

The Breakthrough of Sexual Cinematic Freedom in Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s

Authors : Søren Birkvad

Abstract : This paper traces the development of sexual cinematic freedom in the wake of an epoch-making event in Danish cultural history. As the first in the world, the Danes abolished all censorship for adults in 1969, making the tiny nation of Denmark the world's largest exporter of pornography for several years. Drawing on the insights of social and cultural history and the focus point of the National Cinema direction of Cinema Studies, this study focuses on Danish film pornography in the 1960s and 1970s in its own right (e.g., its peculiar mix of sex, popular comedy and certain 'feminist' agendas). More importantly, however, it covers a broader pattern, namely the culturally deep-rooted tradition of freedom of speech and sexual liberalism in Denmark. Thus, the key concept of *frisind* ("free mind") in Danish cultural history took on an increasingly partisan application in the 1960s and 1970s. It became a designation for all-is-permitted hippie excess but was also embraced by dissenting movements on the left, such as feminism, which questioned whether a free mind necessarily meant free love. In all of this, Danish cinema from the 1960s and 1970s offers a remarkable source of historical insight, simultaneously reminding us of a number of acute issues of contemporary society. These issues include gendered ideas of sexuality and freedom then and now and the equivalent clash of cultures between a liberal commercial industry and the accelerating political demands of the "sexual revolution." Finally, these issues include certain tensions between, on the one hand, a purely materialistic idea of sexual freedom – incarnated by anything from pornography to many of the taboo-breaking youth films and avant-garde films in the wake of the 1968-rebellion – and, on the other hand, growing opposition to this anti-spiritual perception of human sexuality (represented by for instance the 'closet conservatism' of Danish art film star Lars von Trier of nowadays). All in all, this presentation offers a reflection on ideas of sexuality and gender rooted in a unique historical moment in cinematic history.

Keywords : Danish film history, cultural history, film pornography, history of sexuality, national cinema, sexual liberalism

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