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# **Incorporation of the Transgressive: Sex and Pornography in Danish Feature Films of the 1970s**

Isak Thorsen

## **Abstract:**

Denmark was the first country in the world to liberate picture pornography in 1969, and this article addresses how mainstream Danish feature film incorporated the transgressive potential of sex and pornography during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Using a historical perspective, the article describes the circumstances leading up to the liberalization of picture pornography. It also considers how Denmark for a short period of time became known as the centre of porn in the world, often attracting film-makers from abroad. This status quickly ebbed, but porn and sex migrated into mainstream culture via for instance the Danish feature film. Overall the Danish feature film incorporated and commercialised the transgressiveness of sex and pornography in three ways: in actual porn-films, in documentary-like films and in sex-comedies.

The article suggests that a few feature film from the mid 1970s unsuccessfully tried to revitalise the transgressive potential of pornography, for instance by combining sex and Christianity. But the initial wave of liberation had taken place and pushing borders even further in an attempt to bring even more transgressive material into the mainstream was doomed. In the late 1970s pornography gradually left the mainstream cinemas and returned to a similar situation to the one that existed prior to the 1969 change in legislation, and hereby pornography regained a subcultural status.

**Keywords:** Pornography, Denmark, sex-films, sex-comedies, transgressiveness, subculture vs. mainstream culture.

## Introduction

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1969, Denmark became the first country in the world to lift the ban on picture pornography, instantly acquiring a unique position internationally and rapidly becoming synonymous with sex and pornography.<sup>1</sup> This liberalisation of pornography didn't happen in a vacuum, however, and the following article explores the gradual changes in attitudes towards sex and pornography that took place during the 1960s, and the reasons why and ways in which the Danish feature film assimilated, popularised and commodified sex and pornography in the 1970s.

In his book *Porno? Chic!* Brian McNair proposes a 'cycle of liberalisation' to describe how a sub-cultural transgression like pornography becomes integrated in mainstream culture:

1. Sub-cultural transgression→ Provokes: 2. Critical commentary and analysis→ Leads to: 3. Mainstream commentary and analysis, as well as pastiche, parody→ Produces: 4. Resolution/tolerance/acceptance→ Leads to: 5. Incorporation of transgression.<sup>2</sup>

Though McNair's aim in his book is historically different from the focus of this article, his cycle can serve as a frame for how pornography went from being a sub-cultural phenomenon in Denmark in the 1960s, to being commented upon and analysed and ultimately (at least legally) accepted and incorporated into mainstream Danish culture from 1969.

## The Expansion of Pornography

One of the reasons that the Conservative Minister of Justice Knud Thestrup gave when he proposed the law abolishing the ban of picture pornography was to diminish curiosity towards pornography among the general population. 75,000 copies of erotic books were printed each year in 1960-1961; the following year nearly 250,000 copies of erotic literature as well as 200,000 copies of sex-educational books were published; and the volume of erotic literature peaked in 1967 with 1.4 million books printed. Subsequently, the repeal of the obscenity clause on literature in Denmark in 1967 reversed this trend leading to a decrease in the sale of erotic literature.<sup>3</sup> But the law on picture pornography worked in

quite a different way, as Thestrup admits in his memoirs: “It has to be acknowledged, that the abolition of punishment caused a wave of pornographic pictures.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the few sources of data on pornography at the time is the research of Danish criminologist Berl Kutchinsky who conducted a series of empirically based investigations on pornography and crime around New Year 1970, less than half a year after the passing of the new law. Though Kutchinsky expresses reservations concerning the reliability of his research, his data does provide some indication as to the diffusion of pornography at the time. He estimated that approximately 100-120 porn shops had been established in Denmark, of which about 60 were situated in the capital, Copenhagen.<sup>5</sup> In *Sexionary*, a guide to what Copenhagen had to offer on sex, published in German and English and aimed at the curious tourist, approximately 40 porn shops, strip-bars and the like in the capital are mentioned, together with more than 80 porn-related companies, such as post-order companies, printers, publishing houses and film production companies.<sup>6</sup>

The estimated retail turnover of the overall Danish porn industry in 1969 was \$50 million and 50-60% of the material produced was smuggled into other countries, for instance to Britain, hidden in the refrigerated trucks transporting Danish bacon.<sup>7</sup> According to Kutchinsky’s sources, the amount of material seized by police and customs was between 5 and 30%.<sup>8</sup> John Heidenry has called Denmark in 1969 “the Wild West of XXX-rated porn,”<sup>9</sup> and the sexually liberated Denmark attracted filmmakers from abroad – foremost from USA.

### **The American Invasion**

Eric Schaefer describes how for Americans the nationality equated with ‘sexy’ shifted from France to Denmark and Sweden during the 1960s. He writes that, “Americans increasingly looked to Northern Europe, specifically to Denmark and Sweden, to help define what was liberated and sexually appealing,” and observes that American focus on Scandinavian sex exploded in the summer of 1969 when Denmark abolished the laws restricting the sale of pornography.<sup>10</sup>

One of the first results of the new law was the establishment of the world's first sex trade fair, *Sex 69*, held in October 1969 in Copenhagen. 300-350 journalists, together with nearly 50,000 visitors, many of them tourists, flocked to the six-day long event.<sup>11</sup> Among the participants was the American director Alex de Renzy, who shot the documentary *Pornography in Denmark – A New Approach/ Censorship in Denmark – A New Approach* (1970). The film comprises a combination of on-the-spot reports from the sex trade fair, interviews with Danes talking about their opinion of pornography and sex, montages from Copenhagen showing both the red light districts with porn cinemas and shops, as well as traditional travelogue images such as the Little Mermaid statue, the royal castle, etc. It also included explicit hard-core scenes, but since de Renzy had filmed these sequences straight from the screens, he could claim that his film was not pornographic but merely documenting the phenomena of pornography in another country. In this way *Pornography in Denmark* passed the strict censorship laws in the US and became one of the first films to show hard-core sex in American cinemas. On one hand, the film offers an anthropological-

like depiction of Denmark and pornography, and on the other, it was able to show forbidden hard-core sex. The film can further be seen as part of the debate on liberating the American obscenity laws, and the final voice-over of the film underlines that the Danish experiment does not necessarily lead to antisocial or criminal behaviour, asking the audience if there is sufficient justification for the censorship of adult entertainment in the United States. Another American production, *Sexual Freedom in Denmark* (1970), directed by John Lamb, is quite similar, though its depiction of nude Danes playing on a sailing ship on a bright summer day and images from a nude contest were probably not shot in Denmark. The film also mixes interviews, images of Copenhagen and reports on sex education with a message of repudiating censorship in the United States. The Danish-West German co-production *Sådan er porno/ Facts: Copenhagen-Sex-Report* (1971), directed by Werner M. Lenz, offers yet another peek behind the curtains of the Danish porn-industry combined with interviews pro- and contra- free pornography, this time aimed at a West-German audience.

Other Americans who found the lenient Danish laws attractive were Eberhaus and Phyllis Kronhausen, the psychologist couple who specialised in sexuality and who relocated to Denmark in 1970. In Germany, the couple had made the film *Freiheit für die Liebe/ Freedom to Love* (1969) and with the backing of the established and respectable Danish production company Palladium they made the film *Hvorfor gør de det?/ Why?* (1971). The narrative frame of the film is an event in the old historical ceremonial hall of the Student's association in Copenhagen: two large mattresses were placed in the centre of the hall surrounded by hundreds of curious students and three couples, one of them lesbian, had sex in front of the bystanders. The action on the mattresses is crosscut with interviews, testimonies and re-enactments from the performers, as well as a kind of Q&A session between the Kronhausens and the audience in the hall. Yet another figure is introduced late in the film: Bodil Joensen, who was known for having sex with the animals on her farm and was practically a Danish porn celebrity at the time, and she is filmed with her farm animals. The underlying message from the Kronhausens is that, "sexual activity in public

was the inevitable manifestation of a higher, freer consciousness."<sup>12</sup> The Kronhausens' virtual sexual-political manifesto championing the transgressive potential of sexuality as liberation was apparently only shown uncut in Denmark. They then went on to directed *Porno Pop* (1971), a feature length compilation of old stag-films, and the Swiss-Danish co-production *The Hottest Show in Town/Sex cirkusse* (1974), which was shot in Denmark with mainly Danish actors and deals with a circus on the verge of bankruptcy which comes up with the idea of spicing up their acts with hard-core sex.

### **The Danish Feature Film**

Based on the fall in prices of pornographic goods and observations made in porn shops, Kutchinsky predicted that the Danes' interest in pornography was decreasing. Art Historian Peter Webb observed similar tendencies among the Danes on his visit to Denmark in 1971; locals had lost interest, and Webb writes that nearly 90% of the earnings came from export.<sup>13</sup> Kutchinsky saw a prosperous future for the porn industry as long as Denmark retained the monopoly on the legalised production of pornography, but other countries

soon followed the Danish example. Sweden removed the obscenity clause from the Swedish penal code in 1971, and more permissive legislation in the early 1970s gave rise to adult cinemas and the production of pornography in the United States, West Germany and many other countries. Pornographic films from other countries began to appear in the Danish cinemas, and less than four years after the legalisation of pornography, Kutchinsky concluded that the porn wave had peaked in Denmark in 1969 and was now merely a splash in the local village pond.<sup>14</sup>

One company that used Denmark's brief monopoly on producing legal pornography as a stepping stone to a leading position on the world market was Rodox, established in 1966 by the brothers Jens and Peter Theander. From their second-hand bookshop in the centre of Copenhagen, the brothers sold and distributed illegal material, and in 1968 they founded the magazine *Color Climax*, followed by a film production company, Candy Film, in 1969. Over the two following decades, it is estimated that Rodox produced more than 90 million

magazines, 9 million Super 8 films and 1 million VHS cassettes to the world-market.<sup>15</sup>

Linda Williams has called the 1970s "the "Classical" Era of Theatrically Exhibited Porn" in which a comparatively mixed audience watched pornography in cinemas.<sup>16</sup>

In 1976, Danish film historian Peter Schepeleern estimated that approximately 24% of the Danish feature films produced in the first half of the 1970s were pornographic.<sup>17</sup>

And in the most authoritative work published on Danish film history, Dan Nissen claims that about a third of the films from 1970-74 were of an erotic orientation.<sup>18</sup> Neither Schepeleern nor Nissen specify what films they consider pornographic or erotically oriented, but their statements point to a substantial preoccupation with sex and pornography in Danish feature films of the period. As Mariah Larsson observes in an article about the marketing and reception of sexually explicit films in the wake of the removal of the Swedish obscenity clause in 1971, the concept of pornography is historically changeable, and some of the Swedish films of the 1970s would hardly qualify as pornographic films by contemporary standards.<sup>19</sup> A similar conclusion has been put

forward about the Italian sex comedies – that they were found titillating by historical audiences in the 1970s but rather tame by modern standards.<sup>20</sup> Schepeleern’s claim that 24% of the Danish films of the early 1970s were pornographic should probably be seen in a similar light. As in Sweden and Italy, the sex comedies produced in Denmark at the time, for instance, would probably not be considered pornographic today, but merely of an erotic orientation.

Pornography and explicit sex can mainly be found in three groups of Danish feature films. The first category is actual hard-core pornographic feature films; some of these mix pornography with other genres such as horror and could also be labelled ‘exploitation films’. The second category could be termed ‘sociological films’: a mixture of documentaries and didactic films that aim to identify and explain the new phenomena of pornography or to use the medium to inform and educate about sex; such films offer a critical analysis and commentary on the new phenomenon. The third and final category is sex comedies, which include both pastiche and parody with the depiction of explicit sex.

### **Feature Film Pornography**

In the decade leading up to 1969 Danish feature films tested the borders of mainstream culture and legislation. Johan Jacobsen’s *En fremmed banker på/ A Stranger Knocks* (1959) and the Danish-Swedish production *Jeg en kvinde/ I a Woman* (Ahlberg, 1965) were just two of many such films which included erotic or sexual elements; they are also among the films Schaefer mentions as having created the American view that Denmark and Sweden were sexually liberated countries. Still within the limits of softcore, Annelise Meineche’s *Uden en træv/ Without a Stitch* (1968), the story of an apparently frigid young girl who discovers and explores her sexuality with the help of her doctor and a journey through Europe, was released twice in Denmark. The filmmakers deliberately tested the borders of Danish censorship, and the film was first banned, then released with four minor cuts in 1968, and then again in an uncut version after the legalisation of picture pornography in 1969.

The Danish feature films featuring hard-core pornography produced after 1969 comprised both narrative films as well as non-narrative



compilations of sex-acts. Ole Ege, who had illegally produced and sold short erotic and pornographic films since the late 1950s, was the man behind one of the first pornographic films to premiere in a cinema in Copenhagen: *Pornografi – en musical/ Pornography – a Musical* (1971), a compilation of 10 short films shot before 1969, which included striptease, masturbation, intercourse and group-sex. It premiered in the Copenhagen cinema Carlton, well-known in the 1960s for screening trendy French New Wave films. The cinema's owner, Ove Brusendorff, the former head of the Danish Film Museum, participated in the editing of the film and the original score for the film was partly composed by jazz-musician Dexter Gordon, who lived in Denmark at the time. The participation of such cultural figures in the making of such a film testifies to the fashionable aspect of the first Danish pornographic feature films. This corresponds with McNair's definition of the first wave of *Porn Chic*, which captured the free spirit and open-mindedness of the period from the late 1960 to the mid-1970s during which pornography migrated into mainstream American culture and became visible outside the adult zones and X-rated cinemas. What had

previously forbidden by mainstream culture was suddenly becoming fashionable and tolerated as a by-product of the sexual revolution. In 1972, Ege went on to direct the feature *Bordellet/ The Bordello* (1972), which tells the story of a young girl from the countryside who travels to Copenhagen at the beginning of the 1900s and comes to work at a brothel. Within a simple episodic narrative framework, *The Bordello* mixes hard-core sex scenes with comedy and became a huge success, apparently earning over 1 million Danish Crowns during its first run in cinemas.<sup>21</sup> Anders Sandberg, the producer of the film, stated in an interview that *The Bordello* was exported widely but only in cut versions.<sup>22</sup>

Not much research has been conducted on the distribution and reception of the sex and pornographic films released in cinemas, and as the official box office figures in Denmark only began in 1973, it's difficult to say precisely how many people viewed pornographic films in the cinema or whether the films shown were primarily Danish or imported. Some cinema owners made statements suggesting that showing porn films was bad for business,

while others simply refused to screen pornography. Harry Jepsen, who ran a cinema in the small town of Brørup, initially met with a wave of protests, letters and threats of boycotts when he put on pornographic films, but by late 1972, three years after the legalisation of picture pornography, Jepsen was still holding midnight screening of pornographic films on Fridays and Saturdays and achieving healthy returns. When the Danish feature *Sådan gør de det/ That's How They Do It!* (Ørsted, 1973), a compilation of new and old pornographic shorts, premiered in 1973, Just Betzer, who owned a chain of cinemas in Denmark, believed that porn-fever had peaked two years earlier, but to his great surprise, audiences flocked to the film in the larger towns and he ended up screening it in his Copenhagen cinema.<sup>23</sup> Some of the other Danish productions, like *Liderlige Lisbeth/ The Birthday Party* (1971), were produced in English with the export market in mind, and they were released in Danish cinemas only years later – *The Birthday Party* opened in Denmark in 1977, six years after its original international release, and *Vilde Pornolyster/ The Blue Balloon* (1971) was only released in 1974. In total only about 10-15 pornographic

films of feature-length were actually produced in Denmark between 1970 and 1976.

### **Languages of Love**

In 1968, the future Academy Award winner Gabriel Axel made *Det kære legetøj/ Danish Blue* (1968) as a contribution to the on-going discussion about the liberalisation of pornography. Mixing fictional scenes with staged documentary sequences, the film argued for a lenient attitude towards pornography, and this sociological approach to pornography can also be found in several feature films after 1969.

The Danish sexologist couple Inge and Sten Hegeler were forerunners of informing the Danish public about sex. As early as in 1948, Sten Hegeler had written an introduction to reproduction aimed at children, *Hvordan, mor?/ How, Mother?*, and in 1961 the Hegelers published *Kærlighedens ABZ/ The ABC of Love*, which was reported to the police for violation of the laws against pornography. From 1968 to 1971 they ran an influential correspondence column about sex in the largest Danish newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*, receiving letters from all over Scandinavia and

their column was reprinted in major newspapers in both Sweden and Norway. The Hegeler's also participated in four Swedish-produced educational films about sexuality, beginning with *Ur Kärlekens Språk/ Language of Love* (Wickman, 1969), which combined round-table discussions with the Hegelers and Swedish sexologists with re-enactments depicting the difficulties and problems people faced in their sex life, as well as scenes of actual intercourse, which are legitimised by the pseudo-scientific approach. In a split-screen image, an animation shows the penis inside the vagina and finally an ejaculation together with live-action footage of a couple

engaging in intercourse. As the series of *Language*-films progressed, the sexually explicit scenes became increasingly dominant. Sten Hegeler was well aware of the sensational aspect of showing couples having sex on screen, saying “It may well be pornographic as far as I am concerned (...) but of course, preferably healthy and good porn.”<sup>24</sup> Though the *Language of Love* series never gained a large audience in Denmark, they were exported widely and frequently met with censorship and protests; at the instigation of Cliff Richard, thousands of Brits protested against the film on Trafalgar Square.



Intercourse legitimised by the scientific approach in *Language of Love*

Whereas the *Language of Love* films primarily had an educational goal, the two films *Hvem skal med hvem/ Who Does What to Whom?* (Vest, 1971) and *Sex en gros/ Sex Galore* (Vest, 1971) are more traditional documentaries about the new phenomenon. *Sex Galore* documents the Copenhagen sex industry (porn shops, live shows and massage parlours), while *Who Does What to Whom?* follows a day in the life of film director Bent Næsby shooting a porn movie, culminating with a screening of the film we have seen being made. Both films were intended as critical investigations of the new pornography industry but ended up being shown in cinemas devoted primarily to pornography. The veteran Danish director Annelise Hovmand took a similar sociological approach to pornography in her film *Et døgn med Ilse/ 24 Hours With Ilse* (1971), a part-fiction, part-documentary film about a day in the life of a stripper. Like the *Languages of Love* films, all of these titles offer a critical analysis and commentary on transgression, while simultaneously incorporating transgressive material into the films themselves.

### **Sex Comedies**

The genre that most readily incorporated the transgressive qualities of pornography was comedy. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the combination of comedy and sex was already present in Danish popular comedies; even before the legalization of picture pornography, sexual and erotic themes can be found in comedies such as *Det tossede paradis/ Crazy Paradise* (Axel, 1962) or *Halløj i himmelsengen/ Two Times Two in the Four-poster* (Balling, 1965). After 1969, sex was incorporated further into the Danish comedies. For example, in 1970 Palladium launched the very popular ‘Bedside’ films with *Mazurka på sengekanten/ Bedtime Mazurka* (Hilbard, 1970), eventually producing eight films in the series between 1970 and 1976. With the exception of the last two instalments, the series did not include graphic pornography, only nudity and simulated intercourse, and thus have been called “‘innocent’ porn for everyone.”<sup>25</sup> They are quite similar to the trend of soft-core sex comedies found in other, mainly Western European, countries in the 1970s. In Britain, a new rating system opened a path to a stream of sex comedies, defined by Simon Sheridan as films that combine “all the

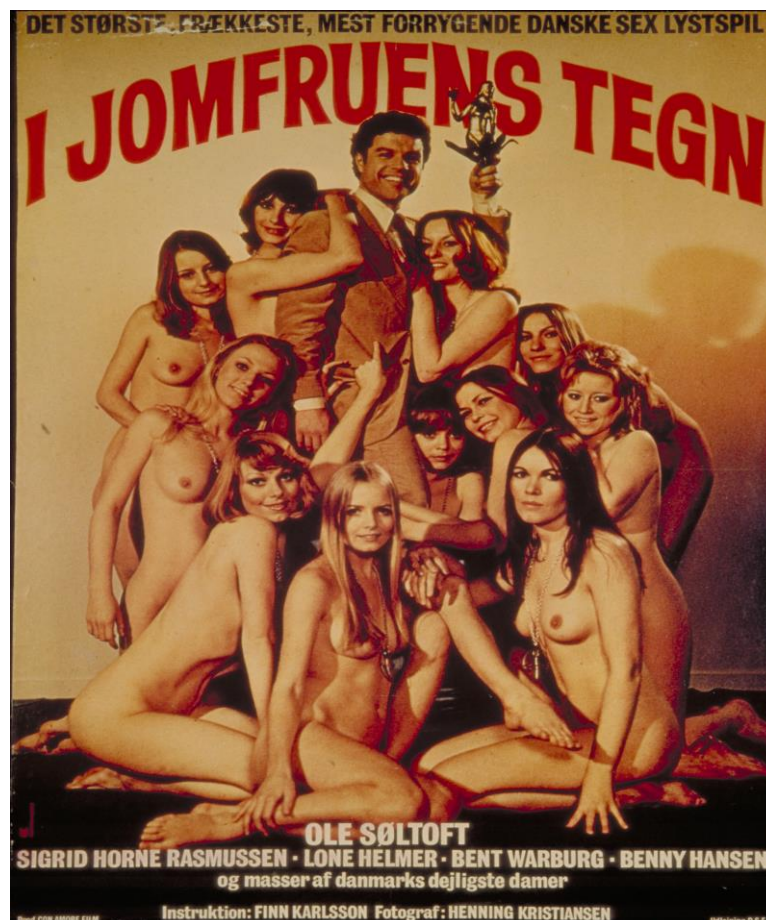
successful elements of TV situation comedy (knockabout plots, gross sexual stereotypes, *double entendres*, familiar suburban settings, crusty old character actors and pretty girls) with a gigantic dollop of nudity and simulated sex.”<sup>26</sup> This characterization can also be applied to Italian sex comedies (see, for example, the essay ‘Death, Desire and Dania’ in this journal issue) and to the more than 40 German ‘Bavarian sex films’, which were simple slapstick comedies foregrounding the rural landscape and mandatory soft-core sex scenes. What all these films have in common is a mix of unsophisticated humour with soft-core sex; the performers are regular actors, the sex is simulated and the production more akin to traditional movie production, as distinct from hard-core pornography where performers are typically sex workers and scenes focus on embodied sexual functions – genitalia, erections and orgasms. The Bedside films allowed a mainstream audience to view soft-core pornography within a popular comedy framework at their local cinema. In this sense, they helped to legitimise pornography. While not typically considered as transgressive, the Bedside comedies nevertheless included subjects (albeit in a jovial and joyous manner)

like homosexuality – officially considered a disease in Denmark until 1981 – in *Sømænd på sengekanten/ Bedside Sailors* (1976), partner swapping in *Der må være en sengekant/ Come to My Bedside* (1975), and sex between elderly people in *Tandlæge på sengekanten/ Bedside Dentist* (1971).

Inspired by the success of *The Bordello*, the producer behind the film, Anders Sandberg, began production of the ‘Zodiac’ series, originally conceived as a series of 12 films, one for each sign of the zodiac, ultimately only six were completed, between 1973 and 1978. The Zodiac films are similar to the Bedside films in their combination of comedy and sex, but whereas the Bedside films were soft-core (with the exception of the last two instalments), the Zodiac films all featured hard-core sex scenes. Within the opening ten minutes of the first Zodiac film, *I jomfruens tegn/ In the Sign of the Virgin* (Karlsson, 1973), the film shows two lesbian sex acts, masturbation, a ‘menage à trois’, oral sex and a ‘money-shot’ of male ejaculation. The generic conventions of hard-core pornography are thus immediately evident in *In the Sign of the Virgin* and this fact was not overlooked by

contemporary reviews. Under the headline ‘Why Did They Leave the Cinema?’ a critic pondered why several members of the audience had left during the opening-night screening: had they been expecting a comedy like the Bedside films? Perhaps they were embarrassed to watch real pornography, or perhaps simply bored?<sup>27</sup> Generic conventions and stars familiar from the sex comedies were used in the promotion of the first Zodiac film; the poster, for instance, announces ‘The biggest, most daring, and boldest Danish sex comedy’ while actor Ole Søltøft, the epitome

of Danish sex comedies who had also appeared in the early Bedside film posters, stands surrounded by nude young girls. In the 1960s, before starring in the Bedside films, Søltøft had made a name for himself by appearing in erotically-oriented comedies. The rather chubby Søltøft was not the obvious choice for an erotic leading man, but he often portrayed a kind of average guy manoeuvring innocently, helplessly and somewhat bewilderedly through a world filled with sexual temptations:



‘The biggest, most daring, and boldest Danish sex comedy’: *In the Sign of the Virgin*

Not only does the poster with Søltoft draw upon the generic familiarities of sex comedies, but in an interview at the premiere, director Finn Karlsson stressed: “It’s not a porn film; it’s an erotic comedy.”<sup>28</sup> According to one reviewer, this was a “misleading trade description,”<sup>29</sup> while another labelled it, “a juicy porn flick,”<sup>30</sup> and a third found the combination of comedy and sex to display “contempt for the audience” – he would have preferred a genuine American porn film.<sup>31</sup> In general, the film was not a success with the critics; it was seen as half-hearted pornography disguising itself as popular comedy. Louise Wallenberg notes that despite explicit straight intercourse, endless close-ups of male and female genitals and hard-core sexual sex acts in the film, “the frivolous, comic character and the unmistakable reference to the old Danish *lystspil* [comedy] was as strong as in the Bedside films.”<sup>32</sup>

With the exception of actor Bent Warburg, it is worth pointing out that none of the established actors took part in the sex scenes. Unlike hard-core features in which the actors portraying the main characters perform the sex acts, the Zodiac films usually had porn-actors perform

the sex acts, while the principal actors are relegated to the role of bystanders. In the few cases when the main characters took part in sex acts, stand-in performers were used for the close-ups. Like the Bedside film the Zodiac series were among the most widely seen films in Denmark in the 1970s.<sup>33</sup>

### **Jesus Christ Sex Star**

Even after the peak of the porn wave in 1969 and the acceptance and incorporation of sex and pornography into many mainstream Danish feature films, the combination of religion and sex could still stir large groups, both in Denmark and internationally. One should not underestimate the reactions that pornography can generate, particularly amongst religious groups; indeed Knud Thestrup, who passed the bill legalising pornography, writes that an elderly lady accused him of working unwittingly for a league promoting the Antichrist’s kingdom on earth.<sup>34</sup> The political party Kristeligt Folkeparti/Christian People’s Party was founded in 1970 as a reaction to the liberalisation of picture pornography and abortion in 1973, and the party entered the Danish parliament in late 1973.

Combining Christianity and pornography thus provided a means to provoke and stir public opinion even during a time of liberalisation. Artist and provocateur Jens Jørgen Thorsen's adaption of American author Henry Miller's novel, *Stille dage i Clichy/ Quite Days in Clichy* (1969), was presented at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival and its freshness and open-minded depiction of sex, including shots of penetration, was received fairly positively. On the back of this success, Thorsen was granted funding from the Danish Film Institute to make a film depicting the human side of Jesus – including his sex life. No one had anticipated the reaction: demonstrations took place in the streets and protest-letters were received from all over the world, including from the Pope and the Queen of England, together with threats of boycotting Danish goods. The Social Democratic Minister of Culture, Niels Mathiasen, withdrew the grant – not because of obscenity, but because Thorsen violated the *droit moral* of the Bible; in other words, Thorsen had violated the authorship rights of the Bible. The decision to withdraw the grant was challenged in court, and in 1989 the case was finally settled to Thorsen's advantage. Thorsen never realised his original

Jesus-film (although Martin Scorsese later encountered similar controversy for depicting the human and sexual side of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988), but he went on to direct a different film about Jesus two decades later, *Jesus vender tilbage/ The Return* (1992), although the film was poorly received by critics and only achieved a cinema audience of 7,451.<sup>35</sup>

When the protests against Thorsen's original Jesus project peaked, cinema-owner Ib Fyrsting reacted swiftly on the media-attention to make *Jeg så Jesus dø/ I Saw Jesus Die* (1975), a hard-core version of parts of the New Testament, which illustrated Jesus' parables with hard-core scenes. Visually, the film is quite primitive; most scenes are filmed in unedited long shots and the sound is mostly comprised of post-synchronised voice-over and music; a limestone quarry makes a poor substitute for the Sinai Desert and the interior sets are quite obviously hand-painted. Around the middle of the film, Jesus is captured by Roman soldiers and thrown in Jail; two fellow inmates are granted their last wish to have sex with young women, but Jesus refuses the temptation of a female Satan masturbating in



front of him. The director Fyrsting stressed that he had found no evidence of a sexually active Jesus in the New Testament, and so didn't depict Jesus having sex in the film.<sup>36</sup> Despite the heated situation surrounding Thorsen's Jesus-film, *I Saw Jesus Die* hardly made any headlines at its release.

### **Exploiting Sex**

Just as Thorsen's Jesus project and *I Saw Jesus Die* challenged Christian morals, another feature film had already provided equally challenging; the makers of the feature *Englene/ Angels/ History of Rape* (1973), directed by Jørgen Hallum, clearly stated, "We will scratch the bourgeoisie in the eyes."<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, not much information about the film is available and apparently only one copy was ever produced, only parts of which have survived (and are now available on the DVD *Hell's Raping Angels-History of Rape*). In an episodic narrative *Angels* tells the story of a group of bikers riding bikes, drinking and having sex. In one representative scene, young candidates for confirmation and their parents sit in a church when the bikers enters and begin harassing them; the parents flee and the priest tries to protect the candidates but is

crucified while the young female candidates either have sex or are raped in front of the altar. Although *Angels* only sold 10,218 tickets, the film made some headlines in the Danish media.<sup>38</sup> A cinema owner screening the film in his cinema warned against the film on national television, which he found "horrible and disgusting" leading him to take the extraordinary step of (unofficially) increasing the classification of the film from 16 to 18 years of age.<sup>39</sup> Some considered the cinema owner's statement as the kind of publicity stunt typical of distribution and exhibition tactics in the exploitation film sector. The cinema even received a bomb threat – if *Angels* was not taken off the billboard, a hand grenade would be thrown at the cinema.

Religion plays no part of yet another exploitation film with hard-core sex: the low-budget American-Danish *Dværgen/ The Sinful Dwarf* (Raski, 1973). The story of a dwarf (Torben Bille) who drugs young women and offers the sedated girls to customers, the film was deliberately filmed in English, with locations that bore no trace of being in Denmark, as the makers clearly had their eye on the export market. It was first released in an

abridged version in the United States, and then uncut a year later in Denmark.



The dwarf sedates and prostitutes young beautiful girls in *The Sinful Dwarf*

These exploitation titles challenged taboos by combining sex and Christianity or sex and violence emerged after the Danish porn wave had ebbed. The novelty of sex and pornography had worn off, and these exploitative and provocative films can be understood as an attempt to revitalise the subcultural, transgressive potential of sex and pornography within a more liberal climate, but they never really attracted a Danish audience.

### **The End of an Era**

The last *Bedside* comedy was produced in 1976, and hardly any feature-length Danish pornographic films were produced after 1975 apart from the later *Zodiac* films, the last of which was released in 1978. Apart from a few cinemas in Copenhagen and late night screenings, pornography left the mainstream cinemas and returned to the closed circles of private homes upon the advent of home video. Kutchinsky stated that the sale of pornographic

magazines had decreased from 4.5 million before 1969 to two million ten years later; meanwhile, the percentage of films designed solely for export had increased to 95%.<sup>40</sup>

Even though Denmark had become known internationally for liberalising pornography and, for a short time, held a unique position within international markets, by the end of the 1970s most pornographic production had returned to a similar situation to the one that existed prior to the 1969 change in legislation: short pornographic films shot and distributed on Super 8 film, VHS cassettes made for viewing in private, and pornographic magazines. Overall, not many feature-length films centred on or including hard-core imagery were produced in Denmark.

### **Conclusion**

Following McNair's cycle of liberalisation, one can argue that the transgressive element was gradually incorporated into mainstream culture; what was once forbidden was now available to everyone, but, as the Danish feature films demonstrate, this process took place through the use of established and accepted film genres and forms and relied on

ordinary institutionalised cinemas.

Pornography was commented upon and analysed in didactic and documentary features like *The Language of Love* and *Sex Galore* and subcultural sex was incorporated and commodified through the use of genre in the soft-core and hard-core sex comedies, while the *Zodiac* films provided a peculiar example of how hard-core pornography crossed over into mainstream, institutionalised cinema. Exploitative and provocative films like *I Saw Jesus Die*, *Angels* and *The Sinful Dwarf* were produced after the initial wave of liberation had taken place, pushing borders even further in an ultimately doomed attempt to bring even more transgressive material into the mainstream.

In his book on the history of Danish pornography up to 1969, Morten Thing states that the borders of culture set the definition of pornography; without taboos and borders, no transgression is possible.<sup>41</sup> Denmark's temporarily unique position as a liberal oasis for the depiction of sexually explicit cinema therefore provided a window and a market for the production of mainstream pornographic cinema, but this liberalism ultimately limited

its transgressive potential and diminished its appeal, returning it to the subcultural position from which it came.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Edström, M. (1970) "Pornfilm miljonindustri i USA", *Dagens Nyheter* 4 January; Pedro (1970) "Dansk: pornografi – Svensk: Erotisk filmkunst", *Demokraten Århus*, 15 February; Heindry, J. (1997) "What Wild Ecstasy. The Rise and Fall of the Sexual Revolution". New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 54; and Schaefer, E. (2014) "'I'll Take Sweden': the Shifting Discourse of the 'Sexy Nation' in Sexploitation Films", in *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 207-234.

<sup>2</sup> McNair, B. (2013) *Porno? Chic!*. London: Routledge, 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> Kutchinsky, B. (1973) "Pornografi", In: Diderichsen, A. & Israel, J. (eds.) *Sexologi*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels forlag, 277-278.

<sup>4</sup> Thestrup, K. (1976) *Mit livs gågade*. Copenhagen: Det Schønbergske Forlag, 285.

<sup>5</sup> Kutchinsky, B. (1970) *Studies on Pornography and Sex Crimes in Denmark, a Report to the US Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*. Copenhagen: Social Science Monographs, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Tjerrild, O. (ed)(1970) *Sexionary*. København: Teamwork, Glentevej 57, S.P.H. Trading.

<sup>7</sup> Kutchinsky 1970: 15 and Palmer, R. (1971) "Pornography is Big Buiness in Britain", *Business Observer*, 15 August 1971.

<sup>8</sup> Kutchinsky 1970: 15.

<sup>9</sup> Heidenry 1997: 54.

<sup>10</sup> Schaefer 2014: 221.

<sup>11</sup> Kutchinsky 1970: 28.

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, Jack (2012) "Why", In: Jon Nordstrøm (ed.) *Dansk porno* København: Nordstrøms, 292-296, (295).

<sup>13</sup> Webb, P. (1983) *The Erotic Arts*. London: Secker & Warburg Ltd, p. 416.

<sup>14</sup> Kutchinsky 1973: 273.

<sup>15</sup> Heidenry 1997: 57

<sup>16</sup> Williams, L. (1999) *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 296.

<sup>17</sup> Schepeleern, Peter (1976) "Filmkunsten i 70'ernes Danmark (eller: Det er ikke til at bære)", *Kosmorama*, 130, 110-114 (110).

<sup>18</sup> Nissen, D. (2001) "Alternativernes år", in: Peter Schepeleern (ed), *100 års dansk film*. København: Rosinante, 237-278 (265).

<sup>19</sup> Larsson, M. (2009) "Drawing the Line: Generic Boundaries of the Pornographic Film in Early 1970s Sweden", In: *Codex and Code, Aesthetics, Language and Politics in an Age of Digital Media*, Stockholm, August 6-9, 2009, avaiable from:

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<http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/042/031/ecp0942031.pdf>, accessed 11 April 2015, 398.

<sup>20</sup> Celli, C. & Cottino-Jones, M. (2007) *A New Guide to Italian Cinema*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 116.

<sup>21</sup> Rud (1972a) "Bordellet runder millionen", *Ekstra Bladet*, 3 November.

<sup>22</sup> Rud (1972b) "Kun vi får sandheden om bordellet", *Ekstra Bladet*, 26 July.

<sup>23</sup> Rud (1972c) "Gør det for turisterne", *Ekstra Bladet* 12 June.

<sup>24</sup> Bjørklund, E. (2012) *The Most Delicate Subject. A History of Sex Education Films in Sweden*. Lund: Centre for Languages and Litterature, 192.

<sup>25</sup> Wallenberg, L. (2005) "Mazurka på Sengenkanten/Bedroom Mazurka", In Soila, T. (ed.) *The Cinema of Scandinavia*, London: Wallflower Press, 161-169 (162).

<sup>26</sup> Sheridan, Simon (2001) *Keeping the British End up* London: Reynolds & Hearn, 18.

<sup>27</sup> sh, (1973) "Hvorfor mon de forlod biografen?", *Ringkøbing Amts Dagblad*, 2 October.

<sup>28</sup> Rud (1973) "Skuespillere og pornofolk samarbejder i jomfruens tegn", *Ekstra Bladet*, 23 April.

<sup>29</sup> Voeler, K. (1973), "Erotisk lystspil – nej, slet og ret en sjofelhed, falsk varebetegnelse", *Aktuelt*, 23 July.

<sup>30</sup> Fleko (1973) "Porno I Pigeskolen", *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, 25 July.

<sup>31</sup> Fgj. (1973) "Foragt for publikum", *Berlingske Tidende*, 24 July.

<sup>32</sup> Wallenberg 2005: 162.

<sup>33</sup> Anon. (undated) "Cinema and Film", *Statistics Denmark*, available from: <http://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/film-boeger-og-medier/biografer-og-film.aspx>, accessed 11 April 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Thestrup 1976: 286.

<sup>35</sup> Anon. (undated) "Cinema and Film", *Statistics Denmark*, available from: <http://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/film-boeger-og-medier/biografer-og-film.aspx>, accessed 11 April 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Stevenson 2010: 240.

<sup>37</sup> Hall, E. (1973) "Vi vil kradse borgerskabet i øjnene", *Ugens Rapport*, 23, July.

<sup>38</sup> Anon. (undated) "Cinema and Film", *Statistics Denmark*, available from: <http://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/film-boeger-og-medier/biografer-og-film.aspx>, accessed 11 April 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Anon. (1973) "Biografmand imod sin egen film", *Middelfart Venstreblad*, 18 September.

<sup>40</sup> Anon. (1979) "Vi køber mindre porno – men vi sælger mere", *Aktuelt*, 14 July.

<sup>41</sup> Thing, M. (1999) *Pornografiens historie i Danmark*. Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 152.