El Paso Wrecking Corp.

Written October 1977, this feature essay was published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977.

I. Author’s Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written April 18, 1998

II. The feature essay as published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

I. Author’s Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written April 18, 1998

How Movies Shaped *Drummer*

Written October 1977, this tiny feature essay was published in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977) because *Drummer* readers loved movies and *Drummer* created itself publishing photographs from movies, as well as printing movie reviews and erotic scripts for plays and films. (For film list, see below. For plays, see entry for *Crimes Against Nature, Drummer* 20, January 1978.) When *Drummer* was new, Ed Franklin was the monthly movie reviewer (1976-1978), and Allen Eagles’ on-going column “Movie Mayhem,” detailing the history of S&M in Hollywood movies, debuted in *Drummer* 8 (August 1976).

I was eager to showcase in *Drummer* the filmmaking Gage Brothers who were a perfect fit with their homomale trilogy: *Kansas City Trucking Co.* (1976), *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* (1978), and *L.A. Tool and Die* (1979). The Gages were narrative story tellers of episodic sex featuring the picaresque escapades of actors like Jack Wrangler and the mature Richard Locke who was *Drummer*’s first “Daddy”—at age 37! In content and style, the Gage *mise en scene* embraced technique, material, eros, and casting that were a revelation embraced by fans of the new genre of homomale action movies.

There is a back story of how the Gage Brothers arrived on the film scene, and there is a back story of how cinema built an audience for *Drummer*. 
Parallel to the emergence of gay bars as the first gay art galleries, gay movie theaters were film galleries screening the moving image of newly liberated homosexuality. In the Titanic 1970s, gay movie theaters were erotic performance-art spaces. Movie-palace sex (on film and live in the audience) was a gay community social phenomenon that went extinct with the 1982 arrival of VCRs and HIV that emptied the theaters, sent everyone home alone, and destroyed the high concept of group sexuality celebrated on screen and in the seats, aisles, and toilets. A man hasn’t lived until he’s had orgy sex on the stage behind the giant screen in a gay porn theater with the dots of Technicolor light flickering through making him and his partners shimmer as if they themselves were glittering on celluloid. That’s a “gay film festival”!

Live sex also occurred on stage. Continuing a sexed up version of the G-rated vaudeville tradition that was very much alive in first-run family movie theaters in the 1930s and 1940s, gay film theaters often included erotic stage shows between features. It was a kind of performance art of male burlesque. See my article, “Pumping Roger: A Night at the Nob Hill Theater,” in Drummer 21 (March 1978) and my review of the live show starring Colt model Clint Lockner and Dan Pace, the star of the Gage Brothers’ L. A. Tool and Die. (Because I was exiting Drummer, my article, “In These Last Days of the American Empire: Dan Pace & Clint Lockner Together,” was published as part of my “Virtual Drummer” collection in the premiere issue of Skinflicks, Volume 1, Number 1, January 1980.)

Anthropologically, gay films of the 1970s are lightning caught in a jar. They were Mondo Cane “documentaries” anticipating “reality TV” showing the way we were. When anthropologist Margaret Mead died in Manhattan in 1978, was she headed to the Adonis Theater to add one more culture to her Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies? The gay film genre of the 1960s and 1970s was a kind of educational cinema verité that taught newly uncloseted primitive audiences the new ways to self-fashion gay identity and have more exotic sex. The Gage Brothers shot primers of masculine-identified eros.

Most gay movies of the 1970s were scripted silent films with music added. Not until the advent of the video camera did silent gay cinema find it could talk; but by then it had nothing to say except the unscripted “Yeah. Uh-huh. Give it to me. I’m gonna cum!”

That decade’s cinema silence is one reason the 1970s is often misinterpreted by latter-day revisionists who don’t “get” the Titanic 70s and the original-recipe sexual revolution before it was turned into gay politics. They wonder about us survivors whose memory of the 1970s is akin to William Wordsworth who wrote of the joys of the French Revolution: “Bliss was it that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven.”
Unfortunately, 1980s video moved 1970s film away from art and into business. Instead of gay movies with forward momentum of plot, eros, and character, the video “grind formula” devolved to eight guys in four scenes with eight cumshots in eighty minutes. Gay video of the 1980s and 1990s (with no art roots) was a travesty of the gay art-and-eros films of the 1970s with their pedigree in the wonderful world of 1960s experimental and underground cinema in which Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, the Kuchar Brothers, and Jack Smith created the gay film esthetic.

In a direct line of homomasculine descent, film DNA shaped Drummer. In the Swinging 60s, American culture had been swept up into the “experimental cinema” of underground films, and many foreign films, and some Hollywood movies which, in fact, created a ready-made audience for experimental Drummer.

Drummer shaped gay culture.

For thirty years, among the millions of leatherfolk, there was hardly a person alive who had not heard of or had not read Drummer. With its 1970s press run of 42,000 copies per issue, more people have read one issue of Drummer than have read any one book by any deeply established GLBT author on the top hundred list of literary best-sellers in the so-called “gay canon.” That’s why I added the line to the masthead of my Drummer 23 (July 1978): “The American Review of Gay Popular Culture.” This makes Drummer worth study and research in GLBT culture.

The Gage Brothers’ DNA comes from this lineage: Kenneth Anger’s leathery Scorpio Rising (1963) and butch-fetish Kustom Kar Kommandos (1965); Andy Warhol’s long-take Blowjob (1963), My Hustler (1965), and chatty Lonesome Cowboys (1969) which was connected through Joe Dallesandro to the 8mm films of Bob Mizer at Athletic Model Guild; Wakefield Poole’s actioner Boys in the Sand (1971) and muscular Bijou (1972); Fred Halsted’s MOMA features L. A. Plays Itself (1972) and Sextool (1975); Roger Earl and Terry LeGrand’s leather-cherry popper Born to Raise Hell (1972); Peter Berlin’s auto-portrait Nights in Black Leather (1973); the uncredited fisting classic Erotic Hands (c. 1975); and Michael Zen’s leather-occult Falconhead (1976) usually double-billed with C. Michael McCullough’s gorgeously sleazy, smokey, and primitivist Tattoo (1975).

Beginning with the first issue, Drummer was always illustrated with movie stills: Sextool photos appeared inside Drummer 1 (June 1975), and on the front and back covers of Drummer 2 (October 1975); Born to Raise Hell on the front cover of Drummer 3 (October 1975); and full-page ads for Falconhead inside the front cover of Drummer 7 (June 1976), and for Kansas City Trucking Co. inside the front cover of Drummer 11 (December 1976). Publicity stills from mainstream features such as Mandingo,
Deliverance, and Salo appeared repeatedly. In the 1980s and 1990s, photographs of men I lensed for Palm Drive Video, such as Keith Ardent, Larry Perry, and Donnie Russo, appeared on the covers of Drummer 118 (July 1988), Drummer 140 (June 1990), Drummer 159 (December 1992), and Drummer 170 (December 1993). A further supply of film stills to Drummer happened in 1989 when Mark Hemry and I shot six films in Europe for Roger Earl and Terry LeGrand, the helmers of Born to Raise Hell. Drummer’s love affair with film embraced also the Super-8 films and video features of David Hurles and his Old Reliable studio. For details of film and video photos in Drummer, search the “Timeline Bibliography” of Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer.

From its first issue wherein “Sidney Charles” reviewed Sextool, Drummer included film reviews written regularly by Ed Franklin aka Ed Menerth aka Scott Masters. Sextool, forbidden by the LAPD, premiered simultaneously in San Francisco at the fratricidal Mitchell Brothers’ O’Farrell Theater and in New York at the Lincoln Art Theater on June 4, 1975, three weeks before the first issue of Drummer. Eschewing straight theaters, the Gage Brothers booked their films into San Francisco at the Nob Hill Theater where their friend Wakefield Poole directed the legendary stage show for the Colt model Roger in 1977.

Because readers responded to film coverage, I added op-ed cinema features such as “Pasolini’s Salo” in Drummer 20 (January 1978), and my interview with Boys in the Sand film director Wakefield Poole, “Dirty Poole,” in Drummer 27 (February 1979), and made humor with movie stills in “Steve Reeves’ Screen Test” in Drummer 19 (December 1977) and “Nobody Fucks Lex Barker Anymore” in Drummer 26 (June 1979).

When Ed Franklin wrote me that he was quitting reviewing movies because publisher Embry fell in arrears paying him, I turned to reviewing significant films such as Derek Jarman’s Sebastiane in Drummer 22 (May 1978) and the homomasculine The Deer Hunter in Drummer 28 (April 1979). Covering films was natural to me because I had been reviewing movies since 1953, and my love of film led into my 1960s career as director of a museum film program and as a university professor in the 1960s and 1970s teaching courses such as “History and Esthetics of Cinema” and “Women in Film.” I assigned other movie reviews to my protégé, John Trojanski, a former Catholic seminarian whose photographs appeared in Drummer 25 (December 1978) and other issues. Had I still been teaching when the Gage Brothers debuted, I would have invited them to speak in my classes and at my museum film program where during the 1960s and 70s I screened gay underground films and hosted filmmakers from the National Film Board of Canada.
(When Sex Meets Art: In a taxi leaving the New York Eagle or, maybe, the Spike at 3 AM in 1973, my new best friend who was taking me back to ball at his apartment introduced himself as “John Boundy, the U. S. manager of bookings for the National Film Board of Canada,” and I introduced myself as the professor-director who needed to fill my museum and campus film programs.)

In the zero degrees of separation in gay culture, Fred Halsted starred in El Paso Wrecking Corp., and he was also a regular Drummer columnist published in this same Drummer 19, page 24. This was my first credited issue as editor in chief, and I believed everything was possible. I wanted to mix all these great guys and these great talents together in the salon around Drummer. In my brief paragraph accompanying the nine El Paso Wrecking Corp. photographs, I promised to interview the Gage Brothers for an upcoming Drummer. In the zero degrees, that opportunity never rose so that we could converge.

Nevertheless, Wakefield Poole made certain that Mark Hemry and I connected with Georgina Spelvin who was the star of Poole’s The Bible (1974), of the Gages’ El Paso Wrecking Corp., and of the blockbuster porn hit by Gerard Damiano, The Devil in Miss Jones (1973). (I featured one of Wakefield Poole’s Fellini-like color production stills from The Bible on the cover of Drummer 27, February 1979.) Fresh from exiting Drummer as editor in chief, in 1980, and with Mark Hemry carrying the cameras and the single red rose that warmed her heart, I interviewed the very bright and funny Georgina Spelvin on a bed in a pretty Sausalito motel for my feature article “The Devil in Ms. Spelvin” published in Hooker magazine (May 1981).

Having withdrawn from the warfare inside Drummer, and bruised by publisher Embry’s cancerous Blacklist of disgruntled contributors, I kept my writing moving forward—not in Drummer, but in the “Virtual Drummer” of other 1980s magazines Honcho, Man2Man, California Action Guide, In Touch, Uncut, Just Men, The Target Album, Dan Lurie’s Muscle Training Illustrated, Skin, and Bear, as well as in the straight Hooker, Expose, and California Pleasure Guide which published my fiction and features that could have been in the Drummer stream.

Editor’s Final Note and Film List
Scripts such as the following were frequently published in Drummer: George Birimisa’s Pogey Bait serialized in Drummer 12 (January 1977) and Drummer 13 (March 1977); Jack Fritscher’s Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley serialized in Drummer 22 (May 1978) and Drummer 23 (July 1978); Jack Fritscher and Old Reliable David Hurles’ one-man show Ex-Cons: We Abuse Fags, serialized in Drummer 24 (September 1978) and Drummer 25 (December 1978).
Fritscher recalled, “In 1980, I co-wrote the script with filmmaker J. Brian for his vanilla porn film *J. Brian’s Flashbacks*. Having fallen out with *Drummer* publisher Embry who had started his *Mach* magazine to steal thunder from his competitor *Honcho* magazine, I couldn’t resist selling my novelization of the J. Brian film to *Honcho* where the six chapters were serialized as twin bills in three issues.” Perhaps one future day a new young Kenneth Anger will come along and shoot several reels of film based on scripts published in *Drummer*.

II. The feature essay as published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977

*Drummer* Previews the Flicks
Richard Locke packs meat for Gage Brothers...

**El Paso Wrecking Corp.**

*Drummer* presents an exclusive peek into what promises to be another hot, new film from director Joe Gage and producer Sam Gage, the brothers who excited us all last year with their *Kansas City Trucking Co. KCTC* was made with a professionalism generally lacking in gay male porn. We don’t know yet the story line. But we do know the stars include: Fred Halsted; Richard Locke; and our *Drummer* 19 cover man Steve King [sic], with Jeanne Marie Marchand, Stan Braddock, Mike Morris, Jared Benson, and a hot new discovery Guillermo Riccardo. *Drummer* will feature an interview with the Gage Brothers and their dedication to the upgrading of male films in an upcoming issue.

III. Eyewitness
Illustrations

New York artist Domino, profiled in *Drummer* 29 by Fritscher and Shapiro, idealized San Francisco erotic celebrity Richard Locke, star of *El Paso Wrecking Corp*. The cover of *Drummer* 19 was a still actor Mike Morris from the same Gage Brothers film. Drawing by Domino. ©Domino. Used with permission.

In 1988, Jack Fritscher directed and photographed the feature film, *The Domino Video Gallery*, produced and edited for Palm Drive Video by Mark Hemry.