

Pornography and Transnationality

The Case of Hälle, Sweden in the 1970s

ABSTRACT

This article addresses border crossings in the 1970s related to sexual commerce, in particular in the small community of Hälle, located near the Sweden–Norway border at Svinesund and European route E6. As the legal situation with regard to pornography differed in Norway and Sweden, Swedish legislation being more liberal, Norwegians travelled to Sweden to both buy and to consume on-site sexually explicit material and entertainment. By choosing this perspective, the article shifts focus away from the sexually explicit material itself, towards the spaces in which it can be found, and reflects upon consumption of such material as a literally transgressive, non-normative sexual behavior.

Keywords: pornography, 1970s, transnationality, Sweden, Norway, Hälle, Svinesund

DURING THE COVID-19 pandemic, borders were closed or border controls severely tightened around the world. Travelling became very difficult even in and between the Nordic countries. In light of this, it might feel strange to think that, from the mid-1950s and up to the 2015 refugee crisis, which temporarily (or so it was said) reinstated border control for travelers between Denmark and Sweden, the Nordic Passport Union allowed citizens to travel between Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland without passport control. The purpose of the union was to encourage free movement between the Nordic states and to promote

integration in the region. In particular, the areas which share borders with another Nordic country – like the southernmost part of Sweden, separated from Denmark by only a narrow strip of water, Öresund; the mountainous, long-stretching areas on the border between Norway and Sweden; the areas on the far north border between Finland and Sweden; or the areas with ferries that cross the Baltic sea – have made good use of this freedom of movement and ostensible siblinghood of nationalities. Of course, as all Nordic citizens know, the passport union – although built on a kind of privileged trust – did not and does not necessarily imply that the countries are integrated. For instance, while Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian are related languages, Danes and Swedes have difficulties understanding one another, and Finnish is a different language altogether.

In addition, the principle of free movement did not include goods. Customs would – and will still – randomly check travelers' luggage for illegal substances and goods brought into the country in illegal quantities. Restrictions notwithstanding, there has been quite a lot of commerce, legal as well as illegal, around for instance alcohol, tobacco, and different foodstuffs. In the 1950s, Swedes went to Norway to buy butter and flour, and until the early 1990s, when the exchange rate shifted in favor of the Danish crown, Swedes would go to Denmark for coffee filters, laundry detergent, brie cheese and rye bread. Up until the pandemic, Norwegians would travel to Sweden to buy food, alcohol, tobacco and candy – a commerce that has resumed since the restrictions were lifted.

Obviously, the commerce that develops is usually connected to consumer goods or activities for one reason or another deemed “sinful” – immoral or unhealthy (or both) – and which some states decide to regulate more harshly than others, either by outright prohibiting them or by imposing taxes or other limitations on them. This article addresses border crossings related to sexual commerce – pornography, strip shows, and live-shows – in particular in the small community of Hälle, located near the Sweden–Norway border some ten kilometers from the area of Svinesund and European route E6. In Sweden, the distribution, exhibition and sale of sexually explicit material was decriminalized in 1971,

later than in Denmark (1969) but earlier than in most (if not all) other countries. Norway, by contrast, retained its obscenity laws until 2006, thus creating a regulatory gap between two closely located national territories that opened up a lucrative market.

The historical transnationality of pornography has increasingly been addressed in literature over the past few years (e.g., Larsson 2015, 2018; Paasonen & Saarenmaa 2022; Carter 2022), but this article focuses on a different kind of border crossing, not of pornographic material per se, but of bodies intent on consuming such material. By looking at the case of the Sweden–Norway border on European route E6, around the time of decriminalization in Sweden, I will discuss how commerce in the small community of Hälle and the border shopping center at Svinesund, was in part shaped by the urge to consume sexually explicit material and entertainment, and governmental forces on the one side of the border considering such wares as “sinful” (i.e., immoral or unhealthy), and on the other as unproblematic – if not, as I will show, altogether accepted. A crucial element in the construction of pornography as a distinct category is, as many scholars have noted, its ability to move us, to affect our bodies (Williams 1991; Attwood 2010; Paasonen 2011). In the case I am exploring here, it is not just a matter of bodily affect, of movement in the body, but of physical movement through actual geographical space, involving cars, boats, and buses.

Furthermore, the perspective of this article – border crossings with the purpose of consuming sexual material – shifts the focus away from pornography itself, towards the spaces in which it can be found and the desires that induce people to move from one location to another, to reflect upon a literally transgressive, non-normative sexual behavior. As such, this article responds to the call of John Champagne in his 1997 article “Stop Reading Films!: Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography” as well as to early scholars finding the potential in queer theory to denaturalize heterosexuality and make it into an object of study (cf. Kulick 2005).

The paradox of pornography is that it on the one hand exists within a hegemonic, patriarchal, heterosexual structure and on the other sub-

verts and deviates from exactly such a structure. Subversions of hegemonic structures occur not only through content and designation (gay porn, queer porn, alt porn, feminist porn, etc.), but through the behaviors connected to consumption of pornographic material.

Throughout time, consumers of pornography have been pathologized in various ways. In the mid-twentieth century, the dangers of pornography were seen to lay in how it would turn the consumer away from a “normal” social and romantic life. Thus, users were regarded as asocial or, if the consumption took place because of a need to compensate for a lack of social and romantic intimacy, socially inadequate (cf. Larsson et al. 2021). The behavior of visiting adult book stores or porn theaters has been constructed as deviant (Larsson 2017). Since the 1970s, porn consumers have also been regarded as potentially dangerous, owing to the view that porn would foster a violent and aggressive sexuality. More recently, and somewhat contradictory, porn has been regarded as the cause of both hypersexuality – leading to porn or sex addiction – and hyposexuality, as in the notion of porn-induced erectile dysfunction. Although pornography may be seen as a very crude expression of patriarchal, heterosexist ideology, the sheer vehemence its use evokes implies that the social meanings of pornography and pornography use, and their position in a normative system, are not unambiguous.

The spaces of pornography, too, are paradoxical. As Champagne points out as early as 1997, the porn shop with its adjacent video arcade is not an unequivocally heteronormative space, since the materials available cater to a wide variety of interests, and some users also engage in male-to-male sexual encounters. This does not mean, Champagne continues, that porn shops are queer, but they are, “rather, polymorphously perverse and rendered increasingly so by capital’s voracious commodification of everything, including ‘aberrant’ sexual desires” (Champagne 1997, 84). Consequently, porn stores are not to be idealized as radical or a liberation from patriarchal, heteronormative capitalism, but “a response of historical subjects to some of the contradictions of capitalism” (Champagne 1997, 92; cf. Waugh 1985).

Yet, I would argue that by their pure existence – and by the existence of their users – porn stores and in particular the movement in actual geographical space of their users draw attention to the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in patriarchal, heteronormative society. In the case of Hälle, one such paradox is already evident in the newspaper article from 1970 which initially drew my attention to it. It is one of the reasons the article about “porn hungry” Norwegians was deemed newsworthy, and one of the reasons behind its particular tone and attitude (Ernemo 1970). By looking closer at the history of the area and its position on the national and natural border of Idefjorden on the West Coast of Sweden, more of such a paradox can be uncovered. The borders that are crossed and made ambiguous are, beyond the literal border, i.e., the national and natural border of Idefjorden, numerous: those between tradition and modernity, rural countryside and urban space, small-time entrepreneurship and big city investors, the social democratic welfare state alongside the labor movement and aggressive capitalism.

Hälle and Svinesund

The Sweden–Norway border on the West Coast of Sweden follows Idefjorden, a long fiord which arrows into the land in an east–west trajectory and then bends perpendicularly to continue almost straightly southwards. On the Norwegian side, the small town of Halden is located right at the bend. On the Swedish side, Svinesund is located by European route E6, or rather in-between the old European route E6 and the new one, completed in 2005. A bit further south is the city of Strömstad. Two bridges cross over Idefjorden, one for the old route E6 and one for the new one. The old bridge was built as late as 1946. Previous to that, boats and ferries took people across the border.

The region around Idefjorden is historically famous owing to the Swedish king Charles XII having died there in 1718, outside the stronghold Fredriksten in Halden, during his attempt to conquer Norway. It was also an important hub in the efforts to help refugees from Norway during the German occupation in World War II. In the nineteenth century, stone quarrying became a major industry in the region and with

the quarrying also stone masonry. Most of the stone quarries, however, were closed down in the 1960s, leading to unemployment and depopulation. A few years later, in the mid-1970s, it was discovered that Idefjorden was heavily polluted due to waste from the wood pulp factory in Halden, and that marine life in the fiord was practically extinct.

Consequently, the region around Svinesund became increasingly dependent on Norwegians crossing the border to buy goods that, although expensive compared to price levels in the rest of Europe, were cheaper than in Norway: alcohol, tobacco, and food. Even today, a sprawling commercial area as well as a large shopping center south of Svinesund, Nordby Shopping Centre, stand as a testimony to the purchase power of Norwegians, even though they have to travel all the way to Strömstad to be able to buy alcohol at the nearest Systembolaget, the Swedish monopoly store chain for alcoholic beverages.

Approximately 10 kilometres from Svinesund, lies the small community of Hälle. In the early twentieth century, Hälle was a thriving community with stores and an elementary school, but in the 1960s, with the closing of the stone quarries, Hälle suffered depopulation and the small community dwindled. One clear indication of Hälle's depopulation was the closing down of the local branch of the Co-operative Federation's national chain of Konsum stores. In spite of the beautiful landscape surrounding it, Hälle seemed doomed to fade away into nothingness.

Pornographic border crossings

Sexually explicit material seems to always have had an extraordinary ability to travel across national borders, even in the pre-digital era, and perhaps especially during the time when legislation would differ quite significantly from country to country. At the same time, focusing on pornography as innately transnational – a universal language, so to speak – draws attention to its nationality, since the transnational presupposes the national (Larsson 2015; Hedling & Larsson 2009). In Sweden in the 1960s, sexual liberation – and thereby sexually explicit material – became increasingly associated with the social democratic welfare state, in particular a young and progressive generation of social

democrats (e.g., Glover & Marklund 2009; Arnberg & Marklund 2016).

As several scholars, among them Eric Schaefer and Kevin Heffernan (Schaefer 2014; Heffernan 2016), have pointed out, “Swedish” and “Scandinavian” came to be associated with a permissive, promiscuous attitude to sexuality during this time period (late 1960s and early 1970s). This association, or reputation, which Nic Glover and Carl Marklund call “the Sweden sex-nexus”, can be understood as part of a Cold War era politics in which either fears or hopes (depending on your political position) about the Swedish position “in-between” capitalism and socialism, market economy and planned economy, the US and the Soviet Union, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, could be projected onto ideas about the sexualities of the nation (Glover & Marklund 2009; Schaefer 2014). Thus, the Swedish sex-nexus could be interpreted as “sinful”, a dystopian insight into what might come of an altogether too-meddling (socialist) government that controlled even the most intimate parts of its citizens’ lives while at the same time granting sexual freedom in lieu of all other freedoms. But it could also be understood in a positive way as progressive – as an expression of liberty and equality, and freedom from oppressive taboos and inhibition.

However, the notion of “Scandinavian” permissiveness in relation to sexually explicit material only provides part of the picture. Although Denmark and Sweden were early in decriminalizing pornography (1969 and 1971 respectively), Norway did not follow suit, instead retaining obscenity laws pertaining to pornographic images until after the turn of the millennium (2006). Nordic neighbor Finland also upheld legal restrictions on pornography.

Similarly, the difference in legal restrictions around same-sex sexual relations is striking, with Denmark decriminalizing same-sex sexual activity in 1933 and Sweden in 1944, whereas Finland and Norway waited until the early 1970s (1971 and 1972 respectively).

According to Susanna Paasonen, in the popular imagination of Finland, Swedish sexuality was connected to two things: male homosexuality and pornography (Paasonen 2018). The Sweden sex-nexus was thus somewhat differently constructed in Finland than in, for instance, the

USA. In Finland, the conception of “Swedish” as “homosexual” had to do with Swedish scandals around male prostitution in the 1950s and “enabled the articulation of Finnish masculinity as agrarian, healthy and heterosexual” (Paasonen 2018; see also Juvonen in this issue) at a time when migration from Finland to Sweden increased. However, gay and lesbian Finns in the 1960s regarded Sweden as a more progressive and open society than Finland. Sweden thus provided both an inspiring example for the gay and lesbian movement in Finland and a place to travel to experience a less restrictive environment (see Juvonen in this issue).

The link between Sweden and pornography, however, seems to have been grounded much more straightforwardly in the realities of the legal differences between the countries with regard to sexually explicit images (Paasonen 2018). Nonetheless, differences in legislation created not only constructions of the neighboring countries as decadent, effeminate, and sinful or progressive, emancipated, and liberal, but also an incentive for the movement of goods and wares.

Early journeys

The transnationality of sexually explicit material becomes evident when we look at some of the indications of pornography’s travels in the 1960s and early 1970s: small news items about people being caught in customs. Swedish tabloid newspapers from the 1960s contain reports of smuggling from Sweden to the US by mail order, and of “Swedish sin” flooding the world market (*Aftonbladet* 19620401; *Dagens Nyheter* 19630327; *Aftonbladet* 19650311, see also Arnberg 2010, 169–172, 2009). It was of course considered a problem that Swedish pornographers tarnished the nation’s reputation abroad, but that the revenue from export of pornographic images and magazines went untaxed was also a great concern.

That Swedish pornography was “flooding” the world market might have been an exaggeration of the sort that tabloids often make use of. However, other, later reports seem to confirm that Swedish pornography may indeed have been quite ubiquitous: in 1967, a Danish man was arrested in the Netherlands for trying to sell Swedish pornography;

in 1969, there was an item about Swedish and Danish porn, smuggled in via Japan, being confiscated in Malaysia; in 1970, there was another item about Swedish tourists being arrested for selling porn magazines and films in Paris, allegedly with a 600 percent profit (*Dagens Nyheter* 19670502; *GT Söndagstidningen* 19691102; *GT Söndagstidningen* 19700501).

Several news items describe Finnish customs confiscating pornographic material being brought over the border from Sweden. At Helsinki airport, two travelers from Stockholm were found with “60 kilos” of pornography, neatly wrapped up in Christmas paper, in December of 1969 (*Hudiksvallstidningen* 19691209). Earlier that year, a car with Swedish license plates, entering the country by ferry from Norrtälje, had been stopped by customs and found to contain “porn worth 10 000 SEK” (*Hudiksvallstidningen* 19690828). In the far north, in Finnish Torneå, located just across the border from Swedish Haparanda, a 35-year-old Finnish man was caught trying to bring “328 kg of porn” across the border in 1970, and in 1971, after the decriminalization in Sweden, Finland was in one article explicitly described as a transit country for Danish and Swedish pornography on its way to Italy (*Expressen* 19700424; *Dagens Nyheter* 19711218).

The Malmö–Copenhagen connection was well established and apart from the sexually explicit material being exchanged between Sweden and Denmark, sex workers also travelled across Öresund, the narrow strip of water separating Malmö and Copenhagen (cf. Larsson 2017, 147–149). Before either country had decriminalized pornography, a woman allegedly working for a publisher in Malmö was caught by Danish customs carrying twenty print clichés and 1 800 magazines (*Expressen* 19680612). Swedish porn entrepreneurs brought Danish magazines across the border to Sweden and sold them from the trunks of their cars, and then later, after 1971, ventured into Copenhagen in search of material to showcase in their stores (Larsson 2017, 147–149). In Gothenburg, pornographer Rune Ljungberg started the porn club Jet Filmklubb in 1967 and, in 1968, Sexografen. Even before decriminalization, he submitted early 8mm porn to the National Board of Film Censors – films

which at that point were banned without discussion simply for being in violation of the law (“Sexografen” 2012).

What these news items – often very brief – bring to mind, is that even before decriminalization, production, distribution, and export of sexually explicit material was actually prospering in Sweden. Porn stores and sex clubs were opened in the larger cities – Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö – and the publication of porn magazines increased rapidly. Regular distribution outlets were not allowed to carry these magazines (cf. Arnberg 2012, 368) but they were circulated by way of mail order. Films, too, were bought and sold via mail order, and at this point in time, much of the film material was imported. Magazines, on the other hand, were exported to for instance Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and the US.

As Klara Arnberg has demonstrated, the Swedish “wave” of pornographic magazines predates the change in legislation and reached its peak in the late 1960s (Arnberg 2010, 193). Although publishers, club owners, and store proprietors were frequently indicted, porn entrepreneurs seem to have been more than willing to gamble for possible profits and try their luck at loopholing existing legislation.

Moreover, porn tourism – tourists travelling to consume sexually explicit material and visit sex clubs – flourished in Stockholm and Copenhagen (cf. Arnberg 2010, 169–172). As Danish scholar Isak Thorsen has observed, Danish feature-length porn films were screened in Copenhagen with English subtitles, in particular during the summer (Thorsen 2014, 290). However, not all porn tourism was confined to the capital cities.

The Sweden–Norway border at Svinesund

The dwindling community of Hälle would in 1970 become an example of the entangled nature of sexually explicit material and entertainment, with its Norwegian customers, Danish strippers, and store proprietors from Gothenburg. In 1970, the big, Stockholm-based, daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* reported from Hälle, calling it “a paradise for porn hungry Norwegians” (Ernemo 1970). Erotic Art Center had opened in the closed-down Konsum store, screening porn films and offering a strip-tease show every hour.

According to the article, most Norwegians came by car, but an entrepreneurial-minded Norwegian on the other side of the fiord made a business out of rowing people across to Hälle. Around fifty visitors a day came to Hälle, most of them Norwegians, paying either 20 SEK or 30 NOK (180 SEK, or around 17 euros, in today's currency) to watch films and see a short striptease show in the former Konsum store. The films had according to the article been approved by the local police chief in Strömstad (pornography still being illegal in Sweden in 1970).

At first thought, this may seem as an innovative way for the local population to have put an end to the region's trajectory of decline, but the Hälle porn paradise was in fact mainly managed by big city entrepreneurs. The married couple who ran Erotic Art Center were from Gothenburg, where the husband worked as an accountant. Erotic Art Center was a lucrative "vacation pastime", the article explained (Ernemo 1970). The striptease dancer who was performing the week the newspaper journalist visited was from Denmark. She observed that stripping in Hälle was "boring" because there was not much to do except work ("I take off my clothes once every hour, I wash my hair, read, and look at the view"), but the money was better than in Gothenburg or Copenhagen. Two locals are interviewed in the article. One, an elderly woman, is horrified at what is going on and misses the old Konsum store. The other, an elderly man, says it is good if it makes Hälle famous, but distances himself from the erotic activity taking place: "I don't want to watch, but others do" (Ernemo 1970).

There are no indications as to what kind of sexually explicit material was on offer in the store. The article presumes a heterosexual, male interest. Nonetheless, porn stores at this time routinely offered a wide variety of materials, placing different categories on different shelves but all clearly visible (cf. Champagne 1997, 84; Larsson 2012, 132–134, 2017, 81–84). Furthermore, in Norway not only pornography but also same-sex intercourse was illegal. If there was a market for porn across the border for Norwegians, some of it would, by the same capitalist logic that motivated a porn store in a closed-down Konsum store in Hälle and several more in Svinesund along the E6, be gay. Champagne sees

“a kind of institutional denial of the homoerotics” in the prevalence of straight material in porn stores and arcades (Champagne 1997, 86), and that same kind of institutional denial seems to be at work in the *Dagens Nyheter* article.

In the article, Hälle is contrasted with the area closer to Svinesund, where porn tents were raised along a noisy stretch of the E6. Hälle is described as a somewhat exclusive, “idyllic” even, place for people “in the know”, located as it is off the beaten track (Ernemo 1970). A winding, narrow highway takes you through the woods to Hälle from Svinesund. The commerce along the E6 is described in harsher terms and comes across as less romantic, although the article mentions the “most adorable porn establishment” – a four-man tent in which six people at a time can watch porn film. The article does not, however, give any mention of what would later become Svinesund’s most longevous porn establishment, Hönan Agda (Agda the Hen), which opened in the 1960s and closed down only a few years ago. The establishments offering sexual merchandise and entertainment fell into decline because of the changes in legislation in Norway in 2006. Since 2006, Norwegians have continued to shop for groceries in Sweden, but nowadays the main items of “sinful” consumption are tobacco, candy, soda, and beer.

During the first summer of the pandemic, in August 2020, I travelled to Svinesund and Hälle, not with any particular research aim in mind but simply because there was a pandemic, borders were closed and social calls discouraged. And of course, I wanted to see the place I had read about with my own eyes and not just via Google Earth and Streetview. Norway’s borders were closed – travel was allowed but you had to quarantine for two weeks.

At the time of writing (2023), borders are open again, and commerce has resumed. According to news items from early 2023, there is an ongoing “selling fest” by the border, and the income yield is comparable to pre-pandemic levels. The cars in the parking lots are yet again mostly Norwegian (*Strömstads Tidning* 20230211; *Dagligvarunytt* 20230331a; *Dagligvarunytt* 20230331b).

In Hälle, which at the time of my visit in 2020 appeared to be a sleepy commuter suburb where about half the houses were splendidly renovated and equipped with two-car garages and the other half were deserted, I found no trace of Erotic Art Center, and no traces of any Norwegian commerce. Svinesund, on the other hand, this sprawling commercial center with its enormous parking lots and huge signs advertising tobacco and candy, seemed eerily deserted without any shopping Nordic neighbors. Here, looking over the vast empty concrete surfaces, I found the spot where Hönan Agda used to be, now torn down to make way for what might eventually be a Godishuset (Candy House). The last news item I found about the Hönan Agda lot is from 2019, and the pandemic may very well have put an end to the plans. I also found the last vestiges of the porn commerce at the Sweden–Norway border: a sex store, open only a few hours a week due to the pandemic.

Paradoxes?

The story of Hälle as a “paradise for porn hungry Norwegians” may seem quaint or cute – anecdotal evidence of nothing more than the lengths people may go to when something is forbidden on one side of a stretch of water and allowed on the other. Certainly, that is the tone of the newspaper article report from Hälle, which relates how one man had allegedly driven a moped all the way from Oslo to visit Hälle and states – on an assumption – that one or two of the local men most likely paid clandestine visits to the old Konsum store too.

However, the case of Hälle can be seen as indicative of several deeply embedded paradoxes. For instance, the newspaper article describes Hälle as “en naturskönt belägen avfolkningsort” (“a depopulation community in a scenic location”), on the shore of Idefjorden. Summer and nature play a significant role both in the national self-image of Swedes and in films that projected the Swedish sex-nexus onto the world – from *One Summer of Happiness* (1951) and *Summer with Monica* (1953) to *The Lustful Vicar* (1969), *Justine & Juliette* (1976) and *Come Blow the Horn* (1978). The allusions to this national trope in the beginning of the newspaper article create a contrast between the perceived

lurid business of a porn store and the idyllic surroundings, but the allusions also (and perhaps unintentionally) evoke a sense of something very truly Swedish: sex, summer, and beautiful natural landscapes. The fact that the owners of the porn store come from a nearby city and call their establishment a “vacation pastime” aligns with the dream of a vacation spent in the countryside (cf. Åberg 2023). At the same time, the picturesqueness of Hälle hides an unsightly (in the literal sense, as it cannot be observed by the unknowing eye) environmental horror – the death of all marine life in Idefjorden – which had not yet been discovered in 1970.

Furthermore, the case of Hälle demonstrates that pornography and sexual entertainment are not in any way, even historically, confined to the urban spaces of large cities. The contrast that the article paints evokes a paradox that is not really there. There were several establishments outside the big cities and on the outskirts of smaller towns in the 1970s, for example the Sex In-stores – a chain of sex clubs in some smaller communities in Southern Sweden. Hälle may seem like a surprising choice of location when opening a sex store, but renting the former Konsum store was in all likelihood not very expensive and apparently potential customers were prepared to make the journey. The depopulation trend in itself created an opportunity akin to that identified by store owners and club managers in Malmö, who rented property marked for demolition and therefore cheap (Larsson 2017, 91–96).

Another aspect highlighted by the case of Hälle concerns the welfare state project, which culminated in the late 1960s (sometimes referred to as the “record years”). The old Konsum store, where Erotic Art Center opened, was part of a chain of stores managed by Kooperativa Förbundet (the Co-operation Federation), and as such something of an emblem of the idea of the welfare state as a folkhem (a “people’s home”). Again, it might seem like a paradox that the premises of something as “wholesome” as a Konsum store would go on to host a sex store for mainly Norwegian customers. However, the progressive ideas about sexual liberation propagated in the 1960s which would lead to the decriminalization of pornography, were very much a part of the ideology of a younger

generation of Social Democrats and the social democratic welfare state (cf. Arnberg & Marklund 2016). Consequently, there is something particularly poignant in the location of Erotic Art Center – not least because the market for sexual entertainment and merchandise opened up due to regulations aimed at curbing the movement of “sinful” goods from one Scandinavian (welfare) state to another, creating an incentive for Norwegians to consume sexually explicit material on Swedish soil. The true paradox of Erotic Art Center opening in the former Konsum store lies not in the sexual commerce per se, but rather in the crass, small-time capitalism of the big-city entrepreneurial couple juxtaposed with the workers’ cooperation movement which was supposed to return investments to the consumers.

Also, the ideals of sexual freedom that permeated progressive circles created a space for commercial entrepreneurship that would later, in the 1970s, clash with the kind of utopian notions of a “better” pornography, and the argument that decriminalization would render pornography obsolete, heard in the debates of the 1960s (Larsson 2007). Champagne’s idea of “capital’s voracious commodification of everything” (Champagne 1997, 84), needs to be modified on the border between Norway and Sweden, as it was here underlined by two welfare states’ differing definitions of what was unhealthy or immoral. On the one hand, the commercial activities across the border were exacerbated by these different legislations, capital thus becoming even more voracious due to a lack on the one side of the border and an abundance on the other. On the other hand, the different legislations were dependent on an idea of sexual freedom in Sweden that was closely tied to a progressive generation of (mainly male) liberals and Social Democrats which argued for free abortion, the rights of sexual minorities, better sex education in schools, and decriminalization of pornography, creating an environment that was perceived as more sexually tolerant than that of Norway and Finland.

Nevertheless, and in spite of this supposed tolerance and sexual liberation, the “porn hungry” Norwegians were, to a degree, mocked. Pornographic magazines, film screenings, and strip shows had not yet become

associated with the oppression of women and social misery and so it was perceived as funny and frivolous, that Norwegians go to such lengths to consume sexually explicit material and entertainment.

The Norwegians, straight or gay, then, were the natural resource that was – like formerly the granite of the quarries – mined. What the case of Hälle and the Sweden–Norway border at Svinesund tells us is that pornographic border crossings relate not only to the pornographic material itself: pornography is also a cause for people to travel. Although there was quite an abundance of sexually explicit material being smuggled into Norway from Sweden – I found four news items from 1967 alone mentioning such cases – and although some of that material actually crossed the border at Svinesund (*Sölvesborgstidningen* 19670926; *Dagens Nyheter* 19670908; *Hudiksvallstidningen* 19670930; *Sölvesborgstidningen* 19670809), there seems to have been an even stronger tendency to consume pornographic material on “legally safe Swedish soil”. On the one hand, this seems to have been taken as a simple matter of fact, just like it was with regard to the other goods the Norwegians came for. On the other, it is quite clear that the newspaper article about Hälle draws on an image of these consumers as starved for porn (“porn-hungry”). The interviewed locals are portrayed as eager to distance themselves from the activity of visiting a sex store and it is pointed out that one person actually rode a moped all the way from Oslo to get to Hälle. All in all, the article is not matter-of-factly but rather takes an almost ethnographic view of these foreigners who come to Hälle to consume sexually explicit material; they are, in a way, Other. Maybe because they have to travel to find this material, maybe because they are Norwegians and therefore both familiar and foreign – like Swedes yet different – or maybe, quite simply, because they are porn consumers and as such constructed as socially inadequate, deviant, or hypersexual. Contrasting them with the mundane activity of shopping along the E6, the idyllic surroundings and picturesque scenery of Hälle, the distancing attitude of the locals, and the stripper’s sense of boredom, serves to emphasize their gullibility as consumers.

Conclusion

The case of Hälle and the Sweden–Norway border at Svinesund brings to the fore several interesting issues concerning sexually explicit material and entertainment: the transnational movement of not only the material itself, but bodies in search of it; the paradoxes inherent in the relationship between capitalism in the form of pornography and the social democratic welfare states; the contradictions between the two Nordic welfare states' definitions of unhealthy and immoral goods; the presumption of straightness in the *Dagens Nyheter* article about Hälle specifically and the discourse on pornography more generally; the view of porn consumers as both gullible and ludicrous; the apparent contrast between the idyllic yet endangered natural environment of Idefjorden and lurid porn; and the utilization of a border area which carries many historic connections between the nationalities.

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