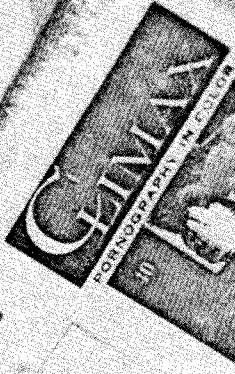


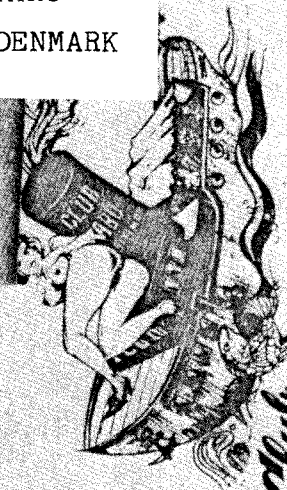
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IJS - 9 NOTES ON PORNOGRAPHY IN DENMARK



1971

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MARITIME

CALLING ALL PLAYGIRLS AND PLAYBOYS:

The exciting SEX HOUR along the beautiful Danish coast

everything of the sex life

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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS-9 NOTES ON PORNOGRAPHY
IN DENMARK

44 Canfield Gardens
London, N.W.6.
England.
19th November, 1971

Mr. Richard Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017
USA

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The modern Danish fairy tale is illustrated with
"feelthy" pictures.

Pornography is the art form which the visitor to
Copenhagen finds all about him.

When I first visited Copenhagen in 1964 its residents
were known for their sophisticated and healthy attitude
toward sex. There was a frankness and honesty in sexual
relationships, at least among the students I met, which was
quite refreshing to an American straight from college in
equally liberal though much more hypocritical New York.
At that point in time only in Scandanavia would it not be
unusual for a woman to ask a man to go to bed with her.

From the open and candid attitude toward sex in the
mid-1960s, there has flowered in Copenhagen a full-grown
libertine (not just libertarian) environment. In 1967
the Danes removed restrictions on written pornography.
Then on July 1, 1969, restrictions on pictorial and
performance pornography were removed. There remained
only two limitations of any consequence: such pornography
could not be sold to children under sixteen; and in regard
to pornographic performances, it was necessary that the
audience be members of the "clubs" at least twenty-four
hours prior to any attendance at a live performance.

Now everywhere one walks he sees pornography shops. These enterprises advertise with huge signs and tantalizing displays. They sell a phenomenal range of pornographic pictures, books and films, as well as a strange assortment of sexual devices -- e.g., whips, hand-cuffs, artificial vaginas and penises, and various other gadgets. Some of these shops have nude sales girls. Others offer live shows; however, these performances tend to be tame and generally just offer a parade of nude women.

For those who want a bit more action in their pornography, there are the sex clubs. These range from the small, store-front establishment to the floating sex show which provides the entertainment on a ship at sea. I can report the activities of these sex clubs only from hearsay, for I decided that they were not worth the money: it costs over 100 Kroner (about \$14) for admittance to one of these shows.

According to the advertising, these shows featured live performances of: heterosexual intercourse, lesbian intercourse, male homosexual intercourse, masochism, sadism and animal sex. Also, "intimate massage for all customers" and free dancing with the nude hostesses. For patrons with very special interests, there are specialty clubs for male and female homosexuals. One advertised "other variants," whatever or whoever these might be.

I thought I was well prepared for this environment: four years near Times Square; two and one-half years with access to Soho; two in Southern California. Yet still I was not completely ready to cope with Copenhagen.

My reactions surprised me. This atmosphere of hypersexuality is titilating, very, very titilating. Indeed, this red-blooded male found it very exciting. For twenty-four hours. Then it became boring. Then oppressive. Both the time scale of my changing reaction and my antipathy at the end of my brief stay were the surprises. What happened?

Two aspects of pornography seem to account for my change in attitude in Copenhagen. First, pornography provides only vicarious sex, nothing substantial. Second, the commercial exploitation of sex, which is so blatant in pornography, is itself the source of vulgarity. Let me comment on both points.

First let me explain the term "vicarious sex." In Copenhagen one is exposed to sexual blandishments from all directions. The pornographers attempt to seduce you, yet they never intend to give you the opportunity to allow this arousal to flow its natural course. The thrills are supposed to be vicarious. By never offering fulfillment, they encourage continuing desire, which looks for vicarious reward even though it is always ultimately frustrating. This vicarious sex is for an adolescent society -- not necessarily in age but in attitude. The consumption of this pornography is an act of self-indulgence: this is social masturbation. And masturbation seldom provides satisfaction. This helps to explain why anyone with a healthy sex life finds pornography unfulfilling.

To characterize the pornography of Copenhagen in terms of vicarious sex and social masturbation is in no way to cast aspersions at the potency of the Danes. Indeed, one very seldom hears Danish spoken in the porno shops. Most of the pornography seems to be sold to the Germans, Americans, and other foreign tourists. The export of pornography has become one of the leading earners of foreign currency for the Danes. So societies with controls on pornography provide the best market for the Danish product: the hypocritical puritans get their thrills from Danish "feelthy" pictures.

There is an interesting paradox in Danish law, which will lead us into the second point about Danish pornography: in spite of very liberal rules concerning the sale and display of pornography, prostitution is still illegal. Of course the laws against prostitution are not very strict -- a young lady who wishes to pursue the oldest profession need only work a few hours a day in some less demanding job to avoid breaking the law. And the laws appear to be

seldom enforced. Therefore, the red light districts -- Nyhavn and just past the main railroad station -- are full of lovely young prostitutes. What makes the paradox of legal pornography and illegal prostitution so odd is that Denmark has legalized activities which culminate in frustration, while making illegal those which carry sexual arousal to its natural fruition. This society encourages vicarious sex on a grand scale, while limiting the real activity.

Both pornography and prostitution suffer from a common corrupting influence: the intervention of money. I have always thought of sexual relationships as the most effective form of communication. And I have thought that commercial transactions are the least satisfactory occasions for communication of feelings. Therefore, once one turns a sexual relationship into a commercial transaction, he has perverted one of its most important roles. The male/female relationship becomes hyphenated by the dollar, kroner, pound, or mark.

Karl Marx, in his early writings, had some interesting observations to make about the effect of money on all human relationships; these seem especially relevant to my impressions of pornography in Copenhagen:

Money abases all the gods of mankind and changes them into commodities. Money is the Universal and self sufficient value of all things. It has, therefore, deprived the whole world, both the human world and nature, of their own proper value. Money is the alienated essence of man's work and existence; this essence dominates him and he worships it.

(p. 37, "On the Jewish Question," The Early Writings of Karl Marx, Tom Bottomore, ed., London, 1963.)

The power to confuse and invert all human and natural qualities, to bring about fraternization of incompatibles, the divine power of money, resides in its character as the alienated and self-alienating species life of man. It is the alienated power of humanity.

(p. 192, "Money - The Third Manuscript," ibid.)

Without my providing a full-fledged exegesis of Marx's Early Writings, especially of his technical terms such as "alienation," and "species life," one can readily see from these quotations an insight which is uniquely appropriate to an analysis of pornography and prostitution. Through the intervention of money that which is close and personal and meaningful becomes the inverse -- distant, impersonal, meaningless. And, in the case of pornography, the inversion becomes perversion. Not only does the sensuous quickly become sensational and crass, but the aims of the porno producer are to prevent any fulfillment of sexual desires which might inhibit a continuing market for his wares. Money contributes, in Marx's language, to the alienation of man: sex becomes something apart from the person instead of being an integral part of his life.

The pictures, live performances and films which one sees in Copenhagen are of the same genre as those one finds on the walls of Tantric temples in India. This genre includes art which glorifies sex in a beautifully erotic manner. What distinguishes pornography in Copenhagen (and London and New York) is that there (and here) one has the intervention of commercial exploitation. This factor, as much as anything else, transforms beautiful erotica into vulgar pornography.

The impact of this pornography on Danish society is difficult to assess. There are two sorts of information which might be relevant to tentative conclusions: sex crime trends and marriage/divorce data. I do not have access to firm and recent data on sex crimes. The English press has published conflicting reports on sex crimes in Denmark: academic criminologists claim that the rate has diminished since the change in pornography laws. The Chief Constable of Copenhagen disputes this view. The layman must register this particular disagreement a draw.

Marriage and divorce trends are more interesting. In recent years -- not just since the change in pornography laws -- the divorce rate in Denmark has skyrocketed.

Whether this breakdown in the family is related to the change in pornography laws and/or sexual mores is difficult to say. One could speculate that, instead of the change in attitudes changing the institution of marriage, this change has broken it.

But there are indications that marriage itself is changing. One can find ads in newspapers stating: "Married couple wants young girl to join them for sex;" "married couple wants young man to join them for enjoyment;" "married couple looking for other couples to join in group sex." These ads are indicative of changes in the institution of marriage. Also, some communal families are developing among students.

Since the Danes have demonstrated themselves to be so flexible in regard to matters of sex, one would expect to see new sorts of relationships within and outside of marriage develop. Such changes may be hidden by a divorce rate which indicates only breakdown, not reconstruction.

Few conclusions can be drawn from these general impressions about the changes in Danish society, which have accompanied the changes in sexual attitudes in general and the reform of the pornography laws in particular. It would be especially unwise to attempt to draw any causal conclusions. What one can say is that Danish society does not appear to be on the brink of dissolution and disaster.

Pornography may have effects which are harmful. In this essay, I have identified social masturbation and commercial exploitation as negative aspects of pornography. However, none of these characteristics or possible effects -- nor others presently known -- justifies general legal proscriptions of the distribution of pornography. The state cannot cure the faults through censorship laws; if for no other reason, because no one has been able to offer a definition of pornography which is reasonable and just. The careful reader of this newsletter will have observed that I have nowhere myself defined pornography: I have assumed that memorable substitute for a definition

offered by one U.S. Supreme Court Justice: "I know it when I see it." And even if one could provide a definition of pornography, the evidence reasonably necessary to justify limiting the freedom of producer and consumer has yet to be produced. The only people worse than the pornographers are those who attempt to save us from ourselves.

Were I the Philosopher-King I would be quite willing to let the pornographer sell his wares, although I would prohibit sales to young children. And I would expect the public of other countries to follow the Danes and leave the porno market to those from less enlightened communities. My major restriction on the pornocrats would be a whopping tax: let us put the returns from vicarious sex to more productive uses.

If we see in the mirror of Copenhagen a reflection of our own future, then we need not fear latter-day decline and fall. But perhaps, given the Danish experience, we should require that for every dozen porno-shops there be at least one Tivoli: this may be the best technique for dealing with the boredom which porno-freedom seems to generate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.', with a stylized, cursive script.

Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

Received in New York on November 29, 1971.