

Mapping Hardcore Space

J. Steven Witkowski

Beginning in the fall of 2008, I conducted on-site research at five video stores in the west San Fernando and Simi Valley, the capital of porn production in the US. My hope was to find direct relations between the Valley's famous porn studios and filming houses and lower-level businesses. What lines of communication were there between wealthy porn producers and smaller, more diverse video stores? My initial attempts to interview storeowners and clientele, however, were largely unfruitful. In response, I focused on the stores themselves. Recording and analyzing their organization draws out porn's relationship with site-specific layouts, locations, clienteles, and histories.

The following maps emphasize the relationship between each store's hardcore space (i.e., areas that held hardcore pornography) and family-friendly space (i.e., areas of the store that feature children's movies, comedies, etc.). In particular, I am interested in how the space of the store is curated to appeal to diverse clientele. Do the stores provide clear separations between pornographic and other titles? What parts of the stores do customers frequent? What kinds of customers go where? What methods do storeowners use for placing genres between family-friendly space and hardcore space? Are hardcore titles kept more up-to-date than family-friendly sections? The goal is to better understand the import of porn rental to the cultural history of video stores.

Mapping offers a useful method for understanding the video store as a space of exhibition and reception. Paying close attention to how video and customers are organized within the space of the store also draws attention to the resilience of pornographic video within adult and neighborhood rental stores. Despite the failure of rental chains like Blockbuster, and the growing importance of the digital streaming and vending machines, not all video shops are poised to close their doors. The porn rental shop is one such exception.

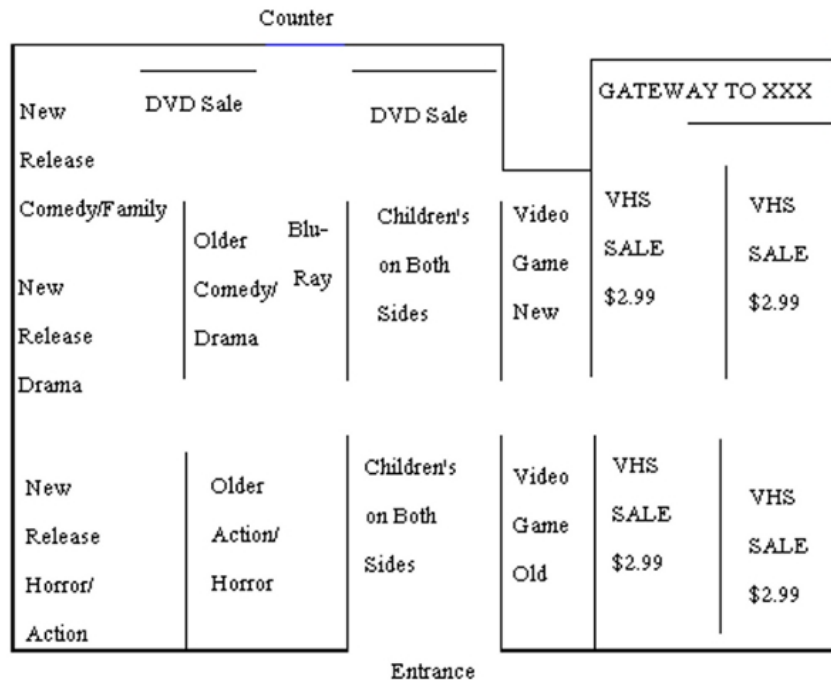


Figure 1. Video 10, Winnetka, 2008

Video 10 has a relatively even number of porn and non-porn renters. Family-friendly customers browse new releases while hardcore customers go straight for the porn section. The backroom is hidden by the tall shelves that separate the two areas.

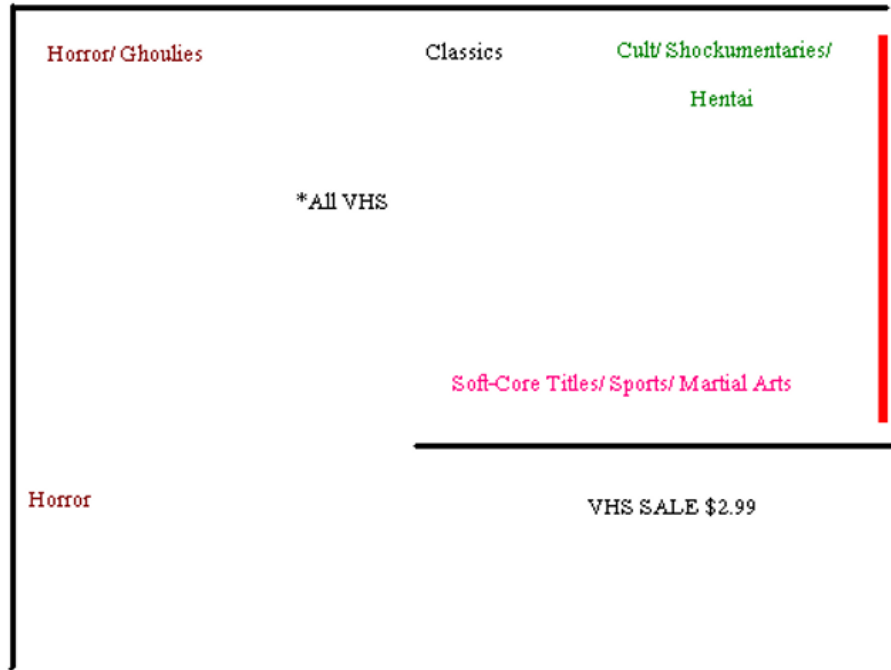


Figure 2. Video 10, Winnetka, 2008

A variety of genres, including hentai, ghoulie, classic, and shockumentary titles serve as a buffer for the entrance to hardcore space. A door at the entrance to the backroom (pictured in red) warns those less than eighteen years of age to stay away.

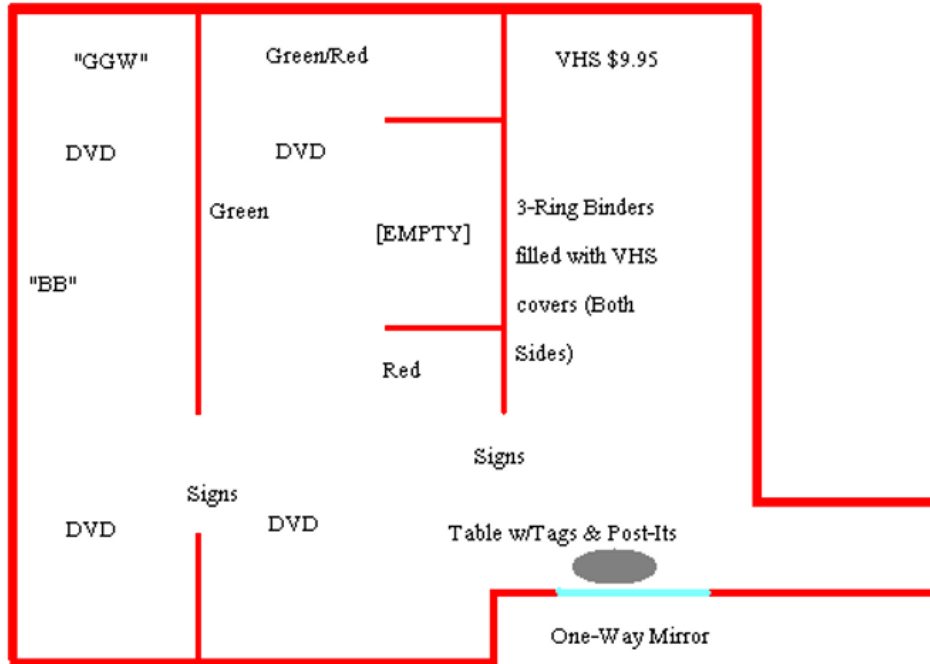


Figure 3. Video 10, Winnetka, 2008

Customers are not permitted to take hardcore DVD and VHS boxes outside the backroom at Video 10. Instead, the store has developed a system where customers use tokens and post-it notes to mark their selections.

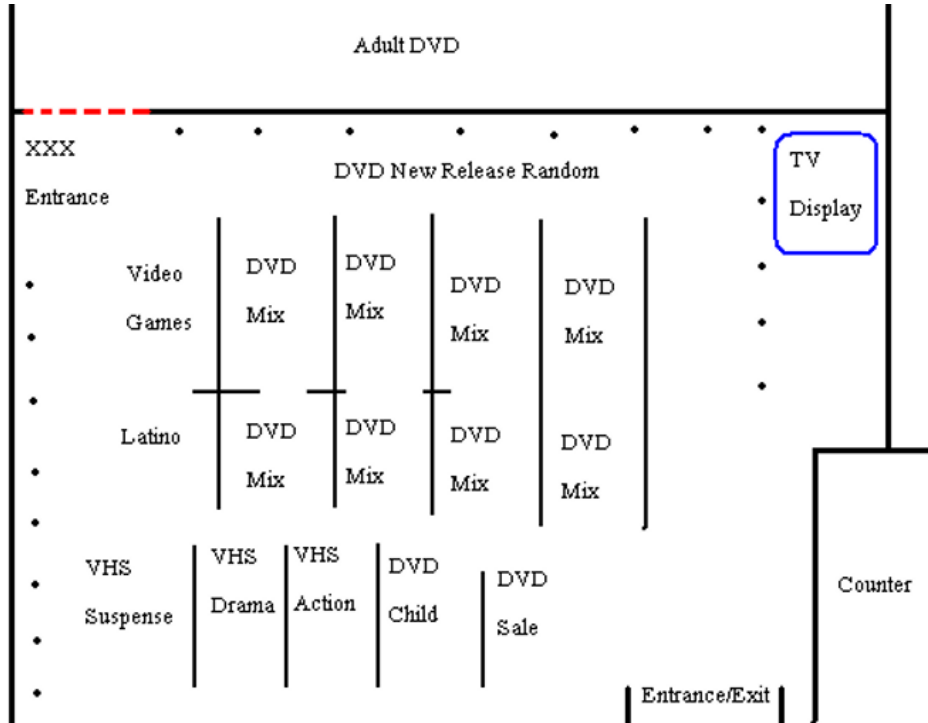


Figure 4. Mega Video #1, Winnetka, 2008

Mega Video does not separate new releases from erotica or softcore, though hardcore titles are located in a separate backroom. Shelf walls wind around the store, holding “new releases.” This strategy resembles that of now-bankrupt Blockbuster. The store permanently shut down soon after I visited.

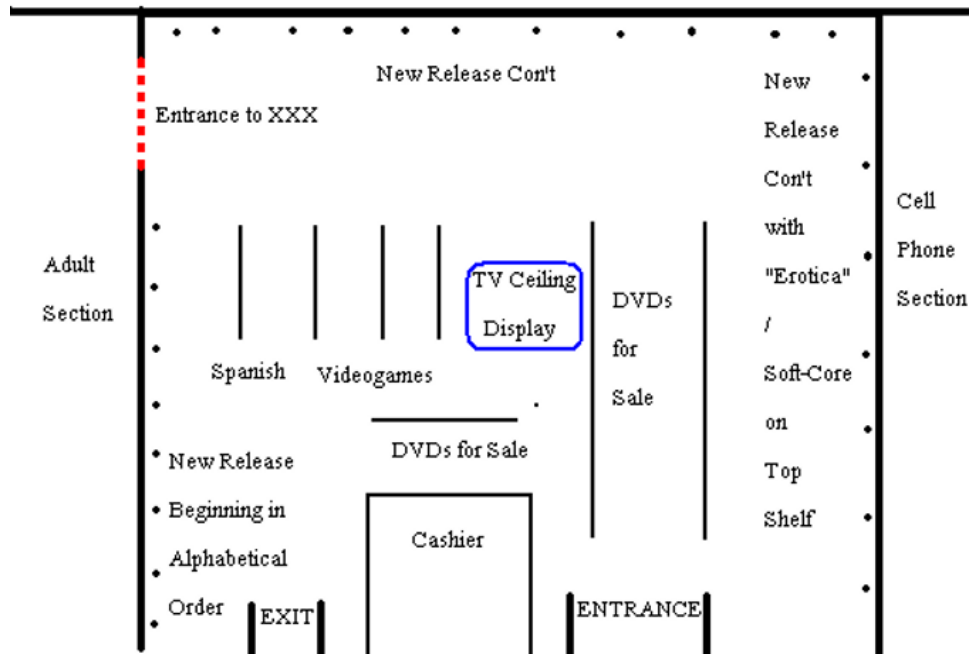


Figure 5. Mega Video #2, Winnetka, 2008

A second Mega Video five miles away from that pictured in figure 4 uses a similar layout. As above, the store's lucrative backroom is kept separate from the rest of the titles.

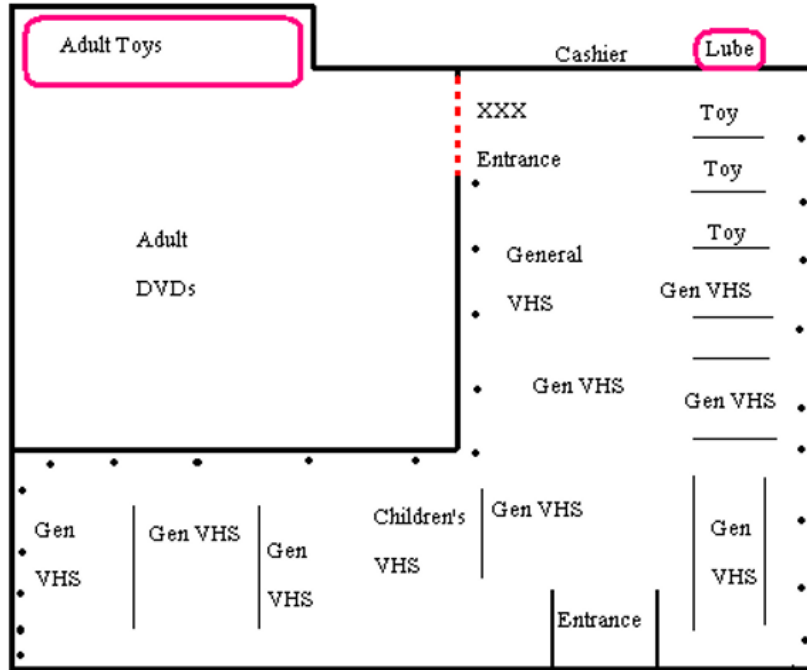


Figure 6. Red Hot Video, Canoga Park, 2008

Red Hot Video is owned and operated by porn actor/producer, Jules Jordan. A smattering of unorganized VHS tapes legitimizes the shop's large backroom. I found no families or children browsing during my visits to the site.

Entrance	Jules Jordan	Brazzers	theme: oral	Girls Gone Wild
	Jules Jordan	Max Hardcore	theme: young	theme: pretty girl
	Girlfriends	Blackzilla/ Mixed	Evil Empire	anal
	Barely Legal	Elegant Angel	Evil Empire	Sticky Video
	Devil's Films	Darkside Entertainment	mature/milf	Evil Angels
	Hours "6-14"	Darkside Entertainment	Zero Tolerance	latino
	Hours "21-24"	Bang Bros	West Coast Prod.	big breast
	Gay Titles	Andrew Blake/Anabolic	Redlight	asian

Figure 7. Red Hot Video, Canoga Park, 2008

Jules Jordan titles are first presented to customers upon entering the backroom at Red Hot Video. Other titles are neatly organized according to studio and sub-genre. Tall shelf walls keep hardcore media hidden from other browsers.