

## Drawing the Line: Generic Boundaries of the Pornographic Film in Early 1970s Sweden

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The article focuses on the advertising for, and reception of, sexually explicit films following the removal of the obscenity clause in the Swedish penal code in 1971. Many films released at this time have gone down in Swedish film history as “more or less” pornographic, although from a present-day perspective they would most probably not be described that way. While pornographic films – so called “stag films” – had been produced since the early twentieth century, it was nevertheless not until the 1960s that sexually explicit material could be shown publicly and not until the 1970s that pornographic films became available to a wider audience. As a film genre then, pornography underwent an important transformation at this point in time. If, prior to this point, it had been clearly defined by its forbidden and clandestine circulation, and more or less exclusively directed towards a male audience, in the early 1970s, those clearly defined boundaries dissolved under a more relaxed attitude from authorities. This led to a re-negotiation of the genre, which is discussed in the article with the aid of film scholar Rick Altman’s theory of how genres are shaped and how they develop, through mutual and complex processes in which producers, audiences, and critics are involved. Mapping the use of generic labels in advertisements, articles and reviews, and censorship records for a few case studies such as for instance *More From the Language of Love*, *Anita – Swedish Nymphet* (*Anita – ur en tonårsflickas dagbok*, 1973), and *Flossie* (1974), as well as exhibition practices, the article traces the development of the pornographic film as a genre during the first half of the 1970s.

## Introduction

In the 1970s, the Swedish film industry went into a decline, after some productive years that had been the result of the Swedish film reform in 1963. During the 1970s, film production decreased, theatre attendance continued steadily to drop, as it had since television was introduced in 1956, and only a small number of films succeeded commercially or critically. Nonetheless, there are two notable exceptions to this general picture: children's films and what is usually referred to as pornographic films. Both of these genres can be regarded as somewhat beside the mainstream of art films as well as of popular films, but whereas the children's film at least is acknowledged, the pornographic film is usually not elaborated on by established film historians but rather explained as films made for export (that is, an unfortunate but not actually a truly Swedish phenomenon).<sup>1</sup>

According to standard Swedish film history, however, approximately one fifth of the production of feature length films for theatrical release during the decade consisted of "more or less advanced pornographic films."<sup>2</sup> Through a rudimentary generic categorization of Swedish films in *Svensk filmografi 7*, one can estimate that the number is correct. Of the 205 films listed there, at least 40 films can be described as "more or less" pornographic.

The increase in the production of this type of film had to do with the fact that in 1971, the obscenity clause of the Swedish penal code had been removed. In one fell swoop, pornography became legalized and could be displayed, sold, and exhibited freely. However, the process had begun even earlier. National film censorship had been easing up since Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*) was approved in 1963. Thus, films became more sexually explicit during the 1960s and when Vilgot Sjöman's *I am curious – yellow* (*Jag är nyfiken – gul*) premiered in 1967, its sex scenes did not cause much of a stir in Sweden.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, during the sixties both sex shops and what was generally referred to as sex clubs had developed. Among other attractions, these shops and clubs also exhibited pornographic films. One of the reasons for the removal of the obscenity clause was that it had become obsolete and difficult to enforce. All the same, after 1971, what had existed under the threat of prosecution could now legally flourish in the open. Compared to the earlier situation, the production of this type of film was relatively risk-free, and as a result, the number of films made increased. Additionally, the share of more or less pornographic films was affected by the fact that the production of films in general had declined.

What must be kept in mind though, is that feature-length, most often narrative films for theatrical distribution were not the only pornographic films produced and distributed in Sweden. Through mail order and in the sex shops, people could purchase or rent 8mm films, to be screened at home. Many of these were imported, but at least some were probably produced in Sweden.<sup>4</sup> Few of them have left any official records – *Svensk filmografi* only lists feature-length films for theatrical release and the National Board of Film Censors (Statens biografbyrå) only have records of films released for public screenings. These films are more closely related to the earlier "stag films" – the clandestinely produced and distributed one-reelers which depicted a diverse number of sexual acts and were shown mostly to private, all-exclusive male audiences, in brothels and, sometimes, at secret midnight screenings in regular

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1 Leif Furhammar, *Filmen i Sverige: En historia i tio kapitel*, Höganäs: Wiken, 1991, p. 329.

2 Furhammar, 1991, p. 328-329.

3 Anders Åberg, *Tabu: Filmaren Vilgot Sjöman*, Lund: Filmhäftet, 2001, p. 192-198, Lena Lennerhed, *Frihet att njuta: den svenska sexualdebatten på 1960-talet*, Stockholm: Norstedts, 1994, p. 248.

4 This information is based on ads for mail order porn films and sex shops, as well as on incidental evidence, verbal accounts, and other clues.

theatres.<sup>5</sup> The stag film era took place between the first few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the late sixties, and is usually said to be replaced by the narrative, feature length pornographic films of the 1970s, the “golden age of porn” which in its turn continues until the breakthrough of VCR.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of the present article is to discuss the “more or less” pornographic films of the estimate made from the corpus of theatrically released Swedish feature films. Many of the films in question could perhaps better be categorized as “sex films” rather than pornography. They vary quite extensively in their sexual explicitness. Some of them are educational, others distant relatives to the American sexploitation genre, some are softcore and still others hardcore. Pornography is usually defined along the lines of “sexually explicit material with the intent of sexual arousal”, but it is possible to fine-tune that definition by, for instance, using it specifically to refer to hardcore imagery – graphic representations of sexual activity, complete with close-ups of genitals during intercourse. Additionally, one can include an industrial consensus – pornography is, in this sense, produced by pornographers, often organized in clusters in particular spots around the globe (e. g. Budapest in Europe,<sup>7</sup> San Fernando Valley in the US), confers to certain intrinsic norms and conventions, relates to outside pressure by maintaining some kind of self-censorship or practices which minimize for instance the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI), and works in general according to a capitalist, entrepreneurial, albeit subcultural, logic.<sup>8</sup>

According to these present-day understandings of pornography, a large number of these forty or so films would not qualify as porn films. Even to call them “more or less pornographic” would be stretching “more or less” to breaking point. Still, the notion of the Swedish production of feature length porn films during the 1970s must come from somewhere. My main hypothesis is inspired by literature scholar Walter Kendrick’s notion that pornography is defined by the boundaries of censorship and control and film scholar Rick Altman’s contention that genres are discursively made.<sup>9</sup> In the present article, I propose to discuss what happened to the label “pornography” when the obscenity clause was removed and once illegal material could be exhibited publicly, and ask what happens in the period Kendrick terms “post-pornographic” in a specific, Swedish context.

Although pornographic films – so called “stag films” – had been produced since the early twentieth century, it was nevertheless not until the 1960s that sexually explicit material could be shown and not until the 1970s that pornographic films became available to a wider audi-

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5 The existence of secret screenings of porn films at regular theatres has been convincingly demonstrated by Tommy Gustafsson in Gustafsson & Maria Larsson, “Porren inför lagen. Två fallstudier angående den officiella attityden till offentligt visad pornografisk film 1921 och 1971”, *Historisk Tidskrift*, 2009:3, p. 445-465.

6 Cf. Eric Schaefer, “Gauging a revolution: 16 mm film and the rise of the pornographic feature” in Linda Williams (ed.), *Porn studies* (Durham and London 2004) p. 370–400, Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible’*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 1999 [1989], Peter Lehman, “Revelations about Pornography” in Peter Lehman (ed.), *Pornography: Film and Culture*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006, p. 87-98.

7 On Budapest as one center of pornography production in Europe, cf. Katalin Szoverfy Milter and Joseph W. Slade, “Global Traffic in Pornography: The Hungarian Example”, in Lisa Z. Sigel (ed.), *International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography 1800-2000*, New Brunswick, New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 173-204.

8 In a rather different mode, Swedish literature scholar Magnus Ullén argues that the defining trait of pornography – its “pornographicity,” as it were – does not derive from the pornographic discourse at all, but from the way we relate to it. Magnus Ullén, *Bara för dig: Pornografi, Konsumtion, Berättande*, Stockholm/Sala: Vertigo förlag, 2009.

9 Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 1996 (1986) and Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: BFI publishing, 1999.

ence. If pornography had earlier been clearly defined by its forbidden and clandestine circulation, more or less exclusively directed towards a male audience, in the early 1970s, those clearly defined boundaries dissolved under a more relaxed attitude from authorities. As a film genre then, pornography underwent an important transformation at this point in time. Altman has claimed that film genres develop through a complex process in which producers, audiences, and critics are mutually involved.<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I will discuss the development of the pornographic film as a genre during the first half of the 1970s, mapping the use of generic labels in advertisements, articles and reviews, and censorship records for a few case studies, as well as considering exhibition practices. I want to underline that the results of this study should be regarded as preliminary – an exhaustive overview of the uses of the word “pornography” as a genre label would need to include more empirical material. One could say that this is a pilot case study, which demonstrates the potential of further enquiries into the subject.

### Sex films, nude films, sex educational films

For this article, I will focus on a few films, emphasizing the earliest ones, which are *More From the Language of Love* (Swe, *Mera ur kärlekens språk*, Torgny Wickman, 1970) and *Bedtime Mazurka* (Dk, *Mazurka på sengekanten*, John Hilbard, 1970). Other films that are used as reference points are *Anita – Swedish Nymphet* (Swe, *Anita – ur en tonårsflickas dagbok*, Torgny Wickman, 1973), *In the Sign of the Virgin* (Dk, *I jomfruens tegn*, 1973), *Flossie* (Swe, Mac Ahlberg, 1975) and *Happy Family* (Swe, *Den k... familjen*, Heinz Arland, 1976).

These films have been chosen because they vary in sexual explicitness – some of them would probably not be described as pornographic today. *More From the Language of Love* is the second instalment in a series of sex educational films made by director Torgny Wickman, the first being *The Language of Love (Ur kärlekens språk*, 1969). It contains very explicit material, albeit framed by didactic and informative conversations between psychologists, physicians and therapists which describe sexual minorities, discuss the sexuality of people with disabilities, and explain sexually transmitted diseases. *Bedtime Mazurka* and *In the Sign of the Virgin* are both Danish films, often categorized together in film histories as Danish “happy porn” (“gladporr”). Both of the films have high production values but *Bedtime Mazurka*, based on works by Danish author Carl Erik Soya, is extremely discreet in depicting sexual acts.

Director Torgny Wickman did not only make sex educational films, although his other films too seem brought about by a sexual mission. *Anita* is a “sexual problem” film and as such, a distant relative to the American exploitation films of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as described by film scholar Eric Schaefer.<sup>11</sup> It tells the story of a nymphomaniac who is cured by a psychology student, and seems to proclaim a message of tolerance and sexual education. Although the female lead, famous model Christina Lindberg, is shown naked and in several sexual situations, the film is not graphic in its representations of sexual intercourse. Lindberg herself has described this as well as the other films she starred in during the early 1970s as “nude films” (“nakenfilmer”), which I think is an apt description.

Another prominent star of the 1970s, Marie Forså, plays the female lead in *Flossie*. Famously, neither Lindberg nor Forså agreed to do hardcore scenes. There is a hardcore version of *Flossie*, as well as of some of Lindberg’s films. In these, stand-ins are used for the close-ups of penetration. Nevertheless, in today’s terms, even without the hardcore scenes

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10 Altman, 1999.

11 Eric Schaefer, “*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*” *A History of the American Exploitation Film 1919-1959*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999.

*Flossie* would probably be described as a porn film (albeit softcore), since it is based on an erotic novella from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, its focus is entirely on sexual matters, and the narrative is mainly a frame for the different sexual numbers being depicted.

Finally, *Happy Family* is a regular hardcore Swedish porn film. It contains graphic representations of sexual intercourse in close-ups, erect penises and cum shots, just like in the standard definition of a pornographic film. Furthermore, it contains a narrative, which is said to be a distinguishing feature of 1970s porn film.<sup>12</sup>

One could describe all of the above films as “sex films” – films which have sex as their main topic, but frame it in various ways and go to various lengths in how explicit and graphic their representations of sexual activity are. One could then organize them in subgenres such as “educational”, “sexual comedy”, “sexual problem/nude film”, “softcore/erotica”, and “hardcore”. Nonetheless, all of the above films have been described, or discussed, as pornographic. Altman has contended that “genres must be understood discursively, i.e., as language that not only purports to describe a particular phenomenon, but that is also addressed by one party to another, usually for a specific, identifiable purpose”, which implies that genres are discursively constructed categories which may or may not speak to immanent responses in humans (like the Aristotelian notion that the tragedy arouses pity and fear), but which are created by what discourses are used to talk about them.<sup>13</sup> Considering that films – almost without exception – are made and marketed for audiences, Altman’s claim is reasonable enough. There are always contexts that shape what genre a film is understood as belonging to. Even ambiguous films – such as certain art films – have their posters designed in order for the potential audience to form a picture of what they are about to see, have critics describing them in certain terms and, sometimes, are distinguished by a discussion as to what genre they may belong to (a black comedy with a satirical twist, a horror story etc). Thinking about genre, in short, is central to thinking about film and understanding film history.

### The porn film as a film genre

Altman argues that genres are constructed and negotiated by producers and production companies, audiences, critics and reviewers, film historians and so on, but also by different national censorship or rating institutions.<sup>14</sup> The case of the porn film in the US illustrates quite well the relation between the rating system and generic labelling. Obsolete and problematic, the self-imposed censorship of the Hollywood production code was abandoned in 1967 in favour of a rating system, implemented by the very same Motion Pictures Producers Association of America (MPPAA) which had earlier handled the production code. The rating system offered a handful of labels for films, such as G – general audiences, PG – parental guidance, R – restricted and X – unrated. All labels were registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Offices except the X-designation. The X was left unregistered because producers would be able to choose to use that rating themselves without going through the MPPAA. However, the adult industry quickly adopted the X-rating for its own purposes, using it to flaunt its films’ unrated, uncensored and uninhibited character. As Altman states: “[M]akers of adult films firmly identify the genre with the rating itself.”<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the case of the American adult (or pornographic) film industry points to the tendency within the low genres – grindhouse, mondo, exploitation, pornography, horror etc – to accentuate their own forbidden, censored, or transgressive nature. For instance, the Swedish

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12 Cf Williams, 1999 (1989).

13 Altman, 1999, p. 121.

14 Altman, 1999, p. 110-111.

15 Altman p 111, 110-111. The X-rating was later replaced by NC-17 (no one seventeen and under admitted) by the MPAA. The NC-17 designation was patented.

film *Thriller – a cruel picture* (*Thriller – en grym film*, Bo A. Vibenius) from 1974 with Christina Lindberg was at first banned by the National Board of Film Censors. When it was finally released after some re-editing, its marketing focused on the (incorrect) fact that it was “the first totally-banned Swedish film!”<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, defining pornographic films according to their rating is not enough. The rating system is decidedly American, although the X-rating has taken on a ubiquitous meaning, signalling porn basically anywhere in the world. One could use the X-rating as a starting point for a definition of pornography in general as that which is forbidden or regulated on the grounds of being obscene, or clearly labelled as obscene. Walter Kendrick’s analysis of pornography in *The Secret Museum* as that which is put away in order to protect volatile members of society – women, children, the lower class etc – provides, as mentioned earlier, an insightful perspective.<sup>17</sup> As Linda Williams explains Kendrick’s definition: “pornography is simply whatever representations a particular dominant class or group does not want in the hands of another, less dominant class or group.”<sup>18</sup> Even looking at for instance the discussion of pornography when Sweden decided to abolish the obscenity clause in the penal code or how the anti-porn argument of the women’s movement is construed, one can note that the shameful, forbidden and inhibited nature of pornography is underlined. Although the proponents of the abolishment of the obscenity clause were pro-porn or rather, anti-censorship, and the women’s movement was anti-porn, both sides comment on what they perceive of as the fact that pornography thrives on an idea of sexuality as a dirty secret, something which is repressed in society.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, like many other film genres such as the Western or the detective film, the film genre of pornography is related to other cultural forms as well – there is pornographic literature, pornographic magazines and a number of other pornographic forms such as statues or statuettes, live-shows and stripshows, video games, sex chats and telephone sex. Although these different forms have different audiences and have been perceived of differently by cultural and political institutions in society, they are nonetheless interrelated and influence each other as well as the discussion of the genre of pornography. This is not necessarily a problem – there are studies of other genres which include historical overviews where a genre’s origin is traced to art, theatre and/or literature. The Western, for instance, originates not only from a literary genre but also from painting and from political speeches and writings.<sup>20</sup>

Altman proposes what he calls a “semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach” for the discussion of film genres.<sup>21</sup> The semantic approach takes into consideration the audio-visual and thematic aspects of the films in question and the syntactic perspective analyzes elements such as narrative structure and recurring motifs. The pragmatic approach focuses on how genres are used and discussed. Altman contends that genres are not stable entities, but change and evolve over time. Furthermore, one film can be defined as belonging to one genre upon its first release and later be redefined as belonging to another. They change in accordance to how we look at them, use them, and talk about them. My focus here will not mainly be on the semantic/syntactic aspects of the films that are the object of study, but on how they are perceived and discussed – by critics, in the marketing and exhibition practices and by the Swed-

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16 The first “totally-banned” Swedish film was Victor Sjöströms *Trädgårdsmästaren* in 1912.

17 Kendrick, 1996 (1986).

18 Williams, 1999 (1989), p. 12.

19 Cf Leif Silbersky & Carlösten Nordmark, *Såra tukt och sedlighet: en debattbok om pornografin*, Stockholm: Prisma, 1969 and Maud Hägg & Barbro Werkmäster, *Kvinnor och sex*, Göteborg: Författarförlaget, 1973.

20 Cf Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

21 Altman, 1999, p. 207-215.

ish equivalent to the rating system, namely Statens Biografbyrå, the National Board of Film Censors.

### Exhibition contexts

In Sweden, at this point in time, film was most regularly screened in cinemas. All films for public exhibition were required by law to pass through the National Board of Film Censors. However, it was not until the debate about video violence in the early eighties that the government felt the need to regulate home screenings as well. In the 1970s, the national film censorship ignored private screenings of pornographic films, since they were not encompassed by the cinema law (“biografafförordningen”). The entire consumption of 8mm pornographic films was thus excluded from regulation, as long as the films in question kept within Swedish law in other respects. In theory, this means that they were illegal until the removal of the obscenity clause. In practice, the sale and rental of this type of pornographic film was established during the sixties and as the national film censorship became more lenient towards sexually explicit images in ordinary feature films, it became more and more difficult to take legal action against these films. Furthermore, the films could be bought through mail order, but they were also screened at clandestine sex clubs and in sex stores. In the 1970s, the sex clubs did not need to operate clandestinely anymore and at least some of them also began screening films which were 16mm and had passed through censorship.<sup>22</sup>

The films I am dealing with here, however, were all – with one exception – exhibited at regular cinemas, as opposed to the “sex cinemas” dealt with in an article in Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* from 1970. The *Dagens Nyheter* article illustrates the importance of obscenity law and censorship in defining the genre of pornographic film, as well as the importance of the exhibition context. In the beginning, the author states: “It is a poorly kept secret that there is a rich and blooming undergrowth of more or less obscure and clandestine porn film clubs. These, however, will be disregarded in this article, which will only focus on the ‘open’ market, those sex cinemas into which anyone can be admitted under the condition that they are at least fifteen years old.”<sup>23</sup> The article deals with the cinemas in Stockholm which show legal “sex films” and not the clubs which show porn films that may or may not have been examined by the National Board of Film Censors. The only reference to porn is made in that first paragraph – aside from that, films with explicit sexual content are called “sex films”. My interpretation of this terminology is that the writer aims to separate the illicit from the legal, and that although the films may or may not be similar, they are different in their institutional status. Another interesting line is drawn by the director of the Swedish cinema owners’ association (Svenska biografägarförbundet) who is interviewed in the article. He has no complaints about the sex cinemas in Sweden. What he does not like, however, is when the porn clubs call themselves “cinemas” in the advertisements. This probably has to do with cinema’s historical problem of respectability and implies that cinemas and cinema owners needed to draw a firm line between themselves and any illegal activity.<sup>24</sup>

### The Danes’ intelligent handling of pornography – *Bedtime Mazurka* and *The Sign of the Virgin*

Nonetheless, the words “porn”, “porno”, “pornographic” or “pornography” were used frequently in the ads, referring to different types of films but simultaneously placing those dif-

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22 Gustafsson & Larsson, 2009.

23 Göran Sellgren, “Sexbiograferna ökar liksom publikens krav”, *Dagens Nyheter* December 20, 1970.

24 Sellgren *Dagens Nyheter* December 20, 1970.

ferent films under a highly eye-catching label. They were also used in reviews and articles in the newspapers.

*Bedtime Mazurka* is described in an article concerned with the commercial success of the film as “giggle porn” (“fnissporr”).<sup>25</sup> Later, in the same tabloid, in a column, another journalist explains how he became curious about the film and went to see it. Here, too, the giggle aspect of the film is underlined in the introduction. “It was not the usual Nordic solemnity between the sheets. [---] Besides, it is wrong to call *Bedtime Mazurka* a porn film. Porn films are crowded with people without the upper body. In *Bedtime Mazurka*, you could look the people in the eyes. Too.”<sup>26</sup> He further contends that the film has no more to do with reality than porn films, which makes it into a “trifle”, but that this trifle nonetheless is “good-looking” and “softer”.

In the largest Swedish daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, prominent film critic Mauritz Edström in a short but all-in-all favourable review of the same film called it a “comedy from the age of porn”. Although he too implies that the film is of little weight, he still concludes that “But for once it becomes not only porn but also a real tone of Soya’s erotic cheeriness.”<sup>27</sup> Apparently, *Bedtime Mazurka* was found to be too good to be porn, although it was close enough to that genre for critics to feel the need to distinguish it from porn by claiming that it was not porn, or at least not “only porn” or “simply porn”. Compared with how people probably would regard *Bedtime Mazurka* today, my impression is that the problem would be the other way around – as a critic/film scholar, I would have to explain how it ever could have been discussed in those terms.

The favorable reception of *Bedtime Mazurka* – which was a huge commercial success in Sweden – shaped the overall perception of Danish cinema and it became a reference point for later films. Although its pornographic elements are ever so small and ever so discreet, it still set the standard for Danish “happy porn”. Like Altman notes, a cycle of films following a successful formula form the basis for a new genre or subgenre.<sup>28</sup> The Danish “Bedside”-films and later, the more explicit “Sign”-films, set a perceived precedent for a national subgenre. In a 1975 article about the current situation for Danish film, the very first sentence says “Danish film – is it only happy porn and full speed at the bedside?”<sup>29</sup> When *The Sign of the Virgin* was released in Sweden in 1973, the strategy of aligning it with other films is employed: “Ole ‘Mazurka’ Søltoft in the largest, most audacious and funniest Danish sex-porn comedy” the advertisement states boldly.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the review of the film finds the film lacking in comparison with the earlier prototype. “One used to speak about Danish happy porn, how intelligent it was and with what wit the Danes handled pornography. That was when the first ‘Mazurka’-film came. But those days are long gone. The latest production with Ole Søltoft hits rock bottom.”<sup>31</sup>

### “An adequate declaration of contents” – *More From the Language of Love*

Other interesting arguments are found in the records of the National Board of Film Censors from the procedure dealing with *More From the Language of Love*. *More From the Language of Love* was submitted the Board on September 1, 1970. It premiered on November 18, 1970.

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25 Bertil Behring, “Mazurkan går över Sverige: Fnissporr ger bion 1 miljon”, *Kvällsposten* February 7, 1971.

26 Tore Borglund, ”Ömhet och politik hör ihop”, *Kvällsposten* April 20, 1970.

27 Mauritz Edström, “Rolig dansk fräckis”, *Dagens Nyheter* December 27, 1970.

28 Altman, 1999, p. 61.

29 Kerstin Sedvallson, ”Inte bara gladporr i dagens danska filmer”, *Dagens Nyheter* December 18, 1975.

30 *Dagens Nyheter*, August 13, 1973.

31 Thorleif Hellbom, ”Danska gladporren en saga blott”, *Dagens Nyheter* August 14, 1973.



The process was prolonged because of two reasons: First, because the censors decided to cut one scene from the film and the filmmakers sent in another scene for approval to be inserted instead of the missing one. Secondly, it was also referred to an advisory committee to the Board, Filmgranskningsrådet. Finally, the Board's decision was appealed to parliament. The records are quite extensive since they contain the minutes from the Board's meetings. The Board and the advisory committee concluded that the film was presented as an informational and educational film, but that the scenes which depicted the activities during the shooting of a porn film and at a sex club in Copenhagen were highly problematic in relation to current law, which, moreover, was about to change (with the removal of the obscenity clause in 1971). "As the film at hand can be expected to be presented as a sex educational film, the purely pornographic elements may conflict with the current law as well as the coming law. On the condition that the film is announced as a pornographic film, the committee has no objections to the public exhibition of these parts of the film. However, should the film be presented as an educational film in sexual matters, the committee finds that the purely pornographic elements are counter to the demand for an adequate declaration of contents."<sup>32</sup>

Nils Bejeroth, the city physician who was called in as an expert, claimed that the film consisted of three components: "honest sex education, gross pornography, and commercial speculation" which were incompatible in any "decent way".<sup>33</sup> At a later meeting, in an attachment, film censor Roland Häggbom explained that according to him, the title of the film did not provide any support for a "traditional interpretation of the concept of 'sex education'". Furthermore, he wrote that regardless whether the existing law did or did not allow visual information about pornography to be spread, the consequences could be problematic.<sup>34</sup>

When the film premiered at the cinemas, the advertisement made a great show of the battle for the rights to screen it: "Finally released in completely unedited shape after a decision by his Royal Majesty on November 13" the caption above the title read in large, capital letters. This statement actually stretches the truth a little bit, since one scene in the originally submitted version of the film had been replaced. Nevertheless, the strategy of evoking a censorship process places the marketing of the film firmly within the tradition of films which flaunt their transgressive character, and thereby within the lower genres. Furthermore, it evokes the sensation of the earlier film in the series, *The Language of Love* in order to enhance interest: "After the year-long, enormous success 'The Language of Love' comes More From the Language of Love".

Interestingly, the problem of the genre of *The Language of Love*-films is still unresolved. They are usually, in histories of Swedish film, described as pornographic or semi-pornographic films which disguised themselves as sex education. Nevertheless, they do not fit perfectly into either of those genres. In a sense, they might be described as Swedish sexploitation films and thus as belonging to a national subcategory or a variation of the American sexploitation film. In a review of the third film of the series, *The XYZ of Love*, the journalist writes: "It has been said about the earliest love films that they are stereotypical, glossy, mechanical and that they are bad porn."<sup>35</sup> Yet, looking at the series today, it is possible to discern a commitment to a sexual mission which may be naive, may be misguided, may be speculative, but still calls for education, tolerance, and acceptance in matters of sex.

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32 Minutes from the meeting held September 15, 1970. Records from the archive of the National Board of Film Censors (Statens biografbyrå). Record number 109.472.

33 Minutes from the meeting held September 15, 1970. Records from the archive of the National Board of Film Censors (Statens biografbyrå). Record number 109.472.

34 Attachment to the minutes from the meeting held September 29, 1970. Records from the archive of the National Board of Film Censors (Statens biografbyrå). Record number 109.472

35 Eva Ekselius, "Hur man botar sexångest", *Dagens Nyheter* July 9, 1971.

## Nudity and hardcore: *Anita*, *Flossie* and *Happy Family*

As the seventies progressed, so did the production of hardcore films inspired (most likely) by films such as *Deep Throat* (premiering in Sweden in January 1973) and *The Devil in Miss Jones*, but actually simultaneously merging the softcore/sexploitation feature with the 8mm successor of the stag film.<sup>36</sup> As a consequence of this development, the line between the porn film and the non-hardcore sex film again became clearer.

The advertisement for *Anita* presented a drawing of the poster image: Stellan Skarsgård holding Christina Lindberg's sweater, in the process of pulling it down over her exposed breasts. No taglines, no sensational words of pornography or sex.<sup>37</sup> Most probably Christina Lindberg's presence both signalled what kind of a film it was as well as worked as an attraction for the audience. According to *Svensk filmografi* 7, Monica Tunbäck-Hansson wrote unfavorably of the film in *Göteborgsposten*, but stated that it was not a porn film: "Now it must be said, however, that the person who goes to see *Anita* in order to see a porn film goes in vain. Whatever happens happens discreetly."<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, the line was not definite. *Flossie* is described as "hårdporr" which would be a translation of hardcore.<sup>39</sup> In the ad for *Flossie*, it is called an "elegant Swedish porn film".<sup>40</sup> *Happy Family*, however, is simply called "new Swedish hardcore", shown at Fenix (a porn cinema) in Stockholm.<sup>41</sup> I have not found any reviews of *Happy Family* and most likely it was not reviewed.

## Conclusion

Like I stated in the beginning of this article, these films could most simply be grouped together under the loose label of quite heterogeneous "sex films". All of them have the colour code yellow from the National Board of Film Censors which means they are forbidden for children under fifteen. In Sweden, however, that label has never, for several reasons, carried the connotations of the X-rated film – although "barnförbjudet" (approx: "adults only") in certain contexts might signal pornography. All of them have sex as their focus – whether the objective is to present it in an arousing, educational or humorous fashion, sex is their *raison d'être* so to speak. Still, the only ones of the films discussed here which present hardcore sex in graphic close-ups and thus look anything like an adult production today are *Happy Family*, *The Sign of the Virgin* and the hardcore version of *Flossie*. Probably this is the reason for film historian Leif Furhammar to describe them as "more or less advanced pornography" in *Svensk filmografi*, since the rudimentary generic categorization which I made and which he is probably basing his estimate on as well includes all these diverse kinds of films. Furhammar and I might differ on a few individual titles, but the main body of the approximately forty out of 205 films listed in *Svensk filmografi* is probably the same. This is just to be expected, since genre boundaries are rarely fixed but always flexible. Many genres consist of a corpus of films which a majority can agree upon and an additional number of films which may or may not belong to that genre. Still, the concurrence of Furhammar's and my own estimates indicate that these films share some kind of characteristic or quality which groups them together.

Nevertheless, by their contemporaries these films were called various things. In the ads for the porn cinemas but also those regular cinemas which surreptitiously exhibited these films, words like "pornography" or "hardcore" functioned as positive signs, telling a prospective

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36 Cf. Eric Schaefer, 2004.

37 *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten* December 24, 1973.

38 Monica Tunbäck Hansson, *Göteborgsposten* January 22, 1974.

39 Bernt Eklund, *Expressen* January 25, 1975.

40 *Kvällsposten* January 18, 1975.

41 *Dagens Nyheter* April 20, 1976.

audience that they could find what they were looking for. In the early seventies, even softcore films were called pornography if they were screened in a porn theatre. For the sex clubs and sex stores, this declaration was not necessary; it sufficed to announce “film screening”. For the reviewers, on the other hand, the porn label was always negative, suggesting that the film at hand held no value other than the questionable one of providing sexual titillation and arousal for the mere sake of profit. Furthermore, since film reviewers most often liked to present themselves as experienced men (or, more rarely, women) of the world, they rarely let on that the film could be arousing to them.<sup>42</sup> A slight contempt for people who found films such as these exciting is implied in reviews and articles. In *Dagens Nyheter*, the reviewer complained about *In the Sign of the Virgin*, proclaiming: “At the first Monday screening at Festival there was not one girl in sight. That is a good testimony to the women in Stockholm. Try to prevent your boyfriends from going there too!”<sup>43</sup> Otherwise, Danish “happy porn” was in a sense an exception, but only as long as it kept on the correct territory of discreet softcore. This probably has to do with the fact that these films had high production values, quite good actors, and delivered their sex stories with a good deal of light-hearted humor. Although Mauritz Edström, who was a cinephile heavyweight in Sweden, as well as Tore Borglund in the tabloid *Kvällsposten*, had to explain that *Bedtime Mazurka* was trivial and insignificant, they still reviewed it favourably.<sup>44</sup>

With the introduction of VCRs, one could say that the situation returns to “normal”. By which I mean that, as Kendrick notes in the afterword to the second edition of *The Secret Museum*, porn films were clearly labelled as such, placed in a certain section of the video store, and eventually disappeared from the public exhibition in cinemas.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, some porn stores still have screening rooms for pornographic viewing, but they are rare. What is more, porn stores are clearly defined as porn stores.

As I underlined in the introduction, the results are still preliminary. What remains to do, besides including more films and more press coverage in the still somewhat sketchy reception study, is to study the production companies which made these films, such as Swedish Film Production (which made three of the above-discussed films), Gebe Films, Saga Film AB etc. These companies often specialized in a type of film which was perceived of as pornographic or discussed as pornographic. In the Hollywood studio system, genres were often associated with studios, such as the MGM musical or the Universal horror. A complete genre study of the Swedish “more or less pornographic” sex film should include the production, as well as the distribution of these films and not only marketing, censorship and reception.

Finally, I would contend that we have two alternatives for looking at how the genre was discursively shaped in the early years of the seventies. Either we have to accept that these films from the 1970s can be grouped together under the generic label “more or less pornographic” and thus redefine the porn film genre, or we have to revise Swedish film history and claim that a lot less than one fifth of the feature length films for theatrical distribution was “more or less advanced” pornography. In either case, an inclusion of the mail order and sex shop 8mm-films is in order, which in its turn opens up a number of questions about these films, who produced them, who saw them, what they looked like etc. From this study, however, it is already evident that the designations “pornography” and “porn film” do not necessarily apply to the same material, even in a short time perspective.

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42 Cf. Maria Larsson, *Skenet som bedrog: Mai Zetterling och det svenska sextioalet*, Lund: Sekel bokförlag, 2006, p. 206-207.

43 Hellbom, *Dagens Nyheter* August 14, 1973.

44 Edström, *Dagens Nyheter* December 27, 1970, Borglund, *Kvällsposten* April 20, 1970.

45 Kendrick 1996 (1986), p. 250.

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