

Smutty Swedes: Sex films, pornography and “good sex”

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Published as: Paasonen, Susanna, *Smutty Swedes: Sex films, pornography and the figure of good sex*. In Darren Kerr and Donna Peberdy (eds.), *Tainted Love: Screening Sexual Perversities*. London: I.B. Tauris (2017).

Swedish Erotica is probably the most successful pornographic film series of all times. Starting out with short Super 8mm loops in the late 1970s, and moving into VHS and DVD production during the following decades, the *Swedish Erotica* series currently spans over 130 titles (in addition to the over 600 loops produced before 1985).¹ Despite its name, the series is, and has been from the start, produced in the United States by Caballero (currently Caballero Home video), a company established in 1974. Its producers, directors and performers – including stars such as Seka and John Holmes – have little connection to Sweden. So why the title?

In what follows, I explore the articulations of Sweden, film, sex and porn – my primary interest not being *Swedish Erotica* but the international reputation of Swedish sexuality that the series both taps into and builds. First, I explore the genealogy of “Swedish sin,” as coined in journalism and film since the 1950s, with particular attention to its underlying dynamics of cleanliness and perversion. Second, I move from the histories of Scandinavian sex film to those of porn in the aim of further charting the fluctuating boundaries of so-called healthy and perverted sexuality involved in the figure of Swedish sin and its international reverberations. In the final parts of the chapter, I address distinctions drawn between Nordic sexualities, with particular attention to Finnish articulations of Swedish sin as homosexuality, in order to investigate the contingencies of the figure of Swedish sexuality.

Swedish sin

The figure of Swedish sin draws from the 1950s and 1960s. On the one hand, it built on the international reputation of Swedish films, such as Arne Mattson’s *One Summer of Happiness* (*Hon dansade en sommar*, 1951) and Ingmar Bergman’s *Summer with Monica* (*Sommaren med Monika*, 1952), with their scenes of nude swimming and sex, and international reports concerning Sweden’s liberalism towards sexuality, on the other (Hale 2003; Björklund 2011).

¹ See <http://adultloopdb.nl/category/swedish-erotica/>.

Sweden was the first country to introduce compulsory public sex education in schools in 1955 and, according to Carl Gustaf Boëthius (1985, 276), a myth was soon established in the United States in particular of Sweden as “peopled by healthy, sexually athletic blondes” assumedly educated in the clinical details of sex since kindergarten. This reputation owed largely to a sensationalist 1955 *Time* magazine article, “Sin in Sweden,” that labelled Sweden a promiscuous secular nation lacking in moral fibre – even as something akin to a “moral cesspool” (Stevenson 2010, 17–18; Hale 2003).

Before the 1970s and the so-called golden era of 35 mm pornography, North American theatres screened a range of titles labelled as sex films. Since hardcore pornography could not be publicly shown, sex films tested and pushed the boundaries of the permissible, the inappropriate and the forbidden. Within the category of sex films, genres ranged from educational films to more or less documentary ones, sexploitation features and imported foreign art house films showing varying degrees of nudity (Wyatt 1999; Williams 1989, 96). Films were screened with subtitles, which, according to Justin Wyatt (1999, 114), lent them “an aura of sophistication.” In this cultural situation, European films arguably connoted sex to American viewers to the degree that the term art film itself was packed with licentious meaning (Stevenson 2010, 64, 66). Swedish and Danish films were extensively featured and they enjoyed considerable popularity due to their frequent displays of nudity and sexual action.

“Swedish films” ranged from Bergman’s stylized *Silence (Tystnaden)*, (1963), addressing death and corporeality, to Vilgot Sjöman’s experimental *I am Curious (Yellow) (Jag är nyfiken: gul)*, (1967) exploring themes such as the Swedish class society, socialism and prison reform and Torgny Wickman’s educational *The Language of Love (Kärlekens språk)*, (1969). These films were shown in both art house and grindhouse theatres, in the latter also as dubbed and edited versions. Bergman’s *Summer of Monica*, for example, was famously screened as a cut version dubbed in English, with a new music score and suggestively titled *Monica, the story of a bad girl* (Schröder 1997; Schaefer 1999, 335–337; Kulick 2005, 10; Stevenson 2010, 16). *I am Curious (Yellow)* was particularly successful due to the publicity it received when confiscated at U.S. customs. The ensuing court cases, continuing for two years, guaranteed high visibility and audience interest. Once released, the film grossed four million dollars within six months and *Variety* magazine listed it as the highest grossing film of 1969. This is rather astonishing, given that *I am Curious* is largely about the shortcomings of the Swedish welfare state. (Wyatt 1999, 114, 116.) In addition to scenes of nude swimming, topless meditation and yoga

in nature, the film features simulated sex scenes. A scene where the socially active and sexually curious Lena Nyman (Lena Nyman) kisses her lover's now flaccid penis after an outdoors sex act gained particular scrutiny.

The films had considerable export appeal in Europe as well as in North America and, due to their thematic repetition, by the early 1960s, critics were already pointing out that their shots of summer nights and nude swimming scenes were becoming something of a cliché (Stevenson 2010, 21). As queer theorist Don Kulick (2005, 210) points out, the sex shown in Swedish films was “never decadent or perverse. On the contrary, such films most commonly represented sex by lingering on clean, fresh, svelte women who without hesitation or guilt had intercourse with their clean, fresh, svelte boyfriends. The ‘Swedish sin’ was healthy, natural, good sex” (also Björklund 2011, 166). The films helped to establish the notion of Swedish sin as a co-articulation of sexuality with cleanliness: in 1964, *Der Spiegel* defined their formula as consisting of “nude swimming plus social critique” (Schröder 1997, 124, 128). While such sin might not seem like sin at all, the tensions involved in the term should not be underestimated. The notion encompasses both repetitive depictions of clean, “good” sex and notions of perverted moral turpitude – of shockingly licentious detachment from moral conventions, fantasies of sexual liberalism and female sexual accessibility – and is, to a degree, defined by their mutual tension (Björklund 2011, 164–165). The accumulating international reputation of Swedish films was such that, in Germany, the term “Schwedenfilm” became synonymous with porn (Stevenson 2010, 159). And when the protagonist of Martin Scorsese's 1975 *Taxi Driver* took his love interest to see a film titled *Swedish Marriage Manual*, she was immediately able to recognize it as a dirty movie (see Björklund 2011).

Enter hardcore

Although “Swedish film” connoted sex film, this genealogy does not fully account for phenomena such as *Swedish Erotica* as a particular branding strategy for hardcore pornography. It is important to note that the development of sex films was parallel to, and entwined with, transformations in the cultural and legal status of pornography. In 1964, the Danish ministry of justice set a committee to evaluate the legal status of John Cleland's classic porn novel, *Fanny Hill*, due to the controversy its translation had caused. The committee consulted a panel of expert consisting of criminologists, psychiatrists, psychologists and educational scientists and, in 1967, the Danish parliament allowed literary

pornography. Two years later, the new law on obscene images, objects and performances passed (Kutchinsky 1992, 43). This made Denmark the first European country to legalise audiovisual porn, and Sweden followed suit two years later in 1971. The two countries became important producers and exporters of porn. Their practically hegemonic status in legal porn production supported the popular image of sexually permissible, liberated and, for some, perverted Scandinavia, as formed during the 1950s and 1960s (Smith 2005, 151, Stevenson 2010). Documentary films exploring Danish developments – such as *Sexual Freedom in Denmark* (John Lamb, USA 1970) and *Censorship in Denmark: A New Approach* (Alex de Renzy, USA 1970) – were the first one to show hardcore porn in US theatres under the legitimisation of social interest and they further solidified the associations drawn between Scandinavia, sexual liberation and potential perversion (Williams 1989, 97–98; Kleinhans 2007, 108–109; Stevenson 2010, 154–157).

Despite Denmark's newly found status as the porn capital of the world, Sweden had a longer history in porn production. Sweden had not participated in the League of Nations pact on the suppression of the circulation and traffic of obscene publications, developed during the 1910s and 1920, and while pornography was considered an illegal, dirty enterprise, it was an issue of domestic legislation only (Stevenson 2010, 131). In 1965, Berth Milton began to publish *Private*, the first porn magazine printed in full colour and the company since grew into one of the largest adult entertainment companies in Europe, currently listed in NASDAQ. Swedish porn film and video production has been influential particularly on the Nordic market.² In 2009, *Dirty Diaries*, a collection of short feminist porn films directed by Mia Engberg gained international attention due to the public funding it had received. The media attention worked to rearticulate the view of Sweden as a land of porn whereas the film itself aimed at reworking the aesthetics and gender politics of porn (see Ryberg 2012).

Considered in a historical perspective, the career of director and producer Lasse Braun is particularly central in terms of the North American reputation of Swedish pornography. Born as Alberto Ferro, son of an Italian diplomat, Braun began his career in porn by producing novels and magazines in the early 1960s and, after moving to North Europe, by making films. Braun narrates his autobiography³ as one of an anti-censorship fighter influencing the

² MAX's Video was a central Nordic porn distributor in the 1990s and 2000s and Demotikos AB (est. 1985, producer of the brands Scandinavian Erotic Video Production and Blue Hotel) remains active to date.

³ The authorized autobiography is available at <http://www.lasse-braun.com/newbio.html>. Roughly the same story is presented in third person at <http://drsusanblock.com/Lasse/>.

transformations in Danish porn legislation and distributing pornography across Europe in the name of sexual freedom. In 1966, Braun set up the production company AB Beta Film, based in Stockholm, and began producing porn loops. Instead of black and white 8mm film used in stag films to date, Braun invested in colour. Shot on the higher quality format 16mm film, the films were transferred on Super 8 (a format only launched the previous year). Beta Film sold the loops through newspaper and magazine advertisements. According to Braun, the number of European customers grew to 50,000 by 1969, and Beta Film set up a film laboratory of their own. Since the activities were still illegal, Ferro changed his name into Braun, a name arguably purchased from a Swedish carpenter who had been present as the police arrived at the Stockholm office. While based in Stockholm, Braun was a markedly translocal operator who shot his films in Sweden and Denmark, Netherlands, France, Spain, UK and the Caribbean alike, aiming to profile the productions as quality pornography with some narrative framing.

Braun's film series ranged from those abiding by the rhetoric of healthy, "good" Swedish sex, as in *Love in Scandinavia* (Sweden 1971), to ones explicitly detached from it, such as *Perversion* (Denmark 1971) *Shocking* (Netherlands 1972), *Bondage* (Netherlands 1972) and *Deep Arse* (Netherlands 1973). All in all, the films marked a clear departure from the by now well-established notion of Swedish film: while occasionally set in nature, they had little resemblance to the educational, clean and socially concerned tone of their more mainstream contemporaries. Exploring anal sex, double penetration, fetishes, bondage, domination and urination in close-up, the films were not confined to given notions of sexual normalcy but were in fact branded and marketed as deviations thereof.

With notable exceptions such as *I am Curious*, the audience for Swedish films was generally small. Braun's Super 8 films, again, were not shown in cinemas as they were targeted for private use.⁴ Mass markets nevertheless became available in the United States when Reuben Sturman – one of the wealthiest and most influential pornographers in North America – took Braun's films into distribution in his (illegal) peep-show parlours in 1971. Mainly set in sex shops, peep show machines included a coin-operated Super 8 projector and a booth with a lock. Sturman developed the distribution method and received divvies from tens of thousands of peep show machines across the United States – the profits being an estimated two billion dollars in the 1970s alone. In the early 1980s, U.S. Justice department estimated Sturman to be the largest distributor of hardcore pornography in the country. (McNeil and Osborne 2005,

⁴ Braun's 1975 feature film, *Sensations*, did gain theatrical release.

104–105; Lane 2000, 48–49.) This scale of the operation had an obvious impact on the distribution of Beta Film’s porn, as well as on the company’s productivity and the reputation of Swedish porn before the beginning of the video era at the end of the 1970s.

Once adorned with titles such as “King of Porn,” “Emperor of Sex” and “Father of Modern Pornography,” by the press,⁵ and author of an estimated 80 films⁶, Lasse Braun has been largely forgotten in porn historiography that has overwhelmingly focused on American films, directors, producers, performers, trials and jurisdictions (e.g. Williams 1989; O’Toole 1998; Lane 2000; McNeil & Osborne 2005; Kendrick 1996; Jennings 2000). These narratives tend to say very little of Europe.⁷ If mentioned, Braun tends to figure through his collaboration with Sturman whereas his films, their production or reception remain unstudied (with the early exception of DiLauro and Rabkin 1976). At the same time, popular cinematic porn historiography – including films such as *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson, USA 1997), *Rated X* (Emilio Estevez, USA 2000) and *Inside Deep Throat* (Fenton Bailey & Randy Barbato, USA 2005) – has focused on 1970s U.S. porn directors and producers in explicitly auteurist tones (Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2007).⁸ While Quentin Tarantino has mentioned wanting to shoot a film in Stockholm as homage to 1960s Swedish grindhouse films, these plans are yet to materialize (Garrett 2007).

Braun’s close-to forgotten status may have to do with film format and methods of distribution – Super 8 versus 35mm, home and peep show consumption versus theatre screenings. Loops often fall off the map of film history. I nevertheless argue that, along with the long-standing reputation of Swedish film, the peep show distribution of Braun’s films contributed to the co-articulation of Sweden and pornography in North America. The title of Caballero’s *Swedish Erotica* series most likely owes to its loops competing over the same peep show markets that

⁵ See <http://www.lasse-braun.com/>. The site also features press clippings on Braun and his films.

⁶ See <http://adultloopdb.nl/category/lasse-braun/>.

⁷ Historical accounts of literary pornography being an obvious exception: e.g. Marcus 1963; Hunt 1994; Kendrick 1996.

⁸ Such porn nostalgia has been relatively absent in Europe, perhaps partly since the “porn wars” – public political debates on the cultural meaning and role of, and regulation concerning pornography – have been less sharp than in North America. Exceptions include Bernard Bonello’s melancholic *The Pornographer* (*Le Pornographe*, France 2001) featuring Jean-Pierre Léaud as an ageing auteur pornographer, a remake of *Language of Love* (*Kärlekens språk* 2000, Anders Lennberg, Sweden 2004) and *Torremolinos 73* (Pablo Berger, Spain/Denmark 2003). Set in the last days of Franco’s regime, *Torremolinos* tells the story of a married couple making educational sex films for a Danish producer, with Ingmar Bergman as their artistic inspiration and model. (Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2007.)

Braun had made a name at during the 1970s. While *Swedish Erotica* films gained broader fame in the course of video production, the initial title likely owes to the appeal and market value of Swedish pornography at the 1970s loop market.

The perverted north

After joining the antiporn feminist cause, Linda Lovelace, the former female star of Gerard Damiano's 1972 *Deep Throat*, grew worried over her lecture trip to Sweden and Norway since she knew Scandinavia to be the "porn capital of the world" (Lovelace and McGrady 1986, 171). The anecdote points to the persistence of the association of Scandinavia with pornography. Writing in a Norwegian perspective, Anne G. Sabo (2005, 37) notes that in the United States, Scandinavia tends to be seen as a promised land of sexuality and pornography despite the considerable differences within the national legislation within the region. Contrary to Danish and Swedish liberal legislation, both Norway and Finland had in fact had rather strict legislation concerning obscenity.

Yet the question still remains as to why was Sweden, rather than Denmark – a country with a more liberal legislation and abundant export of both porn and sexploitation films (Kutchinsky 1992, 45; Kulick 2005, 209; Stevenson 2010) – established as *the* land of free sex and porn? And how did this reputation persist in a country like Germany? Indeed, why has not Germany been similarly figured as a land of sexual freedom, given its long tradition of nudism, free body culture, *Freikörperkultur* (Ross 2005) and diverse porn industry? Public sex education was widespread in Germany already in the 1920s and porn legislation was liberalized in West Germany as early as 1976 (MacRae 2003). German films exploring sexuality in a "moral" framework appeared in the 1910s and 1920, and the 1950s and 1960s witnessed a swell of sex films (*Deutscher Sex-Film*) ranging from educational to documentary and soft-core sexploitation (Herzog 2005, 143–144).⁹ German porn production grew since the late 1970s and the country soon became one of the hubs of Europorn.

Despite the frisky nudism and popularity of Hans Billian's Bayern sex comedies of the 1960s and 70s, with their Dirndls, Lederhosen and Alps, German sexuality has not been associated

⁹ Germans have been known as eager consumers of porn: in 1971 alone, an estimated 50 million marks were spent in West Germany on imported, mainly Danish and Swedish pornography, and 125 million on locally produced, albeit not entirely legal, porn (Herzog 2005, 145). Former Luftwaffe pilot Beate Uhse established one of the world's first sex shops in 1962, creating an international empire (Herzog 2005, 145; Slade 1997, 5).

with cleanliness or health. Quite the contrary, depictions of German sexuality have, since the Second World War, tended to focus on themes such as sadomasochism, barbarism and sexual perversion (Dean 1996, 62–65; Herzog 2005, 11–19). This is particularly the case with characters associated with Nazism in films as different as Lucino Visconti’s art house classic *The Damned* (*La caduta degli dei*, Italy 1969) and Nazi Sexploitation films such as *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (USA 1975). In spite of the range of porn production carried out in country, the international reputation of German porn often impinges on the subgenre of “German Scheißporn,” especially in North America.¹⁰

According to Stephan Schröder (1997, 130), Sweden is associated with sexual freedom in Germany since it is understood as *the* prototypical Nordic welfare state and a prototypical Scandinavian country: Swedish sexuality has similarly come to represent Scandinavian sexuality and the figure of the emancipated Swedish woman has come to stand for Nordic femininity in general. Female emancipation, then, takes the shape of activity, initiative and availability alike. Sabo (2005, 37) further points out that the imagery of free Scandinavian sexuality is associated with the tradition of social democracy and policies advancing gender equality. The association of free porn with gender equality may strike some as strange, given that Nordic gender equality discourse has tended to be characteristically antiporn. Examining some of these frictions in the Swedish context, Don Kulick (2005, 211–213) argues that feminists only began to address and critique commercial sex in the 1970s, after which North American antiporn feminism gained a somewhat hegemonic role. For Kulick, the discourse of Swedish sexuality is a paradoxical assemblage of associations of freedom, legal constraints and normative framings productive of a national model of healthy and morally responsible sexuality – of “good sex.” Good sex, then, involves “socially approved, mutually satisfying sexual relations between two (and only two) consenting adults or young adults who are more or less sociological equals. It must not involve money or overt domination, even as role-playing. It should occur only in the context of an established social relationship” (Kulick 2005, 208.) That which does not meet these criteria (the commercial, the kinky and the promiscuous) is defined as less wholesome, or perverted.

Kulick’s argument owes to Gayle Rubin’s 1984 overview of divisions drawn between good and bad sex. According to Rubin, good – “normal, natural, healthy, and holy” – vanilla sex is practiced by married heterosexual people of the same generation in a monogamous

¹⁰ The stereotype is popular enough to feature in Wikipedia’s brief summary of German porn production, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pornography_by_region.

relationship, preferably marriage, at their home for reproductive and non-commercial purposes, without the aid of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys or role-playing. That which falls outside these parameters – sex practiced by, or with, transvestites, transsexuals, fetishists and sadomasochist, sex for money or in cross-generational assemblages – becomes labelled as bad sex: “abnormal, unnatural, sick, sinful, ‘way out’” (Rubin 1989, 280–282; also Albury 2002, 67–68.)

The Swedish, and more broadly Nordic, ethos of “good sex” is based on the premise of sexual health: it is liberal, heavily influenced by psychotherapy and emphasizes “personal autonomy, socially responsible sexual conduct and equality” (Helén and Yesilova 2006, 258). Contrary to the ideal of sexual abstinence advanced in North America, the Nordic ethos frames sexuality as a form of self-expression that is crucial to physical and mental wellbeing. It also frames “false interpretations”, “myths” and “slanted attitudes” towards sex as risks and problems to be avoided and overcome (Helén and Yesilova 2006, 267). Inherently normative, the model of good sex can be easily mapped onto Swedish sex films – but far less so to pornography and Braun’s oeuvre. Pornography tends to fall categorically outside the parameters of good sex as representative of “false interpretations” and “slanted attitudes” towards sexuality.

Gay danger

In Sweden’s neighbouring country of Finland, the figure of Swedish sin, coined since the 1950s, has been drawn somewhat differently than in United States or Germany. While similarly linked to the notion of uninhibited sexuality, it involves strong undertones of risk and perversion. Finland was never an important exporter of sexploitation films although films such T.J. Särkkä’s *The Milkmaid* (*Hilja maitotyttö* 1953) and *Preludes to Ecstasy* (*Kuu on vaarallinen* 1962) owed their racy reputation to scenes of nude swimming and sexual encounters in the countryside very similar to their Swedish counterparts. At the same time it can be argued that Finnish film history has involved explicit differentiation from Swedish sexuality.

During the 1950s and 1970s, Swedish sexuality became co-articulated in Finnish media together with homosexuality. This association was reiterated amply enough to give rise to the stereotype that “all Swedish men are gay” which remains popular to date. Examining the originating context of the stereotype, queer scholar Tuula Juvonen traces it to postwar media

scandals. Homosexuality was not criminalized in Sweden since the Second World War whereas in Finland the decriminalization of homosexuality only took part in 1971. While homosexuality was legal, Swedish media scandals on male prostitutions were recurrent and Finnish media covered these with gusto (Juvonen 2002, 86). In the course of the scandal coverage, homosexuality was identified as a “Swedish disease” and “the Swedish” gradually became synonymous to the homosexual (Juvonen 2002, 98, 103–104). Film culture played an active part in this: framing Sweden, and Stockholm in particular, as decadent and morally depraved, films such as *Finnish Girls in Stockholm* (*Suomalaistyttöjä Tukholmassa*, Finland 1952) and *Road of Temptations* (*Viettelysten tie*, Finland 1955), depicted Swedish men as depraved stalkers of both young Finnish men and women.

In the course of the 1950s, homosexuality was associated with feminine Swedish men in one arena after another (Juvonen 2002, 141). Identifying male homosexuality as a particularly Swedish quality enabled the articulation of Finnish masculinity as agrarian, healthy and heterosexual at the very moment when migration from Finland to Sweden began to boom. In *Finnish Girls in Stockholm*, young Kirsti (Eija Inkeri) arrives in Stockholm looking for work, only to be sexually harassed. She becomes an erotic artist model, mistress and a prostitute before committing suicide. For his part, medical student Olavi (Esko Saha) witnesses a suspicious all-male party where men sip cocktails, dance together, wear make-up and sport jewelry. Once male-on-male contact gets too much, Olavi punches the host, cursing – and simultaneously draws a clear boundary between Swedish and Finnish masculinity. Critiqued for its anti-Swedish depiction of Stockholm as a lair of criminals, pimps, prostitutes, nude models and homophiles (SK 4 1999, 469–471), the film inspired a sequel, *Road of temptations*, with its share of gay Swedish men, prostitution and drugs, and a Finnish male protagonist striking down a male homosexual artist for his sexual advances.¹¹ In these films, young Finnish women were threatened by commercial sex whereas for young Finnish men the threat was that of homosexuality.¹²

¹¹ The sequel was criticised for its intentional sensationalism: “Should one believe that there is not even one ordinary person in Stockholm but only pimps, homosexuals and man-hungry upper-class men”, a Swedish critic wondered (SK 5 1989, 405).

¹² The Finnish image of Swedish sexuality has also been tied to pornography. Finnish legislation concerning audiovisual porn being considerably strict until the 2000s, books, 8mm films and later videos were bought from Sweden and ordered from Swedish mail order companies. In addition to being the land of homosexuality in popular imagination, Sweden was also the land of porn. See Paasonen 2012.

In the figure of Swedish sin popular in North America, sexual education met idyllic nature and female emancipation was layered with softcore porn. At the heart of this imagery was the figure of a healthy, sexually uninhibited blonde woman, as embodied by Lena Nyman, the protagonist of *I am Curious (Yellow)* and its sister film, *I am Curious (Blue)*. In both North American and German popular culture, Swedish women have been representative of uninhibited and active Swedish sexuality whereas in Finland, Swedish sexuality has been framed in explicitly homophobic terms. This has facilitated the articulation of national fantasies where Finland has been marked apart from its assumedly sexually excessive and perverted neighbour. While drastically different, these articulations of Swedish sexuality share and revolve around the familiar notion of sexual liberation, seen as both a risk and a possibility and as leading to both good and bad sex.

The evasive perversion

Defined as turning away from the right, proper and good, as debasement, distortion, corruption and misuse, the term perversity revolves around the evasive notion of normality. As Michel Foucault (2003, 33) notes, coined in the 19th century, perversity is a historically unstable set of notions linked with the sexual, encompassing both intentional malice and psychiatric notions of abnormality, and “the weaker it is epistemologically, the better it functions.” Given the malleability of the term, it takes little analytical effort then to note that the unstable figures of Swedish sin and Swedish sexuality are exemplary as boundary work between the normal and the abnormal, the acceptable and the perverse that speak of their contexts of creation more than they do of Sweden or the Swedes. Just as the 1955 *Time* article is telling of certain North American norms and conceptions concerning sexuality, matrimony, socialism and religion at the time, Finnish figures of gay Swedish men speak of the fantasy of Finnish men as their opposite – as regular and straight. These figures constantly redraw the boundaries of good and bad sex, perversity and normality in terms of national boundaries, politics, religion and moral norms, yet these boundaries are elastic, leaky and ephemeral.

Contrary to the figures of dark and gloomy perversity associated with Germany, Swedish perversion – “the Swedish sin” – has been invested with transgressive potentiality and promise as that which, by deviating from the norm, points to different possibilities of being and doing. In other words, while entailing an element of risk and danger, it also titillates in a more positive register. Swedish sin has been knowingly used as a branding and marketing strategy, as with 1960s sex films and hardcore pornography. By naming their film series

Swedish Erotica, Caballero tapped into the already established reputation of Swedish porn loops and their added value of international flair while detaching this all from the physical location of Sweden. This exemplifies the uses of Swedish sexuality as a floating signifier that traverses national boundaries without necessarily being recognizable to the Swedes themselves (cf. Björklund 2011).

The figure of Swedish sex gains shape as values, judgements, fantasies and fears are attached to it, and as they layer and conflict with one another, change form and take new shape. Swedish sin is contingent, contradictory and anachronistic, carrying as it does echoes of the sexual mores of the 1950s and the early years of commercial legal porn production. It is open for appropriation and celebration, as in the theme of Stockholm's 2008 EuroPride, *Swedish Sin – Breaking Borders* while remaining a longstanding challenge for those desiring to brand the nation in more wholesome terms. As a figure of fantasy, Swedish sin is likely to circulate and stick as long as it manages to evoke even the faintest of aroma of perversion.

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