Karl McCool
Kara Van Malssen
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Gay Porn Screenings in New York City, 1969-1980: A Data Model and Potential Database

This project seeks to create a data model to be used in the design of a database of gay porn screenings in New York City from roughly June 1969 to the end of the 1970s. June 1969 is when ads for screenings of gay porn films begin appearing in prominent New York periodicals, like the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice.* This planned database will collect information about screenings of gay porn films, as well as the theaters these films screened in, by capturing the information contained in these ads. Put simply, at its essence, this database seeks to store information about what gay porn films screened at what theaters in what areas of the city and when.

Through looking at these ads and data modeling, four entities have been identified: *ad*, *event*, *film*, and *theater*. The *ad* entity contains information about the ad itself, the *film* entity contains information about the film itself, and the *theater* entity contains information about the theater itself. These three entities link together through a fourth entity: the *event* entity, which contains information about the screening or set of screenings, over a course of dates, of a particular film at a particular theater and documented by an ad or even a few ads.

The data model at its simplest form is made up of these four entities and their attributes:

Ad
ID (AD0001)
Film tag line/ad copy
Theater tag line/ad copy
Terminology (“all-male,” “homosexual,” “in the life”)
Graphic (y/n)
Publication
Publication date
Publication volume
Section/page number
Link

Event
ID (EV0001)
Film (FL0001)
Theater (TH0001)
Ad(s) (AD0001)
Showing date range start
Showing date range end
Showtime(s)
Admission price
Special appearance(s) advertised

Film
ID (FL0001)
Title
Alternate title (FL0002)
Constituent films (FL0002; FL0003)
Director
Cast
Studio/production company
Year
Film form (anthology, feature, or short)

Theater
ID (TH0001)
Name
Address
Phone number
Geo URI
Owner(s)
Occupancy
Date established
Date closed

Ads

Advertisements for gay porn screenings at particular theaters appearing in the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, as well as smaller, more gay-themed periodicals, will be the main sources for the information in this database. Therefore, the first step in creating a data model and thinking through the design of this database must be to look at examples of the ads themselves, to see what information (and what kinds of information) they offer, as well as perhaps what information they do not provide.

From the beginning of the project, the essential information to be sought after in these ads, at its most basic, would be: films, theaters, and dates. Study of these ads made it clear that a lot more information could be captured, including some kinds of information that had not been anticipated at all.

For instance, the database was planned from early on to include a field for movie ad copy and tag lines as an attribute in the ad table. However, study of these ads revealed that many of them included ad copy or tag lines about the theater in which a film was showing, as well as the film itself. For instance, the Eros I theater will have ads describing it with the tag line: "The Best of 8th Ave." For this reason, two attributes were created: *filmAdCopy* and *theaterAdCopy*.

Additionally, a field has been created to record whether an ad features graphics, illustrations or pictures of any kind, or whether it is plain text. A mandatory field, the *graphic* attribute will require a simple *yes* or *no* entry. This may help point to trends for theaters, films, or particular dates, as it can be assumed that ads without any graphics would have been cheaper and so an ad without graphics may tell a researcher something about the amount a theater was willing to pay to advertise a particular film, or whether that theater could afford such ads at all in a given period.

Most striking of all, however, is the variety of different euphemisms, slang terms, and other phrases used in these ads to signal, without stating so explicitly, that the films in question are gay porn. The word "homosexual" was not used in a gay porn ad until 1972. Many histories of gay porn from this period recount that, until 1972, and even after that, gay porn films were often advertised by euphemistically describing the films as featuring an "all-male cast," a subtle way to signal to readers that the film was gay, and gay porn at that, without coming out and stating it. Close study of the ads reveals a much wider variety of terms being used to code the films as gay porn, and sometimes even two or three different terms are used in the same ad. In addition to "All-Male," less obvious slang terms, such as, "in the life," dating back to 1920s African-American slang and meaning gay, are used. For this reason, an attribute has been created in the ad table called *terminology*. This field could be home to an ever-growing set of controlled vocabularies, or could simply be used to record the euphemisms and slang terms used as they appear in each ad. Either way, it could allow a researcher to use the database to track trends in and usage of these different slang terms and coded phrases over time, or across theaters.

In addition to these *filmAdCopy*, *theaterAdCopy*, *graphic*, and *terminology* fields, there must also fields to record the publication an ad is taken from, what date it appears in that publication, what section or page it appears on, and, if relevant, in what volume or issue of a periodical it appears. Therefore, there are also the following attributes for the *ad* entity: *publication*, *publicationDate*, *publicationVolume*, and *sectionPage*.

Finally, one last field has been created to store links to URLs for any images of the ad that have been scanned: *link*. For now this field is a measure to try to keep track of any scans or images that have been created of an ad, for future use or reference.

Events

Event has been created as the entity that ties together all of the other entities. This is the one entity that includes unique identifiers for all of the entities. The first four fields are: *id*, *film*, *theater*, and *ad*. For example, an *event* table would, therefore begin with four fields of unique identifiers, corresponding to all four entities that make up the database:

event	
id	EV0001
film	FL0001
theater	TH0001
ad	AD0001

The *event* entity acts, therefore, as the hub through which all the entities pass, where they all come together. By considering each screening advertised as an *event*, the database is able to bring together the film screened, the theater in which it screened, and the ad that documents the screening in the simplest way possible, without needless repetition.

Of these fields, only the ad field is repeatable. Multiple ads may all confirm the same screening of the same film in the same theater. But only a screening or set of screenings of one particular film in one particular theater can be considered an "event." Put another way: each set of screenings for a particular film in a particular theater is an "event," though that "event" may be documented by multiple ads.

In addition to representing the screening itself and linking together all four entities, the *event* entity records the following attributes of the screening or set of screenings:

screeningDateRangeStart, *screeningDateRangeEnd*, *showtimes*, *admissionPrice*, and *specialAppearance*. This way the start date and last known date a film screened can be recorded. Again porn screenings can differ from more mainstream screenings and so showtimes may vary in how they are advertised: some are advertised with specific times, like mainstream movies are (for example, 5:30, 7, 9:30), while others are advertised as continuous screenings over the course of day: "Screens continuously from 1 pm to 1 am," for instance. Tracking admission prices, which are almost always given in the ads, may also be useful, to see if certain theaters, or even certain films, were more expensive, as well as to track admission prices across the city over the course of years.

Finally, the ads sometimes promote special appearances at the theater by stars of the films advertised. (They may also prove to record special appearances by filmmakers and other personalities, like drag queens or go-go dancers, but this has not yet been observed.) Therefore, it should be of great importance to include a *specialAppearance* attribute in the *event* table. This field is repeatable, as it is quite possible ads will advertise appearances by more than one personality for the same screening.

Films

The *film* entity records details about the particular film associated with an *event* (or screening). It includes three attributes that separate out different potential titles: *title*, *alternateTitle*, and *constituentFilms*. Of these attributes only *title*, which records the title as it appears in the ads for a particular screening, is mandatory; the other two attributes are optional, as they may not apply.

From the very beginning, how a database would handle film titles for gay porn screenings has been a major question and concern. To a greater extent than more mainstream films, porn films are likely to have a number of alternate titles, which may or may not correspond to alternate cuts of a film. This tendency to change film titles and recut films most likely became more widespread when these films entered the home video market in the 1980s, a format and time period outside the scope of this project.

Nevertheless, it seems almost certain that alternate titles (and perhaps also alternate cuts) for the films recorded in this database will present themselves and any database of gay porn screenings in the 1970s will have to take this into account. It has already been observed by archivists and researchers that, in New York City and elsewhere, in the mid-1970s (a halfway point in the period that would be covered by this database) a number of gay porn films from the early 1970s were rereleased into theaters with new titles, as a marketing gimmick to pass off old films as new releases.

Furthermore, it has also been documented that, on occasion, gay porn films would have their titles changed, perhaps not on theater marquees and almost certainly not on the films themselves, but in advertisements in major newspapers, such as the two major papers used in this project, the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*. Often mainstream periodicals like these (including others, like *Variety*) would make seemingly capricious censorship decisions in regard to sexploitation, porn, or gay titles. A fairly innocuous word, like "frisky" or "hot," which would be perfectly acceptable in the title of a more mainstream film would sometimes be judged obscene and unprintable by a certain periodical when used in the title of a film with more risqué content. So a mainstream Hollywood film titled something fairly inoffensive, like *Hot Summer*, would be considered perfectly acceptable, but the same title might be flagged by one periodical or another as obscene if the film in question was known to have explicit sexual content.

Film titles, therefore, represent a particularly challenging, yet hugely important part of this proposed database. Designed properly, such a database might allow researchers to track instances of gay porn films appearing in theaters or simply in advertisements under alternate titles. It may be possible that the same gay porn film was advertised in this era under one title in the *Village Voice* and a different title in the *New York Times*, because one periodical took a more censorious approach than the other. Possibly a gay porn film was advertised for a week under one title and then the next week under another, due to the whims of editors. These are outstanding questions that this database, if properly designed, might answer.

Similarly, if gay porn films from the early 1970s started to filter back into theaters under new titles, passed off as new releases, in the mid-70s, this database should be able to, at least potentially, record these title changes, while still maintaining the connection between the two titles, which refer to essentially the same film. This problem poses far more of a challenge: it may simply not be known, or not be obvious, whether a particular title in an ad is in fact the same film that is recorded elsewhere in the database under a different title. What is important is that the database records the title the film was advertised under for each specific screening, while keeping the option open to associate the title with another title, as representing essentially the same film, if that association is known, or if it is discovered later through outside research or input.

A further issue concerning the recording of film titles in this database emerged through closer study of the advertisements themselves. In studying ads in the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*, it became clear that many films advertised in the earliest years covered by the database (1969 and the very early 1970s) were in fact anthology films: compilations of different stag films or short films packaged together and marketed under one overarching title. Issues of the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice* for the week of the Stonewall riots feature ads for two such films: one called *Mary's Trade* and another titled *Male Magazine*, each of which is in fact a compilation of eight shorter films. Certain ads only mention that the film in question is an anthology of eight shorts, others list titles for the shorts: one ad for *Male Magazine* lists all eight titles; a similar ad for *Mary's Trade* lists only six of its eight shorts. A database should, therefore, be able to capture all of this information: the title of the anthology film as advertised for this particular screening or set of screenings and the titles of the short films that make up the anthology, if those titles are known.

Given all of these complicating factors, with regard to titles and gay porn screenings in this period, the data model for this potential database has been designed with three different fields in the table for particular films in which to record film titles: *title*; *alternateTitle*; and *constituentFilms*.

The *title* field will always be used to record the specific title associated with a particular screening. Therefore, the primary title for each screening (or "event" in the terminology used in this database) will be the title used in advertising that particular screening or set of screenings. In also including *alternateTitle* as an attribute for this entity, however, a connection can be made between the title used for this particular set of screenings and other titles this film may have screened under (either elsewhere in the database, or simply elsewhere in the nation and thus outside the scope of this database). This means that something that may be considered, essentially, the same film, may be recorded more than once in the database, with different unique identifiers associated to it: each title used in a screening (or "event") in the database will have its own unique identifier (FL0001, FL0002, and so forth). So if the same film has screened in New York City during the period covered under two different titles, for instance

New York City Inferno and *From Paris to New York*, two tables will be created and linked through their unique identifiers:

id	FL0001
title	*New York City Inferno*
alternateTitle	FL0002

links to:

id	FL0002
title	*From Paris to New York*
alternateTitle	FL0001

The *id* and *title* are attributes are mandatory fields in this table, as any screening must have some title associated with it and every film title must be given a unique identifier in the database. However, *alternateTitle* is an optional attribute, as it would only be used if an alternate title is in fact known to exist.

In addition, including *constituentFilms* as an optional attribute allows the database to capture as much information as possible about any titles that may have made up anthology films screened in the city during this period. Researchers may have a particular interest in one specific stag film or short that screened as part of a larger anthology film, or may simply want to know (if it is known) what shorter films made up an anthology film. An open question, still not settled, is whether and how to signal if only some, but not all, of the titles that make up an anthology film are known. For instance, in the example above, of *Mary's Trade*, only six titles are listed but all ads for the anthology film claim there are eight titles in total. Should the six known titles be listed and the ad copy itself (also recorded in the database) can alert researchers to the fact that there are two additional titles? Or should the remaining two titles be entered with a controlled vocabulary term, such as *Unknown*, that would be used to signal that a constituent film is thought to exist, but no title for it is known?

Finally, one more way, in addition to the *constituentFilms* field, to separate out anthology films for database users will be the *filmForm* field. This attribute is loosely based on the Library of Congress Form and Genre Terms for Film, which include the film forms Anthology, Feature, and Short. The *filmForm* field will be optional, as in many cases the form may be unknown. The field will have three allowed values: *anthology*, *feature*, or *short*. This attribute is optional, but if used, one of these three controlled vocabulary terms must be used. Following the Library of Congress, a feature will be defined as any film 40 minutes or longer in length and any short will be under 40 minutes in length.

In addition to the attributes above, the film entity will contain attributes for: *director*, *cast*, *production company*, and *year* (of production, not necessarily the year of the screening and advertisement). This is all information that is unlikely to come from the ads themselves. They are optional fields in the database, in case the information happens to be known or is discovered later.

Theaters

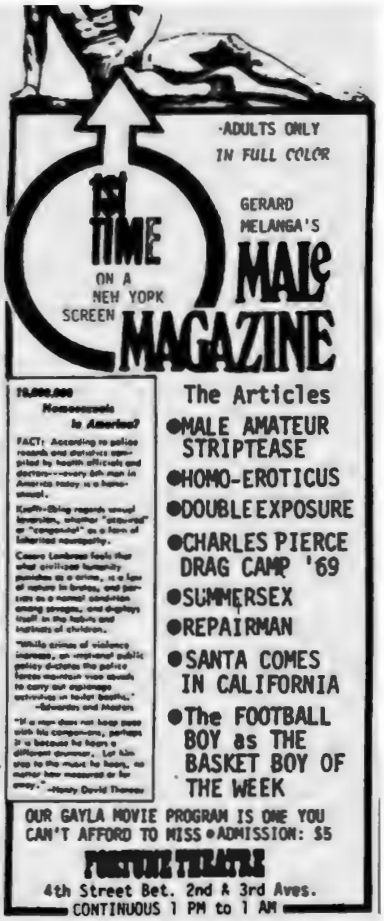
The last entity is the *theater* entity. As with the film entity, this table collects a great deal of optional information that is not necessarily found in the ads. Of greatest importance is the

theater *name* and *address*. These two attributes are necessary for the database to do its work, as it is hoped that one result of this database will be the ability to track trends among, not only different theaters, but the neighborhoods in which they can be found. With addresses perhaps data visualization mapping geographic trends in gay porn screenings in New York City will be possible. At the very least, it is hoped these trends can be discovered or described. For instance did screening locations move at all over the course of years, in or out of Chelsea, the Meatpacking District, or the West Village? It is hoped the database could be used to answer such questions or raise similar ones. Given the importance of geographic location to this project, in addition to address, a field to record geo URIs for theaters, almost all of which are now defunct, has been added as an attribute in the *theater* table. The *geoURI* attribute is perhaps unnecessary, as for a city like New York, a street address is probably sufficient information. However, it has been included in the data model as a possibility.

Additional information that can be recorded about a theater include: its owner or owners, its occupancy, the date it was established, and the date it closed. As with much of the additional information for the films, this is all optional and information unlikely to be gleaned from the ads themselves. These attributes have been created, however, because in many cases this information (particularly regarding owners) is known, and more may come to be known in the future.

Conclusion

This data modeling project has answered many questions about how this database of gay porn screenings in New York City should be structured. As this report has shown, many of the attributes identified were not anticipated at all before this data modeling. Even the entities were not settled on when this data modeling was first begun.

The major remaining question now is how this data model will translate into a database. One of the plans for this database is that it eventually becomes freely accessible to the public online. The next major question to tackle is how best to build a database that will be suited to this eventual use online.

Appendix: Sample Ads