the Pleasure Chest, “metal inhalers” (for amyl nitrite), nude male photography, and hardcore pornography. Posters and flyers for the show did not include the words “gay” or “homosexual,” instead borrowing a phrase from pornographic cinema and touting the play’s “all male cast.” In gay magazines, advertisements for the play appeared next to those for porn films and bathhouses. These marketing tactics drew an audience, allowing the production to recoup its investment within five weeks. It played for a total of 100 performances, before the 103-year old Broadway Central Hotel, which housed the Mercer Arts Center, collapsed, leaving *Tubstrip* temporarily homeless.<sup>[47]</sup>

The production reopened less than two weeks later at the Players Theatre, running for 40 more performances, from 14 August to 16 September, but never officially opening to the mainstream press. Instead, the producers took advantage of the fact that gay culture had grown more self-sufficient since the days of *Geese* and *And Puppy Dog Tails*, with a marked increase in gay-owned publications, bars, shops, and restaurants. Most writers invited from gay publications like *The Advocate*, *Gay Scene*, *Michael’s Thing*, and *Where It’s At* enjoyed the nudity and eroticism of *Tubstrip*, yet even when photos of semi-naked actors accompanied their reviews, they tended to focus on the overall quality of the play, particularly its wit and comic structure, as well as what they saw as its liberationist ethos. Lee Barton of the *Advocate* saw it as a welcome departure from “what’s been passing for gay theatre” and plays that “exploit, degrade, insult, or distort what it’s like to be gay.” He praised *Tubstrip* as “funny, sexy, [and] important,” but wondered whether mainstream critics could “tolerate anything gay that is so open and

healthy.”[48]

In his diary, Donald Vining was effusive about the play and highlighted the sense of recognition experienced by a gay audience member, describing the set as “a wonderful evocation of the Continental Baths.”

I was so glad I had recently been there so that the hanging basket chair, the pool table, the steam room doors, and the mattresses on the floor all had meaning. I said to Ken, “They’ve got everything but the swimming pool” and lo and behold two actors emerged naked and wet from some kind of tub at the front of the stage. . . . We had nine naked men, eight of them quite attractive, and lots of hilarious lines. The play would be of no interest to anyone not a homosexual but it is actually very well crafted, the several plots skillfully managed, the laughs beautifully built up to, the characters nicely differentiated, and everything highly professional. . . . I found the whole thing a hoot and my sentimental nature was pleased when the two romantics, disappointed in their lovers for different reasons, found each other at the end.[49]

Vito Russo, however, wrote that he was “more furious” at plays like *Tubstrip* than at *Boys in the Band* “because they *pretend* to be a product of our liberated culture” but actually just “exploit the situation to make a buck” from members of the gay community who will “pay any price” to see nudity on stage.[50] But Vining’s response indicates that Russo misjudged the desire of the ticket-buying gay audience. The nudity is one element of the larger theatrical fantasy, which also includes the pleasure of seeing one’s world represented, of being an insider who understands the meaning of that world, and of seeing gay romance and eroticism validated in a manner still rare in mainstream culture. The marketing of *Tubstrip* may have exploited sexuality in order to sell tickets, but the play itself offered much more to audience members like Vining, who saw no conflict between the erotic and the legitimate theatre. Indeed, he found pleasure in seeing the erotic *within* the legitimate.

In a rare move for a sexually explicit gay play, *Tubstrip* then hit the road, travelling to eight cities over nine months in 1974. Jerry Douglas was with the production for the entire tour, making revisions to the script and rehearsing new actors, since only two actors remained constant through the entire run: comic duo Walter Holiday (Andy) and Jake Everett (Wally). The stops for the first leg of the tour were Boston (4 weeks), Washington, DC (5 weeks), Philadelphia (2 weeks), Toronto (3 weeks), Detroit (1 week), and Chicago (5 weeks). The only hint of trouble came in Detroit, where residents of the hotel in which the theatre was located covered up the poster, and the *Free Press* sounded alarm bells about the possibility of obscenity.[51] In general, critics who liked the play tended to downplay the significance of the nudity, while negative reviews accused the play of “homosexploitation.”[52] A common theme was determining whether the play could appeal to “open-minded straights” or was strictly for “a specialized audience.”[53]

In Washington and Philadelphia, critics highlighted the “newness” of *Tubstrip* and discussed it as a first. Washington’s NBC station announced, “This may be our first ‘X’ rated theater review. . . so if you’re under 17, please go to bed. Gay theatre has come to town,” [54] while a local magazine expressed the hope that *Tubstrip* would encourage more gay theatre, since “there is a large gay community and others in the Washington area who no doubt would support quality productions.”[55] The critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* regarded *Tubstrip* as



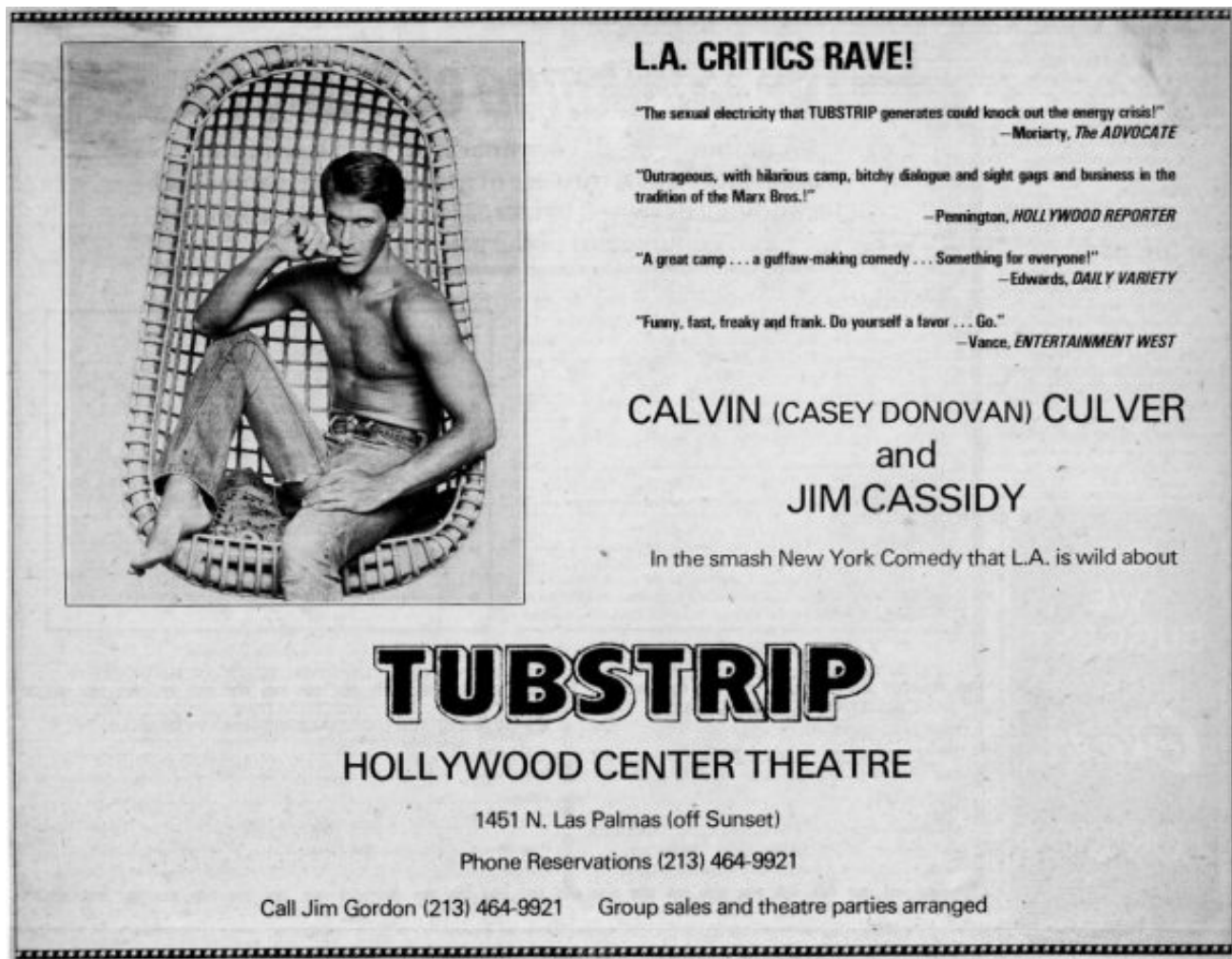
a sex comedy, one of many that have been produced off-Broadway but the first of its kind to reach Philadelphia. . . the tour being something of an event in the history of gay liberation. . . asserting as it does not the sickness but the validity of homosexual affection and homoerotic appeal.[56]

The show won praise as “a comic statement about love”[57] and “an outrageously witty farce,”[58] and even the critics who panned the play grudgingly acknowledged that it “seems to please its special audience”[59] who “responded with great relish”[60] and “seemed to love every minute of *Tubstrip*, which must mean something.”[61]

When the production reached Los Angeles, *Tubstrip* transformed from a successful play into a cultural phenomenon. Casey Donovan, star of the porn films *Boys in the Sand* and *The Back Row*, as well as the recently released film version of *Score* (1974), joined the cast in the lead role of Brian—but he used his “legitimate” name, Calvin Culver. Like Jerry Douglas, Culver worked both in the legitimate theatre and in hardcore pornography, known by different names in each realm. But *Tubstrip*, existing at this particular moment of gay liberation and porno chic, blurred the lines between these realms. Advertisements for *Tubstrip* promoted their star as “Calvin (Casey Donovan) Culver,” literally inserting the pornographic into the legitimate. Douglas recalls that the goal was for Culver to achieve respectability as an actor while not neglecting Donovan’s porno fan base, and Culver told the *San Francisco Examiner*, “I’m not the least bit ashamed of those films I made, but I hope my career will take off now in a more serious and legitimate direction.”[62]

Having a celebrity in the show created more publicity for *Tubstrip* than ever before. Culver appeared on front covers and in photo spreads in magazines, the show scheduled “meet the cast” parties with local bars and bathhouses, famous actors including Shelley Winters and Larry Kert (*West Side Story*, *Company*) came to the show, Reverend Troy Perry of the gay-affirming Metropolitan Community Church attended three times, and the company appeared in the 1974 Los Angeles Gay Pride Parade. Douglas remembers, “There were gaggles of fans at the stage door every night. And Cal signed every autograph that was asked of him.” The production was enormously successful over the 11-week run in Los Angeles, but the new casting seems to have altered the critical reception of the play. Unlike actors who previously played Brian, 30-year-old Culver was no moony-eyed youth gazing into the romantic distance; in promotional photos, Culver glares directly at the viewer in a sexual come-on [Figure 3]. His co-star Jim Cassidy, newly cast in the role of Bob, was also a porn performer but had little acting experience, which seemed to contribute to the perception among some critics that the show was merely an opportunity to see porn stars in the flesh, with one review noting that some audience members “literally oohed and aahed when [Cassidy] stripped.”[63] For the first time, some expressed disappointment that the actor playing Brian did not engage in full-frontal nudity, since that was now the expectation with Culver in the role.





**L.A. CRITICS RAVE!**

"The sexual electricity that TUBSTRIP generates could knock out the energy crisis!"  
—Meriarty, *The ADVOCATE*

"Outrageous, with hilarious camp, bitchy dialogue and sight gags and business in the tradition of the Marx Bros.!"  
—Pennington, *HOLLYWOOD REPORTER*

"A great camp . . . a guffaw-making comedy . . . Something for everyone!"  
—Edwards, *DAILY VARIETY*

"Funny, fast, freaky and frank. Do yourself a favor . . . Go."  
—Vance, *ENTERTAINMENT WEST*

**CALVIN (CASEY DONOVAN) CULVER  
and  
JIM CASSIDY**

In the smash New York Comedy that L.A. is wild about

**TUBSTRIP**  
HOLLYWOOD CENTER THEATRE  
1451 N. Las Palmas (off Sunset)  
Phone Reservations (213) 464-9921  
Call Jim Gordon (213) 464-9921    Group sales and theatre parties arranged

Figure 3. Advertisement for 1974 touring production of *Tubstrip* in Los Angeles, featuring Calvin (Casey Donovan) Culver as Brian. Used with permission of Jerry Douglas, from his personal collection.

*Tubstrip* concluded its tour with a seven-week run in San Francisco, where the city's two major newspapers savaged the play, but the local gay press celebrated it as an exemplar of gay liberation and a "positive statement" that successfully captured gay life. One headline announced "No Suicides in This Homosexual Play,"<sup>[64]</sup> and one writer quipped, "When is the last time you walked out of a play or film about gays and felt good?"<sup>[65]</sup> Jerry Douglas (still operating under the name Doug Richards) had a more public profile in San Francisco, giving a press conference with Culver. Perhaps with an eye toward the planned Broadway production, Douglas asserted that, though a "gay play," *Tubstrip* was not "about homosexuality" and appealed to a broad audience:

It's interesting the same pattern in every city we've played; the first week we get the dirty old men with binoculars in the front row, the second week we get the younger gay set, and by the third week it's 50-50 mixed straight and gay.<sup>[66]</sup>

After successfully running for over 400 performances off-Broadway and around the country, *Tubstrip*

would now test its ability to reach a diverse audience in the commercial center of the American theatre.

*Tubstrip* opened on 31 October 1974 at Broadway's Mayfair Theatre (previously known as Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe) under what was known as a "middle theatre contract."<sup>[67]</sup> For the first time, Jerry Douglas used his own name as the director (but not as the playwright), and Calvin Culver no longer had Casey Donovan splitting his name in two. But *Tubstrip*'s desire for success on Broadway was a bit like Brian's desire for heterosexual Bob: the big guy might be open to a fling, but he wasn't about to make a commitment. New York critics took pains to warn heterosexual audiences that this play was not for them, up to and including dialogue that "might be virtually a foreign language."<sup>[68]</sup> Mel Gussow in the *New York Times* was especially dismissive, and the *Associated Press* critic acknowledged that while the play might have "a nationwide gay housekeeping seal of approval," he felt like a "straight intruder."<sup>[69]</sup> In a positive review that praised "a uniformly superb cast," Debbi Wasserman of *Show Business* attempted to dismantle the homo-hetero divide imagined by her fellow critics by redrawing the lines: "*Tubstrip* is not for everyone, but it comes pretty close. It's not for the prejudiced puritan, but it is for the romantic."<sup>[70]</sup> *Tubstrip* had found extraordinary success as a gay play for primarily gay audiences, a reciprocal relationship based on mutual desire, but the straight trade of Broadway refused to see it as legitimate, and the production closed after 37 performances.<sup>[71]</sup> *Tubstrip* had a return engagement in Washington, DC, in January 1975, and has not been produced since.<sup>[72]</sup>

Two months after *Tubstrip* closed, another comedy set in a gay bathhouse found greater success on Broadway. *The Ritz* by Terrence McNally had started at the Yale Rep with the title *The Tubs*. On the way to Broadway, the play not only changed its name (to avoid confusion with Douglas's play), but also changed the sexual desires of its main character. In New Haven, the play concerned a married sanitation engineer from Ohio who has come to the baths to have a gay affair. In New York, the play concerned a married sanitation engineer from Ohio who has come to the baths unwittingly, and the greatest source of comedy is this straight man's confusion and embarrassment when faced with the gay goings-on of the kooky patrons. In a stage direction regarding the "men endlessly prowling the corridors" of the bathhouse as though they are "on a treadmill," McNally indicates that "Even though they never speak, these various patrons must become specific."<sup>[73]</sup> But the playwright does not bother to make them specific, and they function as little more than part of the scenery for a comedy about straight people. Reconstructed to cater to non-gay audiences, *The Ritz* ran for 400 performances and won a Tony Award for Rita Moreno. Interestingly, Larry Gilman, who had first played Brian the attendant in the off-Broadway production of *Tubstrip*, was hired as a replacement in the role of an attendant in *The Ritz*, and Culver, performing as Casey Donovan, starred opposite Warhol superstar Holly Woodlawn in a short-lived 1983 revival.

After making the bisexual porn film *Both Ways*, Jerry Douglas spent the next chapter of his career working as a writer and editor in pornographic publishing. He returned to pornographic cinema in 1989 and steadily produced a series of popular and highly regarded films—including *More of a Man* (1991), *Flesh & Blood* (1996), *Dream Team* (1998), and *Buckleroos* (2004)—that won numerous industry awards for best picture, best screenplay, and best direction. The sexual exuberance and romantic longing that inform *Tubstrip* are evident in many of Douglas's films, which have maintained their popularity in a way that his theatrical works have not. In the midst of gay liberation and looking ahead to the future, the actor John Bruce Deaven, who played Dusty and served as Equity Deputy, kept a record of *Tubstrip*'s production history. He completed the document in 1975 with a fantasy—clearly inspired by the Sondheim musical *Follies* (1971)—that on 4 July 2001:

*Tubstrip* casts from all the years (thousands) reunite at broken down Mayfair Theater in New York prior to the day it is torn down. All wear “year” they were in *Tubstrip* and what part! [\[74\]](#)

This “reunion,” of course, never occurred, and many of the men involved in *Tubstrip* did not live to see 2001.

Although largely forgotten, plays like *Geese*, *And Puppy Dog Tails*, and *Tubstrip* are significant for their role in opening the theatre as a venue for the expression of gay romantic and sexual desire. What was once condemned as “homosexploitation” has persisted in one form or another for over 40 years, often at the intersection of legitimate theatre and pornography, from staples of the “purple circuit” like Robert Patrick’s *T-Shirts* (1979), with porn star Jack Wrangler in the original production, and the erotic plays of Cal Yeomans and Robert Chesley; through a resurgence in the mid-1990s with works like David Dillon’s ensemble comedy *Party* (1995), Ronnie Larsen’s *Making Porn* (1996), and Robert Coles’s *Cute Boys in their Underpants...* series; to the long-running musical revue *Naked Boys Singing* (1999), the meta-pornography of Thomas Bradshaw’s *Intimacy* (2014), and the *ménage à trois* soap opera *Afterglow* (2017). By engaging in cultural battles with the theatrical establishment and critical gatekeepers, the erotic theatre of the gay liberation era also helped to create a cultural landscape where later Broadway plays as esteemed as Harvey Fierstein’s *Torch Song Trilogy* (1982), Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1993), Terrence McNally’s *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1994), and Richard Greenberg’s *Take Me Out* (2002), all featuring nudity and/or depictions of gay sex, could be seen as legitimate.

Gay sexuality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is quite different than it was in the era of sexual liberation. The AIDS crisis, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and the use of apps like Grindr as a tool for meeting sexual partners have radically changed the ways that queer men experience their sexuality. The internet has facilitated renewed interest in “vintage” porn from the era of gay liberation, with films of 1970s restored, rereleased, and posted by aficionados on video sharing websites. These “classics,” along with contemporary documentaries about *Gay Sex in the 70s* and porn stars like Jack Wrangler and Peter Berlin, offer the viewer a nostalgic fantasy of an era of gay sexual abandon. It’s more difficult for “vintage” plays to maintain a place in the culture, particularly when critical disdain caused them to go unpublished. Yet revisiting erotic plays of the gay liberation era can do more than offer the pleasures of nostalgia. They illuminate how our experiences and fantasies of sex and romance are constructed by our changing social realities, allowing us to reflect more clearly on how we experience desire in our current moment—and to imagine ways in which we might experience it in the future.

\* \* \* \*

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**Jordan Schildcrout** is Associate Professor of Theatre & Performance at Purchase College, SUNY. He is the author of *Murder Most Queer: The Homicidal Homosexual in the American Theater* (University of

Michigan Press), “Drama and the New Sexualities” (*Oxford Handbook of American Drama*), and “Refusing the Reproductive Imperative: Sex, Death, and the Queer Future in Peter Sinn Nachtrieb’s *boom*” (JADT). His article “Envisioning Queer Liberation: The Performance of Communal Visibility in Doric Wilson’s *Street Theater*” will appear in *Modern Drama* (Spring 2018).

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[1] Other plays in this subgenre, containing nudity and depicting gay relationships, often structured as romances and informed by the ethos of gay liberation, include: *War Games* (1969) by Neal Weaver, *Foreplay* (1970) by Robert Lane, *Score* (1970) by Jerry Douglas, *Georgie Porgie* (1968/1971) by George Birimisa, *Minus One* (1971) by Lawrence Parke, *Brussels Sprouts* (1972) by Larry Kardish, *Mercy Drop* (1973) by Robert Patrick, and *Stand by Your Beds, Boys* (1974) by John Allison and Ray Scantlin. Beginning in 1969 in Los Angeles, the SPREE (Society of Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts) Theatre Company staged performances of original gay plays, often comedies containing nudity, with titles like *The Casting Couch* and *The Love Thief*. While not necessarily featuring romantic relationships or liberationist ideologies, Sal Mineo’s 1969 revival of *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* by John Herbert and Jerry Douglas’s 1970 staging of *Circle in the Water* by Gerry Raad also featured nudity and homosexuality.

[2] Whitney Strub, “Hey Look Me Over: The Films of Pat Rocco,” UCLA Film and Television Archive, <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/inthelife/history/hey-look-me-over-films-pat-rocco>. Accessed 8 September 2017.

[3] Whitney Strub, “From Porno Chic to Porno Bleak: Representing the Urban Crisis in 1970s American Pornography,” *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 40.

[4] Elizabeth Wollman, *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970s New York City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

[5] Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 269-273.

[6] Jennifer C. Nash, “Desiring Desiree,” *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s*, eds. Carolyn Bronstein and Whitney Strub (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 86. Among the most famous (heterosexual) films associated with porno chic are *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Behind the Green Door* (1972).

[7] Along with Poole and Douglas, another theatre artist who created gay porn in the early liberation era is counter-culture playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie, who wrote and directed the hardcore film *American Cream* (1972) under the name Rob Simple.

[8] Richard Dyer, “Gay Male Porn: Coming To Terms,” *Jump Cut* 30 (March 1985), 27-29.

[9] The term echoes the more prevalent phenomenon of “blaxploitation,” which functioned under a very different set of circumstances in regard to class, gender, cultural power, and, obviously, race. But both terms point to the concurrent burgeoning of previously underrepresented or disempowered voices in



American culture. For more on instances of crossover between these cultural trends, see Joe Wlodarz, "Beyond the Black Macho: Queer Blaxploitation," *The Velvet Light Trap* 53 (Spring 2004), 10-25.

[10] Don Shewey, "Theatre: Gays in the Marketplace vs. Gays for Themselves," in *Lavender Culture*, Revised Edition, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 236.

[11] Shewey, 243. Shewey mentions these three erotic plays in the same context as Jonathan Ned Katz's activist documentary play *Coming Out* (1972), as coming from and speaking to the gay community.

[12] Personal interview with Jerry Douglas, 23 January 2017. All subsequent references to Douglas's memories or assessments of the past come from this interview.

[13] Richard Hummler, "Off Broadway Reviews," *Variety*, 29 January 1969, 75.

[14] My description of the play is based on contemporaneous reviews and articles, since an exhaustive search has yet to turn up a copy of the script.

[15] "Off-B'way *Geese* Plugs Nudity, Frank Queerism," *Variety*, 22 January 1969, 57.

[16] Hummler.

[17] "Sex Downtown: An Off-Broadway Review," *Screw*, 7 March 1969, n.p.

[18] William Glover, "Review," AP Service, 12 January 1969, clipping.

[19] John Simon, "Theatre Chronicle," *Hudson Review*, Spring 1969, 102.

[20] Wollman, 14. Wollman also notes the "relative tameness" with which adult musicals depicted gay sexuality compared to straight sexuality (52). The "straight plays" of gay erotic theatre were much bolder.

[21] Dan Halleck, *Geese* Theatre Program, Players Theatre (New York, 1969), 2.

[22] "Won't Depict A Nude Homo, Actor Quits," *Variety*, 25 November 1970, 1. Robert Jundelin's departure caused a delay in the Broadway opening of the production, which received mixed-to-negative reviews and closed after 38 performances.

[23] Richard Hummler, "NY Legit Going Sex-Happy: Off-B'way Porny May Reach B'way" *Variety*, 21 May 1969, 1, 70; Charlotte Harmon, "Nudity Sells Tix?: Bare Facts Still Not Totally Clear," *Backstage*, 7 February 1969, 28.

[24] John Elsom, *Erotic Theatre* (New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1974), 2.

[25] David Gaard, *And Puppy Dog Tails*, manuscript, New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

[26] Walter Kerr, "For Homos and Heteros Alike, A Swindle," *New York Times*, 26 October 1969, D3.



[27] Daphne Kraft, "Off-Broadway: *Puppy Dog Tails*," *Newark Evening News*, 20 October 1969, 16.

[28] George Oppenheimer, "And *Puppy Dog Tails*, Or How to Make Boys," *Newsday*, 20 October 1969, n.p.

[29] Richard Hummler, "Off-Broadway Reviews: *And Puppy Dog Tails*," *Variety*, 29 October 1969, 70.

[30] Clive Barnes, "Theater: *And Puppy Dog Tails* Opens," *New York Times*, 20 October 1969, 60.

[31] It's important to note that male playwrights, directors, and producers created the lesbian eroticism seen in both *Geese* and *Score*. Women generally have had less cultural power than men, so the history of lesbian eroticism created by lesbians in the theatre had a very different path, which was also informed by arguments in feminism throughout the 1970s and 1980s over sexual representation, with different camps described as "anti-pornography" and "pro-sex." Lesbian theatre scholars like Jill Dolan, Sue-Ellen Case, and Kate Davy have celebrated the eroticism in the groundbreaking plays of *Split Britches* and *Holly Hughes* at the WOW Café in the 1980s, as well as the plays of the Five Lesbian Brothers produced off-Broadway in the 1990s. More recently, lesbian eroticism has been seen on Broadway in productions of Paula Vogel's *Indecent* and the musical *Fun Home*, adapted for the stage by Lisa Kron from Alison Bechdel's memoir. See Jill Dolan, "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," *Theatre Journal* 39:2 (May 1987), 156-174; Sue-Ellen Case, *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Kate Davy, *Lady Dicks and Lesbian Brothers: Staging the Unimaginable at the WOW Café Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

[32] Dick Bruckenfeld, "Review," *Village Voice*, 5 November 1970, 49.

[33] *Score* was more successful in Radley Metzger's 1974 film version, for which Douglas wrote the screenplay. The film, featuring Casey Donovan, was financially successful, leading the producers to take a full-page ad in *Variety* announcing "*Score* Scores at the Box Office," 28 August 1974, 23.

[34] Jeffrey Escoffier, "Sex in the Seventies: Gay Porn Cinema as an Archive for the History of American Sexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26.1 (January 2017), 91-92.

[35] Leo Bersani, however, does not. He describes the gay bathhouse as "one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable." Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (Winter 1987), 206.

[36] *Gay Sex in the '70s*, directed by Joseph Lovett, Lovett Productions/Frameline, 2005.

[37] Citations refer to the manuscript available in the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive at the University of Southern California, currently the only accessible version of the play. However, the archived version is an early draft, not reflecting changes made over the course of rehearsing and performing the play, which appear in the final version in Jerry Douglas's possession. While all textual citations are for the archived earlier version, this essay will also reference plot details that exist only in the final version of the script.

[38] Kevin Winkler, "The Divine Mr. K.: Reclaiming My 'Unruly' Past with Bette Midler and the Baths," *Cast Out: Queer Lives in Theater*, ed. Robin Bernstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 69.

[39] Although Douglas's play expresses a very different perspective on gay identity and sexuality, he remembers finding Crowley's play "brilliant" when we saw the original production. For a production history of the play and analysis of its complicated cultural impact, see James Wilson, "'Who Does She Hope to Be?': Celluloid Ghosts, Queer Utopias, and *The Boys on Stage*," Matt Bell, ed., *The Boys in the Band: Flashpoints of Cinema, History, and Queer Politics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016).

[40] J. Todd Ormsbee, "The Tragedy and Hope of Love Between Gay Men: *The Boys in the Band* and the Emotionality of Gay Love in the 1960s and 70s," *The Boys in the Band: Flashpoints of Cinema, History, and Queer Politics*, ed. Matt Bell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 282.

[41] Lyn Rosen, "Forum on Sadomasochism," *Lavender Culture*, Revised Edition, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 88.

[42] Sadly, on 25 May 1977, the Everard Baths was destroyed in a fire that killed nine people. Laurie Johnston, "9 Killed in Bath Fire Identified by Friends," *New York Times*, 27 May 1977, 17.

[43] For more on the "object-ification" of the Cowboy, see Matthew Tinkcom, "'A Credit to the Homosexual': *The Boys in the Band* and the Appearances of Queer Debt," *The Boys in the Band: Flashpoints of Cinema, History, and Queer Politics*, ed. Matt Bell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 261-263.

[44] Dusty was initially played by Dean Tait, a professional body builder who was also in *Circle in the Water*. Tait was featured in beefcake photo spreads promoting *Tubstrip*, and he would later appear in Jerry Douglas's film *Both Ways* (1975) and the popular erotic musical revue *Let My People Come* on Broadway in 1976.

[45] The production used a live cat on stage. Douglas recalls that when the production toured, "In every city we went to we got a different one, a baby kitten, and left the old cat behind."

[46] "New Plays: *The Boys in the Band*," *Time*, 26 April 1968, 97.

[47] The collapse occurred on 3 August 1973, at 5:10pm, when the play was not in performance, and most people were able to evacuate the building, used primarily as a welfare hotel, before it fell. Because the performance complex was on the east side of the structure, the theatres were not severely damaged, and the production's cast and crew, after obtaining a court order, were allowed to rescue the set and props from the space. Newspapers reported the deaths of four people and the injury of a dozen more in the collapse. Murray Schumach, "Broadway Central Hotel Collapses," *New York Times*, 4 August 1973, 1; Fred Ferretti, "Two More Bodies Found in Rubble," *New York Times*, 11 August 1973, 23.

[48] Lee Barton, "*Tubstrip*'s a Grand Hotel with Steam," *The Advocate*, 20 June 1973, n.p.

[49] Donald Vining, *A Gay Diary: Volume Four, 1967-1975* (New York: The Pepys Press, 1983),

324-325.

[50] Vito Russo, "Tubshit: A Parade of Tight Asses," *Gay*, 18 June 1973, 14.

[51] Chuck Thurston, "Staid Hotel Preparing For Gay Play," *Detroit Free Press*, 24 March 1974, 8-D.

[52] Lawrence DeVine, "Tubstrip: A Play for Posterity?" *Detroit Free Press*, 28 March 1974, 9-C.

[53] Louise Lague, "It's a Steam Bath, and the Gays Have It," *Washington Star-News*, 5 February 1974, C-3.

[54] Lou Robinson, "Review: *Tubstrip* [Transcript]" WRC-TV 4 (NBC), n.d.

[55] Teddy Vaughn, *Memo Magazine* [typed advance copy, no title/date], collection of Jerry Douglas.

[56] William B. Collins, "Tubstrip Made For Gay Audience," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 February 1974, 15.

[57] Lague.

[58] Vaughn.

[59] Richard Christiansen "Tubstrip is Soggy," *Chicago Daily News*, 10 April 1974, n.p.

[60] David McCaughna, "Tubstrip Cashes in on Gay Mannerisms," *Toronto Citizen*, 15-28 March 1974, 13.

[61] Gregory Glover, "Tubstrip Sequel to *Boys in the Band*," *Toronto Sun*, 8 March 1974, 24.

[62] Jeanne Miller, "Gay Theatre that Draws Straight Voyeurs," *San Francisco Examiner*, 16 August 1974, 29.

[63] "Rub a Dub Dub, All Men in a *Tubstrip*," *UCLA Summer Bruin*, 5 July 1974, 7.

[64] Anitra Earle, "No Suicides in This Homosexual Play: The Porno Film Star of *Tubstrip*," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 August 1974, 43.

[65] Pola Del Vecchio, "Stepping Out," *Kalendar*, 30 August 1974, 5.

[66] Donald McLean, "Meet Calvin Culver," *Bay Area Reporter* 4:17, n.p. Clipping, Jerry Douglas personal collection.

[67] The goal of this contract, offered by the League of Broadway Theaters, was to bring plays from off-Broadway to Broadway, allowing lower production costs but also restricting capacity to 300-800 seats—not the full Broadway house. Industry commentators seem to have made no distinction over this contract, with both *Variety* and Otis Guernsey categorizing *Tubstrip* as a Broadway play. See Stewart W.

Little, "The Lively Arts: Upward Mobility in the Theatre," *New York Magazine*, 11 May 1970, 47.

[68] Madd. "Review: *Tubstrip*," *Variety*, 6 November 1974, 62.

[69] William Glover, "Theater," *Associated Press*, 1 November 1974, clipping, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

[70] Debbi Wasserman, "Review: *Tubstrip*," *Show Business*, 7 November 1974, 6.

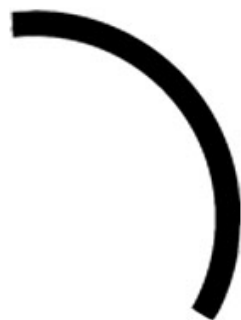
[71] Most sources (including *Theatre World*, Otis Guernsey's *Best Plays of 1974-1975*, the Internet Broadway Database, and the Playbill Vault) incorrectly state that the play ran between 22 and 25 performances, listing October 29 as the date of the first preview. However, advertisements and "Theater Directory" listings in the *New York Times* show that *Tubstrip* had its first preview on October 18, opened on October 31, and closed on November 17. The timeline created by the actor John Bruce Deaven (who also served as Equity Deputy for the production) corroborates these dates.

[72] In 1975, Ken Gaston produced and took credit for writing the script of *Hustlers*, another play by "A. J. Kronengold," which performed in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York. Jerry Douglas had nothing to do with this production. David Richards, "The Producer, And Playwright, Is Hustling, Too," *Washington Star-News*, 22 January 1975, C1/C3.

[73] Terrence McNally, *The Ritz and Other Plays* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1976), 6.

[74] John Bruce Deaven, "History of *Tubstrip*," unpublished personal document, 1975, collection of Jerry Douglas.

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