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Local flavour, film fantasies and shifting selections: Finnish sex magazines, 1972–1973

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Within porn historiography, the years 1972–1973 mark a key moment in the development of the genre and its mainstreaming: this is specifically connected to the visibility and success of feature-length 35mm films such as *Deep Throat*, *Behind the Green Door* and *Devil in Miss Jones* preceding the 1973 Miller vs. California ruling that removed First Amendment protection for content deemed obscene. As the sentence above suggests, when the so-called golden era of pornography is reminisced, this often happens through the format of narrative feature film and, predominantly, within the US context (Alilunas 2016, 9, 11; Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2007). As the essays in this special Forum nevertheless show, many local developments involved print media – and, needless perhaps to state, sex magazines remained central in the U.S. across various subgenres (e.g., Bronstein & Strub 2016; Fritscher 2006; Hilderbrand 2013). Furthermore, while the 1970s marked transformations in the legal status and visibility of porn internationally, these developments were far from uniform or synchronous.

Parallel to developments in the U.S., a plethora of local pornographic cultures continued to operate predominantly in print and in connection with varying local regulation practices. In Finland, where the distribution and accessibility of screen porn was tightly regulated, the period was one of expansion in sex magazine production inasmuch as it was one marking a shift towards hardcore print content. Zooming in on this landscape, this article inquires after the visibility and invisibility of porn films in Finnish sex magazines of 1972–1973, contextualises the publishing market in terms of its overall economy and governmental regulation and attends to the challenges involved in print porn historiography. Source-wise, we build on an examination of all available issues of fifteen Finnish-language sex magazines published in the country at the time (for more detail, see the historiographical discussion below).

A specific Nordic context

Despite generalized understandings identifying the Nordic countries as defined by permissive attitudes towards sexual displa, regulation, production and distribution practices within the region were highly varied in the early 1970s (Paasonen 2009, 587). Denmark and Sweden decriminalized audiovisual pornography in 1969 and 1971, respectively, becoming important international producers and exporters of porn. Meanwhile, Finnish obscenity legislation from year 1927 was not revised until 1999, and regulation remained similarly strict in Norway and Iceland. In 1971, the conservative Finnish MP Alli Vaittinen, alarmed by the availability of sex magazines, wanted to take action and a governmental inquiry into the availability of obscene print publications was put in motion. In 1973, the resulting memorandum by the committee on the freedom of press assigned to evaluate the legal status of pornography however recommended that only the distribution and public visibility – and not the content – of sex magazines should be subject to regulation (Jyränki 2007, 93). This resulted in laxer interpretations of the obscenity law, in the course of which novel hardcore magazines were quickly introduced, less explicit titles by independent publishers went under, and existing periodicals began to feature more graphic content.

To our knowledge, there were a total of fifteen Finnish titles that could be categorised as sex or men's magazines in 1972–1973 – by no means a modest volume in a country with a population of circa 4,5 million. Of these periodicals, *Cocktail* (1945–1974), was translated from a Scandinavian brand also published in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. An independent operation, it traded in short stories and pin-up photographs with fully imported content. This period also marked the end of all three men's magazines by Kirjolehti (a minor publisher trading in humour, true crime, crosswords and other popular print genres): *Miesten maailma* (*Men's World*) with a tangible DIY feel launched in 1962 ended with the issue 1–2/1973,

Uusi Aatami (New Adam) relying on imported visuals ran from 1965 till 1972 and *Charming Bazaar* (1971–1973) had its short run. All these four titles were of relatively low print quality – much of them in black and white – and the models’ hair and makeup dated the photos as products of the previous decade. With the exception of *Mies & nainen (Man & Woman, 1973–1974)* a fact-oriented sex magazine by the internationally operating Marshall & Cavendish Ltd (Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2022) and *Panoraama (Panorama, 1973–1974)*, a sex and scandal magazine briefly published by Menekkilehdet Oy (which since continued with other similarly short-lived initiatives), this left the field open to two large operators.

Of these, the Finnish-owned Lehtimiehet Oy (1957–1989) published the country’s most popular monthly *Hymy (Smile 1959–)*, the populist and scandal-infused angle of which helped the magazine maintain a circulation of more than a million in the 1970s. The scope of Lehtimiehet was broad, ranging from women’s magazines to periodicals on technology, pop music and sex. Its smaller competitor, Kustannus Oy Williams, traded predominantly in translated content from children’s comics to crime pulp, and beyond. Williams evolved from Gilberton World-Wide Publications, the European-language divisions of the American comic book publisher Gilberton Company with established branch companies in Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and West Germany since the 1950s, which collaborated with the British publishing house Thorpe & Porter. In the early 1970s, Williams Publishing and Distributing Co. Ltd. took over Gilberton branches in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway. Novel branches were founded in Finland, Italy and France and, in 1972, Williams was reincorporated into multinational Warner Communications. Apparently due to weak profits, Warner began closing and selling off many of these European branches in the mid 1970s. In Sweden, Finland, and Norway, Williams’s operations were taken over by the Swedish Semic Press (1963–1997) in 1975.

During 1972–1973, Williams published four sex magazines: *Jermu* (*Old soldier*, 1968–1979), *Seksi* (*Sex*, 1970–1982), *Mies* (*Man*, 1972–1973) and *Naku* (*Naked*, 1972–1975), all with the same editor-in-chief, Art Wirmola, trading in imported and translated materials, yet varying in their degrees of sexual display. For its part, Lehtimiehet published the increasingly explicit men's magazine *Jallu* (1958–2015), the 'continental men's magazine' *VIP* (1968–1974), *Nyrkkiposti* (*Fist Mail*, published also as *Nyrkki/Fist* and *Nykyposti/Current Mail* in 1960–1990) trading in scandal and softcore, as well as *Kalle* (1973–2015, first out in less explicit form in 1950–1956) and *Ratto* (*Enjoyment*, 1973–1987), hardcore titles introduced directly after the publication of the memorandum on the freedom of press. Both Lehtimiehet and Williams were large operations with fully developed mainstream distribution networks. They used professional designers and the same printing houses for sex magazines as they did for their more mainstream titles. It was also characteristic for editors and designers to work across the publishers' different magazines. This allowed for both glossiness and degrees of visual ambition, or at least for recognisable graphic styles. There was also the additional advantage of advertising for the publishers' novelty titles and more established endeavours across magazines. As the two publishers basically split the sex magazine market, their many titles also competed with one another for consumer attention, and not all survived for long.

Despite featuring imported true crime and adventure stories similar to those published by Williams, Lehtimiehet's leading sex magazines relied largely on locally sourced content, highlighting this as an asset setting them apart from both Swedish competition (broadly available through mail-order) and from Williams's line of periodicals. Even given the difficulty of identifying the origins of the nude photos published, the credits for which were omitted as a rule, Lehtimiehet – and their most popular brands *Jallu* and *Kalle*, in particular – foregrounded the domestic and the recognizable. Their nude models were often photographed using familiar, local consumer brands (such as bottles of mass-consumer beer brands, milk

cartons and detergents). The domestic decors included books and magazines in Finnish and, on more than one occasion, models were seen reading or lying next to the newest issues of the publisher's own magazines in an attempt to anchor the features in the regional context of the here-and-now. Models identified by (most likely fictitious) Finnish names and places of residence posed in next to posters of local pop bands, leaning on locally designed, ubiquitous Marimekko tablecloths, by recognizable urban landmarks and in nature shots featuring fauna native to the region. (**Figures 1–3**)

While the high-profile *Kalle* and *Jallu* were, by late 1973, hardcore magazines squarely focused on the display of female bodies, most other Lehtimiehet titles were genre hybrids combining local scandal with gossip, humour, adventure, true crime and exposés of various kinds. The magazines were mainly monthlies and their personal ads served social functions as women and men sought out the sexual company of women, men and couples alike. This hooking up was quintessentially local, just as it was temporally bound, connecting readers with both one another and with the magazines facilitating their mutual engagements.

Sex films as print content

Across sex periodicals, film – the key focus of 1970s porn historiography internationally – remained a highly elusive referent. Williams's titles drew largely on British visual and textual content. Of these, the more 'edutainment' oriented *Seksi* covered film in contextual articles, such as one tracking the development of sex onscreen from cinema's silent era to filmed intercourse ('Celluloid Kisses', *Seksi* 3/1972). Features also detailed (unidentified) authors' experiences at foreign theatres: 'Sin from a velvet seat' (*Seksi* 2/1973) dutifully detailed the plot of a film seen in a Danish cinema (no visuals of the film were offered). 'No taste for sausage after porn films' (*Seksi* 3/1973) reported of a day spent at Stockholm's Lido

Stripograf offering both sex films and live performances, and the theme continued with a scene-by-scene description of a film seen in Copenhagen ('Mona, virgin, and nymphomaniac', *Seksi* 4/1973). Film-themed travelogues further extended to New York ('Sex made in USA', *Seksi* 9/1973). Describing the cinemas, films and overall experiences thereof in some detail, these articles tried to mediate international cinematic thrills – and the occasional disappointments – to a domestic readership through somewhat random examples.

For its part, *Naku* charted the historical development of sex films, illustrating its articles with stock images of ephemeral origin: 'the pictures on these pages are from English films that won't most likely be seen here (...) but everyone can look at the pictures' ('Film memories', *Naku* 1/1972; 'Erotic cinema', *Naku* 2/1973). Such features occasionally broadened into detailed descriptions of individual films, such as the 1969 *La monaca di Monza* ('Sex on the screen', *Naku* 1/1973). Importantly in terms of our focus, these were not pornographic films, merely ones displaying female topless nudity and non-explicit sexual action. The focus was, unsurprisingly, the same in *Mies* building on imported materials (e.g., 'Sex farm', 'How to make a sex film?' and 'Sex thief', all in 8/1973). The magazine published articles on Russ Meyer's sexploitation films and the sex-therapy-themed *101 Acts of Love* of 1971 ('Russ Meyer, Yankee porn by the kilo' and '101 acts of love', both in 1/1972). As was routine with sex films, the focus freely expanded to European and arthouse productions so that the magazine detailed scenes of non-consensual sex starring Sophia Loren in *Man of La Mancha* ('This is how Sophia gets raped', *Mies* 2/1973), the censored and released scenes of *Bluebeard* starring Richard Burton ('Snip, snip, snip, clips from Bluebeard', *Mies* 4/1973), and, as a 9-page 'extra', Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Decamerone* (*Mies* 6/1973). The category of 'sex film' in use was, in short, capacious. **(Figure 4)**

It was a general practice to depict film plots in detail, and with ample illustrations (no matter how decontextualised these may have been). Some of these films made it to Finnish screens: many others did not. Given the film regulation in the country (for an overview, see Sedergren 2006), publicly screened content was never hardcore. At the time, it was illegal to commercially produce or distribute hardcore films in any format (whether 35mm, 16mm, 8mm, or Super8). Consequently, moving image belonged to the margins of local pornographic cultures as scarce commodities and the stuff of stories that people could import from abroad for personal use – and occasionally buy (illegally) from so-called ‘tobacco shops’ – yet which were not part of public display. In order to add to the softcore thrills on offer, sex film theatres added strip-tease shows to their repertoire, especially so in the larger cities.

By way of reference to the developments in the United States, *Cocktail* (11/1973) published an article ‘Sex Films’ on a film of ‘a girl with a fantastic million-dollar throat’, addressing the phenomenon of *Deep Throat*, citing Linda Lovelace on its making and describing some of the film’s plot. The illustrations used were nevertheless unconnected from the film so that it may have been difficult for the readers to estimate whether this was a fact-based article or a fictitious story – not least since the magazine regularly published erotic short stories set in the world of sex film production (e.g., ‘Hollywood’s [*sic*] new wave’, *Cocktail* 3/1973; ‘Filmed love’, *Cocktail* 24/1973). **(Figure 5)**

Mies (10/1973) provided much broader coverage of *Deep Throat* in a non-credited article titled ‘Pube-throat’ on the film’s popularity, style, and technical execution, the controversies surrounding it, as well as Lovelace’s newfound fame – and by using actual film stills. As *Deep Throat* did not premier in Finnish cinemas until year 1999, the articles addressed a markedly alien – possibly even exotic – pornographic culture.

Meanwhile, there virtually no mentions of porn films in Lehtimiehet's magazines. Porn, in this context, was primarily a matter of print culture consisting of magazines and books available throughout the country. While offering sufficiently titillating editorial content, the medium of film represented merely a fraction of the periodicals' content and was easily overshadowed by ubiquitous nude poses (of varying degrees of graphicness), erotic short stories, popular sex ed pieces and articles probing the realm of sexuality from the future of intercourse in space to sex tech. Within all this, the content classifier of 'porn' extended with seemingly little difficulty to other realms of commercial sex covered in keen detail.

Opacities of circulation

Print porn was certainly not hard to find or expensive to purchase in 1970s Finland: a copy of a hardcore magazine in 1973 cost roughly 3,5 euros in terms of adjusted cost-of-living index. All Lehtimiehet and Williams titles were available nationwide through a centralised newsagent infrastructure that also doubled as unofficial regulator of acceptable content (especially so in the 1980s), in addition to which tobacco shops offered miscellaneous selections of print matter. As the dominant form of pornographic production and consumption, magazines of the period allow for mapping out some of pornographic materials then in circulation – as in ads for other periodicals or mail-order companies trading in Super 8mm reels, books, full-colour hard-core periodicals and specialty magazines. Since it was legal to import porn for personal use independent of the medium, adverts for Swedish and Danish mail-order companies remained plentiful.

The Stockholm-based Doggman, for example, marketed 'sex packets' with 'five large colour magazines of the hottest and newest porn. (Over 200 images and many hundred different tips

on making love with large clear colour images and with images that would even make the Harem's father blush).' (*Jallu* 12/1973.) Mail order enabled access to Swedish gay porn as well as to specialty content, such as BDSM porn otherwise unavailable in the country. The volume of this transnational traffic is virtually impossible to retrospectively study, yet it is an educated guess that the figures were marginal in terms of Finnish sex paper trade as a whole. Even so, the illegal import of Swedish sex magazine by Finnish wholesale companies was the stuff of exposés, such as *Nyrkkiposti*'s (2/1972) 'Porn smuggling costs Finland a million per year!' (Needless perhaps to point out that the magazine's publisher, Lehtimiehet, had itself more than a vested interest in this economy.)

As Oliver Carter, Tommy Gustafsson and Mariah Larsson (2022) point out, any inquiry into local or national pornographic cultures is by necessity also one into transnational flows of commodities and content, even as these remain opaque as objects of study. Despite difficulties in reconstructing the distribution and markets of pornography in the early 1970s, some of this can be parsed together from magazine adverts, ranging from the ones offering physical street addresses (and hence allowing for more location-sensitive inquiry) to those operating more anonymously with mail box numbers. Being a bilingual country with a native Swedish-speaking minority, Finland was an easy market for Swedish publications in particular – also since visual content can, in the context of porn, easily override the textual.

It is equally difficult to chart practices of production. We know very little about the transnational circulation of materials in Finnish periodicals, such as the contracts, contacts and communications within Williams Publishing or international press syndicates distributing materials for magazines across the Nordic countries: as practices of copying, translation and recirculation were occasionally loose in terms of copyright, some of these omissions may also have been well advised (Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2022). The textual remains of sex magazine

publishing have not been seen worth archiving, or valuable in terms of media history, so that no archives remain for the companies addressed in this article. We know very little about the practices of production and the experiences and agencies of women working for the magazines as co-editors, co-producers and models, as there are no corporate archives available for studying contracts or fees. Consequently, it is possible to only make educated guesses about the economies – as well as the conditions – of domestic sex modelling.

Some information pertaining to distribution is nevertheless available. The circulation figures of many (yet not all) of the sex magazines published in the country can be retrospectively queried from MediaAuditFinland, which has screened these numbers in collaboration with publishers since 1972, and which we consulted via email for this article. While not complete, these figures show that, in year 1973, Lehtimiehet's leading sex magazine, *Jallu*, had a circulation of issues 141,671 in comparison to Williams's *Seksi*'s 19,780. The year after, *Jallu* was down to 102,682, *Kalle* had a reported circulation of 67,941, *Ratto* 49,808 and *Seksi* upped its game to 26,987. This was by no means a niche trade.

Furthermore, all print publications in Finland have been horizontally archived in public depository libraries since year 1917, so that porn magazines are available as archival copies: this was the case with the titles discussed in this article. Many of the leading 1970s sex magazines were archived as hard-bound library volumes: their positioning as parts of cultural heritage is certainly a luxury by international comparison (see also Straw in this issue; Larsson 2022, 31). Copies have nevertheless been stolen – with some more rare 1980s titles, entire volumes can be missing. In addition, library metadata regularly fails to correctly identify the periodicals as men's magazines, sex magazines or pornographic magazines, classifying them under flexible genre monikers such as 'leisure magazine' instead: this practice has been supported by some magazines opting to define themselves along similar

lines, as in *Cocktail*'s subtitle 'short story and joke magazine'. It may then be hard to track down the titles in circulation in any given year, just as it can be difficult to retrospectively understand perishable publishing and consumption routines that have mostly escaped forms of archiving.

Reference works on Finnish periodicals squarely omit pornography, despite the long-term popularity of many such titles. In order to reconstruct the field of porn periodicals in the country in 1972–1973, it was necessary for us to combine search engine queries with those to online second-hand booksellers and the national library database. These searches were conducted for both genre and publisher. Despite the care we took, it remains possible that some marginal/novelty titles published during the period may have escaped our attention.

Considering the easy accessibility of 1970s Finnish sex periodicals, research on the material remains surprisingly scarce. Extant studies have focused on the magazines' visual and textual representations of gender and sexuality (e.g., Saarenmaa 2017; Kangasvuori 2014; Juvonen 2002) while histories on production and economy, rare as such, have mainly been published as popular memoirs and biographies of Finnish male porn 'tycoons' (Af Enehjelm 2008; Kalemaa 2006; Korppi 2002). The scale and volume of the Finnish sex magazine market lacks systematic research comparative to Klara Arnberg's (2010) exhaustive study within the Swedish context.

Remembering a golden era?

The retrospective visibility of 1970s Finnish sex magazines varies drastically. Some titles, while long discontinued, have remained in popular memory as points of reference – both nostalgic and not. Since *Kalle* and *Jallu* – along with *Ratto* – were highly popular and

published until year 2015 so as to be among the last sex magazine brands to survive, they have specific permanence as points of reference. Even as many other titles have simply evaporated, or hover about as the more spectral stuff of anecdotes, these periodicals have remained objects of reminiscence, often in connection with memories of one's youth and introduction to sexual media content (e.g., Saarinen 2015; Paasonen et al. 2015).

Within such forms of public remembrance, there is a seduction to frame the 1970s as an era of innocence preceding the AIDS crisis, the ubiquity of surgically enhanced breasts and the broader pornographic body ideal identified as 'plastic' (e.g., Härmä and Stolpe 2010, 113; Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2007). Such nostalgia may also involve the pitting of 1970s magazines against later porn productions so that the narrative becomes one of increasing explicitness and violence. Archival inquiry nevertheless quickly points out the fallacies inherent in this notion, given the presence of sadist fantasies, casual sexism and (semi-scientific yet titillated) explorations of paedophile desires in many of the leading titles of the period. Discussing this point in the Swedish context, Mariah Larsson (2022, 29–34) points out that as legislation concerning child sex abuse material was not yet in place in, it appeared in high-profile titles such as *Private*. Finnish readers could also purchase specialty titles such as *Fifteen*, *Lolita Love* and *Children Love* through mail order: some of these were also available as tobacco shop imports (as reported in *Kalle* 4/1977, 'Kalle presents the hottest magazines in Finland!'). An era of innocence this was not.

Rather, as we have suggested, 1972–1973 was a period of transformation towards both hardcore print content and centralised production. It further involved a redefinition of the tabloid press through the so-called 'Lex Hymy', which passed in 1975 to regulate offenses against privacy: spearheaded by dismay towards *Hymy*'s invasive techniques in particular, the law resulted from the memorandum by the freedom of press (Saarenmaa 2010, 267–273).

Lehtimiehet – *Hymy*'s publisher – was predictably active in lobbying against this development: their *Nyrkkiposti*, for example, published numerous articles questioning the law (e.g., 'You can laugh now: A year ago this was porn', 7/1972). Juxtaposing 'illegal' gossip and 'legal' porn, the magazine asked its readers to define what porn might be to start with:

'The freedom of the press committee gave their suggestion. Someone will get rich again: the first one quick enough to bring a truly French-Swedish 69-positioned full-colour magazine – will get rich. But if we tell that the celebrity x had an extramarital tryst with the celebrity miss y – we can go to jail.

THE POOR, DEFENSLESS MAN WITH LITTLE MONEY AS CONFUSED AND ALARMED AS EVER.' ('Money for porn, jail for gossip: Do you think or know what's porn?', 1/1973; also 'What's porn? Draw a real porn image', 12/1973).

Since the publisher had aggressively moved to distributing hardcore content, this lament rings hypocritical, yet it also speaks of the financial need – as presented by shifts in media regulation – for the tabloid press to focus on sex over speculative celebrity gossip. In addition, it speaks of the slipperiness, be it rhetorical or felt, of the moniker of porn within this all.

Rather than comprising a 'golden age' in Finnish porn history, years 1972–1973 marked the beginnings of what became a highly lucrative domestic market for hardcore periodicals, such as Williams's *Urkki* (1974–1983, named after the Finnish President, Urho Kaleva Kekkonen), introduced as the Finnish version of *Ugens Rapport* (est. 1972 in Denmark), which reached the circulation of 68,558 during its year of launch alone. The 1970s also witnessed the increased visibility of gay male content in *Kalle* in particular. Much of these developments, as well as the periodicals that came, went and remained in the course of them, are yet to be charted.

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Figure 1: *Kalle* 1/1973, 'Jansson's temptation' featuring a recognisable Marimekko tablecloth, local brands of flour and (elsewhere) beer. Identified as 'Maija Peltonen' (a somewhat generic Finnish name), the model is quoted offering the recipe for 'Jansson's temptation', a popular dish of potatoes, fish and cream.

Figure 2: *Jallu* 7/1973, 'Not even a stick standing' features 'Eija S.' with a love for nature who, according to the article, enjoys cutting down trees in the nude.

Figure 3: *Jallu* 12/1973, 'Could I be a model?' addresses the modelling dreams of 'Kerttu P.', seen musing over the magazine's recent issues.

Figure 4: 'Sex thief', *Mies* 8/1973

Figure 5: *Cocktail* 11/1973, 'Sex films' addressing *Deep Throat*