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GAY RIGHTS AND THE RECEPTION OF *DOG DAY AFTERNOON* (1975)

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For its eccentric content, *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975) has some remarkable bragging rights. It starred Al Pacino, won an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and garnered Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Director, Actor, Supporting Actor, and Film Editing. Boasting the seventh-highest box-office gross of 1976, this commercially successful motion picture featured openly gay characters the likes of whom had never been seen on screen. The film starts with a disarming title card: "What you are about to see is true—It happened in Brooklyn, New York, on August 22, 1972." That docudrama approach continues in an opening montage of drive-by, slice-of-life Brooklyn footage on a sweltering summer day, ending in a shot of Sonny (Pacino), Sal (John Cazale), and Stevie (Gary Springer) sitting in a parked car, then stepping out, and, one-by-one, entering a bank just before it closes for the day. Audiences expecting a slick heist film are quickly disappointed when the robbery falls apart almost immediately: the young Stevie abandons them, the vault is nearly empty, and the New York police arrive to surround the bank.

After the initially comical misfortune, the film focuses on the tense situation inside the bank, as the two nervous thieves are forced to use the manager, security guard, tellers, and typists as hostages. Outside, FBI agents arrive, and a neighborhood crowd gathers, along with reporters, camera crews, and helicopters. Snipers perch on nearby rooftops, and eager policemen swarm, all of them held in check, however, by Detective Moretti (Charles Durning). Moretti tries to negotiate the release of the nine hostages, but Sonny threatens to kill them if his demands are refused. Meanwhile, policemen interview Sonny's loud, fast-talking wife, with whom he has two young children. After Sonny demands to see her, a squad car arrives bearing instead a man, Leon (Christopher Sarandon), brought from Bellevue Hospital after an attempted suicide. He is still wearing a patient's robe. To everyone's surprise, not least the film's audience, Sonny has planned the bank caper to pay for a sex change procedure for Leon. He wants to be taken with Leon to the airport so that they can escape together.

Sidney Lumet's obituary called attention to this startling film—"Vivid and powerful, direct and explosive"—because of the director's ability to make an event neatly formulated with stock characters and devices seem like a messy event occurring "right next door, right down the block…taking high melodrama and giving it a documentary feel."[1] Lumet said that he omitted scoring and Hollywood lighting, as if "you were watching a newsreel," so "that you never felt like it was a movie."[2] Working with "material that was sensationalist by its nature," Lumet created "a naturalistic film … as close to documentary filmmaking as one can get in a scripted movie" to avoid a negative "audience reaction" toward "something they've never confronted before"; material that hits deep nerves, the director explained, can "reveal something about yourself and others." [3] Richard Dyer argues that "much of the power of the cinema rests in the belief in seeing-as-believing," in "realism/naturalism." [4] As a result, Lumet's "striking" tableau, as one reviewer wrote, is "a veritable sociological data bank" with "an honest vitality." [5] According to *Los Angeles Times* critic Charles Champlin, *Dog Day Afternoon* "retains the raucous urgency, the look and feel, of neighborhood life … with singular characters who … behave for the most part as real people rather than fictional creatures." Screenwriter Frank Pierson's "dialogue sounds accurate," and the cast performs "with

easy authenticity," creating an "engrossing and unpredictable film."[6]

The film, in other words, not just the robbery it depicts, is not going the way everyone expects. Lumet is upsetting an established genre, in which power and sex should play predictable roles. Inside the bank, Sonny strikes an unspoken bond with the female bank workers. Despite his threats to the police, he tells his hostages, "I'm a Catholic; I don't want to hurt anybody." Yet he tells Detective Moretti that the wound-up Sal is "a killer." On the phone with a local television news anchor broadcasting live, Sonny gives awkward voice to the plight of prisoners and working-class people. By disrupting the genre's conventions, Lumet paints the ill-fated robbery less as a crime than as a last-ditch effort by disenfranchised citizens, pitting the helpless hostages and hapless protagonists against the inept detective and ineffective cops. Sonny is, at this point, the urban everyman who cannot make ends meet—an anti-hero who throws money to the onlookers, then, "feeling his power for the first time after a lifetime of failure," agitates the cheering crowd, chanting "Attica! Attica!"[7] The large street assembly boos the police, and Sonny's reference to the 1971 Western New York prison riot, which began with prisoners demanding improved living conditions and ended with guards and state troopers fatally shooting twenty-nine inmates and ten hostages, positions him on the side of oppressed, downtrodden Americans. Sonny and Sal, both Vietnam War veterans, are themselves disaffected.

Whether or not movie-goers actually identified with the two outcasts, "the film clearly encourages its audience to sympathize with the captors," especially with Sonny, for whom such sympathy "is needed to sustain the drama."[8] Al Pacino had impressed audiences with his lusty machismo in *The Godfather* (1972); he had strutted his earnest machismo in the hit cop film *Serpico* (1973), also directed by Sidney Lumet; and he had just finished as the new godfather himself in *The Godfather Part II* (1974). Pacino, with his string of Oscar nominations for roles that exaggerate masculine power, offered audiences a rogue hero for the 1970s. But suddenly, in this film, which initially presents itself as another vehicle or Pacino's rogue manliness, he is a tender-hearted loser responding to the financial and psychological "pressures" of his life, trying to help his female-identified male wife. The System is now a devouring beast. The bank fiasco becomes an allegory to critique contemporary attitudes, with Sonny telling the news anchor that he and Sal are going to die on TV as "entertainment." Yet the real news is that both Sonny and Leon express no guilt about their sexual orientations. Beyond any class-based, anti-establishment, counter-cultural underdog theme, and against the difficult history of gay and lesbian images on the silver screen, including the 1960s cinematic representations of loveless homosexuals who killed themselves or died violently because of their sexuality, *Dog Day Afternoon* remains significant because the main character is *unashamedly* bisexual, and the supporting character is *unapologetically* transgender. As critic Robin Wood observed at the time, *Dog Day Afternoon* broke new ground as "the first American commercial movie in which the star/identification figure turns out to be gay."[9] As Sam Roberts reported in 2014, Sidney Lumet recalled that Pacino "was the one at greatest risk," because "no major star that I know of had ever played a gay man."[10]

Richard Dyer claims that the English production *Victim* (1961) was "the first film to defend homosexuality as a cause in a mainstream context" and "the first to have a major star playing a gay character … as a way of intervening in a social debate."[11] In 1968, the Hollywood culture industry eliminated the Motion Picture Production Code that had, for more than thirty years, censored depictions of homosexuality and other presumed moral offenses, after which came unprecedented characterizations: *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *The Boys in the Band* (1970), *The Christine Jorgensen*

Story (1970), *Myra Breckinridge* (1970), and *Cabaret* (1972).[12] The task of changing our perception of gender starts, perhaps, with changing our perception of *genre*, the field of expectations through which we understand character and its placement within the value structures of our culture. How we tell stories determines, to a large extent, how we determine our values. Hence the struggle over stereotypes and their role in the stories told in various media by political majorities. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Film has been the most potent vehicle of the American imagination … an industry that lives by stereotype and an art that often undermines stereotype."[13] Stuart Hall posits that stereotyping helps maintain "social and symbolic order," establishing binaries "between the 'normal' and the 'deviant,' … between 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' Us and Them," thereby facilitating "the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one, 'imagined community."[14] As Richard Dyer argues, "How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them." Thus representations "have real consequences for real people;" they "delimit and enable what people can be in any given society."[15] To get beyond the stereotype, Lumet builds in as many points of sympathy with Sonny before revealing his bisexuality, short-circuiting the audience's later reactions to Sonny's matter-of-fact bisexual gendering and Leon's equally quotidian transgender self. The result, as the critic Judith Crist observed, is an otherwise conventionally "engrossing" and suspenseful drama that, by Lumet's sleight-of-hand, probes deeply "into the psyche of its audience" as its overwhelming "stranger-than-fiction truth … is laid bare."[16]

For his part, Chris Sarandon, who earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor in his film debut, dispels contemporary stereotyping by balancing vulnerability and composure, fondness and accusation. His frequently "hysterical" reactions, as Charles Champlin wrote, nonetheless do not exceed "the viewer's sympathy."[17] One critic praised Sarandon as "spot on in a tacky role," while another described him as "treading a perilous line between bathos and camp theatricality."[18] To research the role, "a gay friend arranged a dinner party with Sarandon and four twenty-something trans women … dressed like middle-class young secretaries." As Gwynne Watkins reports, Sarandon called it, in 2015, a "transformative evening" that changed how he "thought about the whole idea of being transgender," although, as he notes, "the vocabulary was much less sophisticated back then." To better understand "what the character … had gone through," Sarandon asked the dinner guests, "'Did you always know that you … somehow had been born in the wrong sex?' And all of them said, 'Yes.'"[19] Midway through the film, in a four-minute conversation with a concerned and considerate Detective Moretti, Leon explains, "I was the one that wanted to get married … I went to a psychiatrist, who told me I am a woman trapped in a man's body." Director Sidney Lumet always "made it clear," continued Sarandon, "that Leon should *not* be a Hollywood caricature"—a guideline to which even Sarandon had to re-calibrate his performance. After his first reading with Pacino, "Sidney took me aside and said, 'Chrissy, a little less Blanche DuBois, a little more Queens housewife.' And the light bulb went off immediately." The result was, says Richard Combs, a "precise and cogent collage."[20] In many ways, Leon, suffering from depression, afraid of Sonny, who threatened to kill him, is the key to "the conflicting emotions the movie stirs up throughout."[21] In 1975, there was no credible precedent for Sarandon to follow. Stereotypes were the precedent. Appropriately, then, after Lumet has cultivated relatively conventional sympathy for Sonny, the director reveals the unconventional marriage not through Sonny himself but through the media: a TV news anchor announces that "Leon Shermer, a twenty-six-year-old admitted homosexual,"

married Sonny in a ceremony at a Catholic church, with seven male bridesmaids, each wearing gowns, and with Sonny's mother and seventy members of the gay community present. The news bulletin cuts to a still photograph of Leon in his white wedding gown, with a white lace veil, holding a bouquet of white flowers. The anchorman reports, "The presiding priest was subsequently defrocked." Suddenly, Leon and Sonny are pulled away from audience sympathy by the medium through which stereotyping occurs daily.

Two especially poignant scenes rescue the lovers from this media trap. The first is a telephone conversation between Sonny, inside the besieged bank, and Leon, inside the makeshift police command center across the street. During this eight-minute bittersweet exchange, Leon says, "I took a handful of pills to get away from you," and rejects Sonny's offer to leave with him on the getaway jet. After an agonizing pause, a dejected Sonny, in closeup, whispers goodbye. The scene worked.[22] As Matthey Leyland remarks, "some of the best scenes are also the quietest, such as an emotional phone call between the lovers. Such empathy for these characters seems remarkable for a time when mainstream cinema mostly sniggered at gay people or simply ignored them."[23] In the other scene, which Sidney Lumet intended to be "the most emotionally moving moment," Sonny dictates his last will and testament to the head teller.[24] "To my darling wife Leon, whom I love more than any man has loved another man in all eternity," he begins, using all the conventional language of a lover's dedication. Sonny bequeaths $2,700 from his life insurance policy to Leon for a sex-change operation, and, to his "sweet wife Angela," he leaves $5,000, stating, "You are the only woman that I ever loved, and I re-pledge my love to you." He mentions his children, and asks his mother for forgiveness, then, as a veteran, stipulates that he wants "a military funeral, and I'm entitled to have one, free of charge." All the discourse centers on the quotidian and conventional features of an otherwise honorable citizen's life.

Such normalizing of a bisexual man was difficult for Hollywood: apart from the obvious, if unwieldy, fact that Western culture is driven by a masculine ethos, more narrowly, men anchored most of the genres that drove profits. Selling a bisexual bank robber is tough business. As Steve Neale still argued nearly 20 years after the film, "While mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, can constantly take women and the female image as its object of investigation, it has rarely investigated men and the male image in the same kind of way."[25] It is something of a miracle that Sonny and Leon could "emerge from the film with a surprising degree of complexity (and hence sympathy)."[26]

Out of the Closet and Onto the Screen[27]

The audience response to Sonny and Leon was as divided as the American public was about the dramatic cultural changes occurring during the 1970s, as anti-establishment voices battled for a hearing. Critics themselves mirrored that division. For example, *Time*'s Richard Schickel insisted that, although one tries to feel sympathy for the characters in *Dog Day Afternoon*, "the viewer leaves the theater with that most devastating of disclaimers: This has nothing to do with me." Schickel commented that Pacino's "skillful," "electric performance" made his character likeable, up until the spectator

discovers his motive for robbing the bank. Schickel deemed Sonny's "paranoia" "a sickness," and his "moronic … relations with his parents and his dull-witted wife extraordinarily unattractive and beyond most people's own experience."[28] Andrew Sarris complained in *The Village Voice* that *Dog Day Afternoon* blames society for the "deep unhappiness of its criminals." Upset that the "crooks are cuddly," while the police are buffoons and the "honest citizens are boobs and bores," Sarris cynically summed up the entire affair as "the crazies" having "a field day against the squares." He wrote mockingly, "Poor Al Pacino as sweet Sonny. All he wants to do is rob a quiet bank ... in order to finance a sex change operation for his beloved." Sarris found Sonny's sexuality distasteful, describing Leon and Sonny's relationship as a "complex pathology," and, in psychiatric terms, their phone conversation as full of "paranoia" and "hysteria." While Sarris admitted that Chris Sarandon as Leon is "memorably dignified," he ended his review with the side-stepping lament, "I can't see making heroes out of felons with a theatrical flair."[29]

In sharp contrast, Arthur Murphy at *Variety* felt that *Dog Day Afternoon* ranked "most favorably" with "the best of Frank Capra" as a humorous slice of modern, urban life, calling it a "moving" and "compassionate" exemplar of "filmmaking at its best." Murphy claimed that it "makes all its characters incredibly real" but "never attempts to legitimize the bank robbery" and that "one cares about Pacino, the bank tellers ... the lover, [and] the wife."[30] Jerry Stein in the *Cincinnati Post* applauded "Leon (splendidly played by Chris Sarandon)"; Sonny, in whose "confused mind the robbery is an expression of love"; "Pacino's approach," which avoided "stereotyped limp wrists"; and director Sidney Lumet, who "reaches into suspense and sensitivity to achieve excellence."[31] According to Stanley Kauffmann in the *New Republic*, "The film's biggest act of daring" is its "proletarian homosexuality … that is left quite unexplained." Sonny's wife, mother, and accomplice "*accept* the fact that he has a male 'wife,'" who is "played nervously, delicately, free of cliché, by Chris Sarandon." The "gripping" drama, Kauffmann clarified, offers "no apologies and no psycho-sexual explanations, just acceptance"; that is the film's "quiet bombshell."[32]

A more ambivalent review in *New York* magazine described the robbers as "oddballs," as "underprivileged and maladjusted veterans," and Sonny's wife Angela as "hysterical"; Leon's "outpourings" strive "for psychological and sociological accuracy," while Sarandon's superb performance "must tread the delicate line between what might strike heterosexual viewers as either maudlin or grotesque."[33] Vincent Canby's *New York Times* review called *Dog Day Afternoon* "a gaudy street-carnival of a movie" and a realistic portrayal of "city distress, anger, sweetness and violence." Canby wrote that Pacino and Cazale "appear to have grown up on the city's sidewalks in the heat and hopelessness of an endless summer." The cast, he raved, brought these people to life with their "brilliant characterizations," including Sarandon's Leon, "played with just the right mixture of fear, dignity, and silliness." Despite this otherwise glowing recommendation, however, Canby implied that gays are mentally deranged when he deemed Sonny's bisexual lifestyle "quite demented."[34] The critic Jack Kroll, writing for *Newsweek*, called *Dog Day Afternoon* "electric but erratic," praised its "synthesis of pathos and absurdity," and lauded the role of Leon, "played superbly by Chris Sarandon." Kroll contended that Sidney Lumet's "fable" lapses into ludicrous extremes, specifically Sonny as a "lumpen-revolutionary" and Sonny's mother and wife as "ranting cartoons of the smotherer and the shrew," concluding that it "captures the increasingly garish pathology of our urban life."[35]

Writing in the journal *Jump Cut* in 1976, Karyn Kay declared, "in playing the pseudo-documentarist, pretending to a façade of objectivity, Lumet … has taken the

opportune cinematic and historical moment to spring a homosexual hero from the closet," yet ultimately the director "throws over sociology for psychology" and "heavy melodrama." Kay herself, in a burst of reckless psychologizing, wondered if, "in a film so intensely concerned with questions of sexual preference and identification," the director used "shrill images of women … to support some challenged stereotypic notion that men become homosexual because women are aggressive, hideous, neurotic?"[36] Against that assessment, yet in some equally implausible leaps, fellow *Jump Cut* reviewer Eric Holm pointed out how "the warm, mercurial, doggedly nice guy Al Pacino portrays … is not as overtly gay nor as bristling with contradictions as" the real-life "gay bandito," and critiqued Lumet and Warner Brothers studio's "conservatism," particularly their "cautious exploration of human sexuality." While conceding that "stereotypical expectations of how homosexuals are supposed to act are somewhat deflated when audiences are drawn into sympathetic identification with a supermensch bankrobber," Holm argued that "building audience sympathy for a homosexual who looks and acts like Al Pacino only takes us so far in the context of a film whose overall vision of human society and sexuality is so conservative."[37]

Before Sidney Lumet became involved, *Dog Day Afternoon* began "as an exploitation vehicle" called *The Boys in the Bank*, "but the script underwent drastic revisions just before and during shooting."[38] The irrational responses to homosexuality are consequently foisted on the media. When Sal complains that the reporters are calling them "both homosexuals," Sonny replies, "It's just a freak show to them." Lumet was determined to emphasize the protagonists' humanity rather than sensationalize the gay angle, describing his message as, "What seem like freaks aren't really the freaks you think they are"; they have much more in common with the audience than "we'd like to admit"—or "that we know of."[39] The goal for Lumet was empathy.[40]

Gays on the March

In 1964, *Life* magazine published the second part of a double-feature story, "Homosexuality in America," which reported on tensions between the "gay" and "straight" worlds, and on homosexuals' "constant conflict with the law," as they faced "arrest, disgrace." *Life* was notifying readers that "a secret world grows open and bolder. Society is forced to look at it—and try to understand it."[41] In 1969, the Stonewall riots radicalized the modern gay civil rights movement, and by 1973 *Newsweek* published a story on "Gay Power."[42] When *Dog Day Afternoon* hit U.S. theaters in September 1975, a *Time* magazine cover story on gays and lesbians indicated Americans' attitudes toward "the spread of unabashed homosexuality." The article, titled "Gays on the March," noted that in most American cities gays could "generally be barred or evicted from privately owned housing, without legal recourse," and also that, in response to the rise of gay visibility, many Americans "have become alarmed, especially parents. Some are viscerally hostile. Others [are] more tolerant ... and yet cannot approve behavior that they believe harmful to the very fabric of society."[43] Gay groups zapped politicians with gotcha, agitprop politics, reflecting a new militancy—depicted in *Dog Day Afternoon* by activists marching to the bank at night, chanting "Out of the closet and into the streets!" Of course, in the real world, American gay liberation activists were raising public awareness by organizing rallies, marches, and parades, especially in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. The public consciousness—and conscience—was at a crossroads.

Since the mid-1960s, gay rights activists had argued that "unless homosexuals were acknowledged to be as mentally sound as the average heterosexual … they'd never be first-class citizens," yet the notion of gays as

mentally ill permeated the nation, since the American Psychiatric Association had removed homosexuality from its list of disorders, with compromise exceptions, only in 1974.[44] Public perception placed gay rights beneath other recognized civil rights, and same-sex marriage was taboo. Coastal liberalism was suspect. In Minnesota, for example, a marriage license was denied in 1971 to two Minneapolis men, and in 1975 the Internal Revenue Service refused a joint tax return submitted by another gay male couple from Minneapolis.[45] That year, only eleven U.S. states had consensual sex laws, and same-sex marriages were illegal everywhere except, for a brief period, in Boulder, Colorado. As *Time* reported, "many heterosexuals saw the ruling as a mockery of marriage, and normally liberal Boulder was in an uproar over six legally sanctioned gay weddings." Gay churches were formed, such as the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, which had, by 1975, performed three hundred marriages in its first five years, although the partners involved did not possess any legal rights as married couples.[46] As George Chauncey states, "Today's marriage debate is shaped by half a century of struggle over the place of lesbians and gay men in American society and an even longer history of evolution in the meaning and legal character of marriage itself."[47]

Until the 1970s, family law courts in most states judged gay and lesbian biological parents who divorced their straight spouses unfit on moral grounds, and denied them child custody and visitation rights.[48] In a 1977 Gallup poll, 65 percent from a cross-section of approximately 1,500 Americans felt that gays should not be hired to teach elementary school, and seven in ten of those polled stated that "homosexuals should not be allowed to adopt children," based on "the belief that homosexuals are abnormal."[49] Most American companies did not hire open gays, and fired stigmatized employees discovered to be gay. Similarly, during the 1970s the armed forces staunchly upheld their long-standing policy of kicking out gays and lesbians. The highly publicized honorable discharge of Air Force sergeant Leonard Matlovich in 1975, who had won a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart after three tours of duty in Vietnam before coming out to his superior officer, propelled the issue into the national discourse. On September 8, 1975, Matlovich became the first openly gay person to appear on the cover of *Time*, in his military uniform, his name tag clearly visible, with the bold caption, "'I am a Homosexual': The Gay Drive for Acceptance."[50] Thirteen days later, Warner Brothers released *Dog Day Afternoon*, in which Sonny Wortzik demands a military funeral, based on the real John Wojtowicz, whose gay experiences in basic training and while serving in Vietnam prompted him to immerse himself in New York's gay social scene and political movement.[51]

In 1975, Psychoanalyst Herbert Hendin wrote that, because of the new gay "political stance," young men are "faced with the traditional forces" encouraging "homosexuals to hate themselves" and "with a strong counterpressure to deny even to themselves whatever conflict, pain, or anguish they feel," while poet Allen Ginsberg, long-accustomed to fending off such pressures, theorized that "a lot of homosexual conflict comes from internalizing society's distrust of your loves, finally doubting your own loves, and therefore not being able to act on them."[52] In light of the social climate by 1975, and given the cultural nature of the political battle for gay equality, the atypical cinematic characters of Leon and Sonny, who do *not* hate themselves, who do *not* deny their own feelings, who do *not* doubt or fail to act on their own loves, testify to the audacity of this film, which flouted not merely sexual standards but also the performative guilt they were expected to induce. Sonny represents the sweaty, twitchy verisimilitude of a man wrestling with a system, not with himself. In dropping the disguises of homosexuality—represented through Paul Newman in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), Shirley MacLaine in *The*

Children's Hour (1962), Don Murray in *Advice and Consent* (1962), and Rod Steiger in *The Sergeant* (1968)—Pacino's Sonny drops the attendant self-hatred. What does America do with a homosexual who won't play by those rules anymore?

Transgender Issues and Marriage Equality

Dog Day Afternoon ends by informing viewers that "Sonny Wortzik is serving twenty years in federal prison," "Angie Wortzik lives with her children on welfare," and "Leon Shermer is now a woman and living in New York City." The real bisexual bank robber, John Wojtowicz, who went by the alias Littlejohn Basso when he frequented gay bars and meetings of the political organization Gay Activists Alliance, served six years in a penitentiary. The real Leon, who was named Ernest "Ernie" Aron but became Elizabeth "Liz" Eden, paid for sex-reassignment surgery by using the money Wojtowicz received for selling the rights to the true story. In 1973, Liz told an imprisoned John that she never wanted to see him again.[53] The true love story, in other words, unraveled in as conventional a manner as it might have for a straight couple. And, in a predictable irony for Hollywood, "the producers might have ripped off the real-life characters financially (they bought rights to the story for pitifully small amounts)," resulting in a sideshow of lawsuits and countersuits.[54]

Because of this startling mainstream film, however, the perception of authorized masculinity had changed dramatically. In 2012, a federal judge ordered state prison officials in Massachusetts to grant a taxpayer-funded gender reassignment surgery for a male convict serving life for murdering his wife. Although later overturned by an appeals court, as Sam Roberts argues, the federal ruling "dramatized how profoundly sensibilities have evolved since Mr. Wojtowicz robbed the bank, and Mr. Pacino accepted his risky role."[55] As Oliver Lyttelton asserts, *Dog Day Afternoon* was ahead of its time, and "some sensitive portrayals of trans characters have followed in the film's footsteps.[56] Gwynne Watkins reasons that "Sarandon's character seems like a trailblazer, a sympathetic and complex portrayal of a trans woman trying to come to grips with her identity," paving the way for future characterizations, whether complicated or over-the-top.[57] Indeed, the campy cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* came out four days after *Dog Day Afternoon*. A bevy of pictures featuring cross-dressing and transgender characters followed, including roles that won popular and critical acclaim.[58] Marriage equality made history with the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2015 decision that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage, signaling a broader acceptance for gay spouses.[59] In July 2015, the Department of Defense announced a forthcoming end to its ban on transgender people serving in the military.

According to Steven Seidman, after transitioning from "the polluted homosexual to the normal gay," American gays and lesbians now seem less like outsiders.[60] *Dog Day Afternoon* played a central role in this transition from second-class citizenship to the acceptance of gay civil rights. It "broke new ground in its compassion and humanity for a trans character in a mainstream movie," thus it "is more relevant than ever before."[61] In Al Pacino's estimation, the picture "is not dated." Sidney Lumet believed it to be "the first of its kind," and claimed that its "shock value" has been lessened only because "gay rights are so much more familiar to all of us."[62] However, as Seidman also asserts, the increased gay visibility in popular culture is counter-balanced by the constant vulnerability to being fired, harassed, and assaulted; the slow and uneven trend toward social acceptance, integration, and equality is offset by the rollback of political and legal gains, as well as the entrenchment of "gay inequality" and "heterosexual dominance."[63] For example, local county clerks across the nation still refuse to issue same-sex marriage licenses,

many states still deny lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals joint or second-parent adoption, and President Donald Trump reversed the Defense Department's 2015 decision, after four court challenges, in 2018.[64] Moreover, reminding us that "gay inequality is deeply rooted in American society," Seidman states that, "if champions of mainstreaming accept too quickly the virtues of assimilation into America as it is, some critics on the left too easily surrender to a romanticism that imagines America as fundamentally repressive and gays as potential revolutionaries"—a contradictory and oddly static condition that, while "beyond the closet," nonetheless keeps gay, lesbian, trans, and queer citizens comfortably subordinated by "most institutions."[65] *Dog Day Afternoon* announced the move by mainstream actors and directors into a radically new discourse about gay identity and civil rights, but the film could not reach far enough beyond 1975—beyond the very nostalgia we have created about the period—to clear the present complacency that Seidman warns against. It is the work of new films to help determine the future of gay rights in both public policy and cultural politics.

[1] John Podhoretz, "The Real Thing: Sidney Lumet, 1924-2011," *The Weekly Standard* 16, no. 31 (April 25, 2011); http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-real-thing/article/557496 (accessed April 13, 2016).

[2] Director's Commentary, 2-Disc Special Edition DVD, *Dog Day Afternoon* (Warner Bros., 2003).

[3] Sidney Lumet, *Making Movies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 54, 33, 50.

[4] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, second ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 71.

[5] James Monaco, "Dog Day Afternoon," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 57, 58.

[6] Charles Champlin, "'Afternoon'—a Bite Out of the Big Apple," Los Angeles *Times* (October 5, 1975): 30.

[7] Lumet, *Making Movies*, 34.

[8] James M. Wall, "'Dog Day Afternoon' Revisited," *The Christian Century* 97 (April 23, 1980): 459.

[9] Robin Wood, "American Cinema in the '70s: Dog Day Afternoon," *Movie* no. 23 (Winter 1976-1977): 33, as quoted in Christopher R. Brown, "Homosexuality in *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975): Televisual Surfaces and a 'Natural' Man," *Film Criticism* 37, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 35.

[10] See www.nytimes.com/2014/08/05/movies/a-film-on-john-wojtowicz-who-inspired-dog-day-afternoon.html.

[11] Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 71. Vito Russo calls *Victim!*, the first movie in history to utter the word "homosexual" onscreen, revolutionary for presenting the screen's first homosexual "hero" character who chooses to be visible and open, in a blackmail plot that overtly pleaded for social acceptance and tolerance. See Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

[12] See Harry M. Benshoff & Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, *The Celluloid Closet* (Sony Pictures Classic, 1995); Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (Boston: Da Capo, 1993); Richard Dyer, *Gays & Film*, rev. ed. (New York: Zoetrope, 1984). *Little Big Man* (1970) included an unprecedented depiction of a two-spirit Native American character.

[13] John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, eds., *American History, American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image*, New Expanded Edition (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1991), xii, xiv. Schlesinger, Jr. notes that "the audience, supposedly passive in the shrouded theater, is actually an active collaborator, seizing from the movie what it needs for its own purposes of tutelage and fantasy." Ibid., xiii. Since consumers interpret, appropriate, and repurpose cinematic images—even stereotypical characters—in their own ways, reception is important when analyzing representation.

[14] Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 2010), 258.

[15] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, 1, 3.

[16] Judith Crist, "Out of the Doldrums," *Saturday Review* 3, no. 1 (October 4, 1975): 35, 36.

[17] Champlin, "'Afternoon,'" 30.

[18] John Coleman, "Partners in Grime," *New Statesman* 90, no. 2335 (December 19, 1975): 799; Richard Combs, "Dog Day Afternoon," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 42 (November 1975): 237.

[19] Gwynne Watkins, "Oscar Nominee Chris Sarandon Remembers His Groundbreaking Role in 'Dog

Day Afternoon,'" September 23, 2015, https://www.yahoo.com/movies/oscar-nominee-chris-sarandon-remembers-his-175057534.html, (accessed October 23, 2015).

[20] Combs, "Dog Day Afternoon," 237.

[21] Champlin, "'Afternoon,'" 30.

[22] Michael Buckley saw Chris Sarandon as "a standout … remarkable in a touching telephone conversation with Pacino and an even better monologue." In "Dog Day Afternoon," *Films in Review* 26, no. 9 (November 1975): 563.

[23] Matthew Leyland, "Dog Day Afternoon," *Sight and Sound* 16, no. 5 (May 2006): 88.

[24] Lumet, *Making Movies*, 33.

[25] Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan & Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 19.

[26] Champlin, "'Afternoon,'" 30.

[27] Al La Valley, "Out of the Closet and on to the Screen," *American Film* 7, no. 10 (September1982): 57-64, 81.

[28] Richard Schickel, "Lost Connection," *Time* 106, no. 14 (October 6, 1975): 70.

[29] Andrew Sarris, "It's Mythmaking Time for Pacino and Lumet," *The Village Voice* 20, no. 39 (September 29, 1975): 111.

[30] Arthur D. Murphy, "Dog Day Afternoon," *Variety* 280 (August 27, 1975): 15.

[31] Jerry Stein, "Dog Day Afternoon," *Film Heritage* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1975-1976): 44.

[32] Stanley Kauffmann, "Dog Day Afternoon," *The New Republic* 173 (October 4, 1975): 21.

[33] John Simon, "One Dog Day or Three Condor Ones?" *New York* 8, no. 39 (September 29, 1975): 85.

[34] Vincent Canby, "Screen: Dog Day Afternoon," New York *Times* (September 22, 1975): 41.

[35] Jack Kroll, "Bank Shot," *Newsweek* 86 (September 29, 1975): 84.

[36] Karyn Kay, "Dog Day Afternoon: Lumpen Lumet," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* nos. 10-11 (1976): 3.

[37] Eric Holm, "Dog Day Afternoon: Dog Day Aftertaste," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* nos. 10-11 (1976): 3-4.

[38] Monaco, "Dog Day Afternoon," 57.

[39] Steve Warren, "Director Sidney Lumet Talks About *Dog Day Afternoon*," *The Advocate* issue 177 (November 19, 1975): 43.

[40] Director's Commentary, 2-Disc Special Edition DVD, *Dog Day Afternoon* (Warner Bros., 2003).

[41] Paul Welch, "The 'Gay' World Takes to the City Streets," *Life* (June 26, 1964): 68-74.

[42] "Gay Power," *Newsweek* 81 (February 26, 1973): 32.

[43] Cover Story, "Gays on the March," *Time* 106, no. 10 (September 8, 1975): 32, 33.

[44] Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 285.

[45] William Parker, *Homosexuality Bibliography: Second Supplement, 1976-1982* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 96, 93.

[46] "Gays on the March," 33.

[47] George Chauncey, *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 3. See also Mary Bernstein and Verta Taylor, eds., *The Marrying Kind? Debating Same-Sex Marriage within the Lesbian and Gay Movement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[48] Kate Kendell, "Lesbian and Gay Parents in Child Custody and Visitation Disputes," *Human Rights* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2003), http://www.americanbar.org/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/human_rights_vol30_2003/summer2003/hr_summer03_custody.html (accessed April 29, 2016); Evan Thomas, "The War Over Gay Marriage," *Newsweek* (July 6, 2003), http://www.newsweek.com/war-over-gay-marriage-139539 (accessed May 2, 2016).

[49] George Gallup, "Gallup Poll on Gay Rights," *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 18, 1977): 1.

[50] Lily Rothman, "How a Closeted Air Force Sergeant Became the Face of Gay Rights," *Time* (September 8, 2015), http://time.com/4019076/40-years-leonard-matlovich/ (accessed April 24, 2016).

[51] Dave Philipps, "Ousted as Gay, Aging Veterans are Battling Again for Honorable Discharges," The New York *Times* (September 6, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/07/us/gay-veterans-push-for-honorable-discharges-they-were-denied.html?_r=0 (accessed April 24, 2016).

[52] "Gays on the March," 35.

[53] Cliff Jahr, "Littlejohn, the 'Dog Day' Bank Robber, Learns Moviemaking, Like Crime, Does Not Pay," *The Village Voice* 20, no. 39 (September 29, 1975): 124-25; Larry Getlen, "The Bizarre True Story That Inspired 'Dog Day Afternoon," *New York Post* (August 3, 2014), http://nypost.com/2014/08/03/the-man-who-inspired-dog-day-afternoon/, (accessed April 13, 2016).

[54] Monaco, "Dog Day Afternoon," 57.

[55] Sam Roberts, "'The Dog' Who Had His Day on Film: A Film on John Wojtowicz, Who Inspired 'Dog Day Afternoon,'" New York *Times* (August 5, 2014): C1; online version, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/05/movies/a

-film-on-john-wojtowicz-who-inspired-dog-day-afternoon.html?_r=0, (accessed April 13, 2016).

[56] Oliver Lyttelton, "Why *Dog Day Afternoon* was ahead of its time" (September 23, 2015), https://www.yahoo.com/movies/why-dog-day-afternoon-was-ahead-of-its-time-144427688.html (accessed October 23, 2015). Subsequent "sensitive portrayals of trans characters" include those in the films *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) and *Transamerica* (2005).

[57] Watkins, "Oscar Nominee Chris Sarandon Remembers." The Leon character paved the way for subsequent roles such as those in cable television shows like *Transparent*, commercial films like *The Danish Girl* (2015), and independent films like *Tangerine* (2015).

[58] See *The World According to Garp* (1982), for which John Lithgow earned a Best Supporting Actor nomination for his role as a transgender woman, *The Crying Game* (1992), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), for which Hilary Swank won a Best Actress Academy Award, *Flawless* (1999), in which Phillip Seymour Hoffman's drag queen character plans to use stolen money to pay for sex reassignment surgery, *Dallas Buyer's Club* (2013), for which Jared Leto won a Best Supporting Actor Academy Award, and *Boy Meets Girl* (2015), an independent film featuring transgender actress Michelle Hendley. See also Ellen DeGeneres's multiple programs since she came out as a lesbian in 1997, and television shows such as *Will & Grace* (1998-2006), *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy* (2003-2007, 2018-), *America's Next Top Model* (2003-), *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-), and *Orange is the New Black* (2013-), the prison drama with a character played by transgender actress Laverne Cox, and *Pose* (2018-). Further, as co-producers on the Amazon series, *Transparent*, for which lead actor Jeffrey Tambor won Golden Globe and Emmy awards, Zachary Drucker and Rhys Ernst advise the show's creator, Jill Soloway, on how to portray the transgender experience "with accuracy and sensitivity" as part of "their mission to promote acceptance of trans people." See Sharon Mashihi, "Helping 'Transparent' Get the Trans Experience Right," *The New Yorker Radio Hour* (April 8, 2016), http://www.wnyc.org/story/helping-transparent-get-the-trans-experience-right/ (accessed April 10, 2016). Finally, the Academy Award-winning 2007 documentary short *Freeheld* inspired a 2015 eponymous narrative version starring Ellen Page and Julianne Moore in the true story of a same-sex couple fighting for domestic partner pension benefits, illustrating not only that the struggle for marriage equality and other gay rights continues, but also that mainstream commercial Hollywood films play their part, with art imitating real life in a docudrama style, and cultural politics magnifying the myriad reverberations of each new character's representation. In this regard, after four decades, "Hollywood is catching up to *Dog Day Afternoon* and its enormous sense of compassion" (Lyttelton, "Ahead of its Time"). Nonetheless, despite much more respectful, realistic mainstream media exposure, Hollywood struggles to get the facts right, even when based on a true story, such as in *Stonewall* (2015), a disappointing, historically inaccurate movie that whitewashes the role of radical transgender activist Sylvia Rivera and other "black and brown transwomyn and drag queens." Mark Segal, "I Was at the Stonewall Riots. The Movie 'Stonewall' Gets Everything Wrong," *PBS Newshour* (September 23, 2015), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/stonewall-movie/ (accessed April 25, 2016); John Courtmanche, "Valentin-Escobar Exhibit Named Top 20 Museum Show of 2015 by Art Media," *Hampshire College News & Events* (January 12, 2016), https://www.hampshire.edu/news/2016/01/12/valentin-escobar-exhibit-named-top-20-museum-show-of-2015-by-art-media (accessed April 25, 2016); Pat Cordova-Goff, "Boycott 2015 'Stonewall' Movie," *Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network* (September 2015), https://unite.gsanetwork.org/petitions/boycott-2015-stonewall-movie (accessed April 25, 2016).

[59] Rebecca Beitsch, "Despite Same-Sex Marriage Ruling, Gay Adoption Rights Uncertain in Some States," *Stateline* (August 19, 2015), http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2015/08/19/despite-same-sex-marriage-ruling-gay-adoption-rights-uncertain-in-some-states (accessed April 29, 2016). Before this decision, thirteen states prohibited same-sex couples from marrying, and all but two prevented them from adopting foster children jointly.

[60] See Steven Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[61] Lyttelton, "Ahead of its Time."

[62] "The Making of Dog Day Afternoon," 30th-Anniversary Documentary, Special Features, 2-Disc Special Edition DVD, *Dog Day Afternoon* (Warner Bros., 2003).

[63] Seidman, Beyond the Closet, 2, 4, 5, 6.

[64] See https://www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/transgender-rights/breaking-down-trumps-trans-military-ban.

[65] Seidman, *Beyond the Closet*, 6.