



# Halsted Plays Himself (Semiotext(e) Native Agents)

*William E. Jones*

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## **Halsted Plays Himself (Semiotext(e) Native Agents)** William E. Jones

Fred Halsted's L.A. Plays Itself (1972) was gay porn's first masterpiece: a sexually explicit, autobiographical, experimental film whose New York screening left even Salvador Dalí repeatedly muttering "new information for me." Halsted, a self-taught filmmaker, shot the film over a period of three years in a now-vanished Los Angeles, a city at once rural and sleazy. Although his cultural notoriety at one point equaled that of Kenneth Anger or Jack Smith, Halsted's star waned in the 1980s with the emergence of a more commercial gay-porn industry. After the death from AIDS of his long-time partner, lover, spouse (and tormentor) Joey Yale in 1986, Halsted committed suicide in 1989. In Halsted Plays Himself, acclaimed artist and filmmaker William E. Jones documents his quest to capture the elusive public and private personas of Halsted--to zero in on an identity riddled with contradictions. Jones assembles a narrative of a long-gone gay lifestyle and an extinct Hollywood underground, when independent films were still possible, and the boundary between experimental and pornographic was not yet established. The book also depicts what sexual liberation looked like at a volatile point in time--and what it looked like when it collapsed.

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