

Homespun: Finnporn and the Meanings of the Local

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100% Finnish girls show all their abilities to the hungry camera team. But that's not all! Genuine Finnish Santa Claus visits the set a couple of times to check out the sucking and fucking skills of these young [sic] Finnish beauties... Witness a dissolute mating ritual at Tampere's Viikinsaari. Watch as a horny couple, to the horror of elderly folks, fuck their way in Suomenlinna.

Rich in promises of hard-core action performed and recorded in specific geographical locations, this introduction to Radical Pictures' *Finnish Fuck Film* (2007) is exemplary of how the meanings of 'the local' are played out in Finnish porn production (also known as 'Finnporn' or *suomiporno*). Through recognisable settings and details, homespun execution and semi-amateur performances, the films invite their viewers – and as I argue, Finnish viewers in particular – into affinities based on familiarity. In what follows, I provide a brief overview of porn production in Finland before investigating the ties made between the local origins of the films and their claims for authenticity. Based on a broad sample of contemporary Finnporn, this chapter considers four films – *Pure Porn* (2001), *Fucked in Finland* (2004), *Finnish Fuck Film* (2007) and *The Magic Birds* (2008) – in particular and addresses the role and function of things Finnish in them. My main concern is how regional and national origins become tied to notions of realism and how these ties structure particular

relationships between the viewers and what is depicted on screen, such as national culture, identity, imagery and gender politics.

Finnish pornoscape – a brief overview

The Nordic countries enjoy a certain pop cultural reputation as havens of sexual liberalism and accessible pornography. Denmark was the first country to decriminalise audiovisual hard-core pornography in 1969, followed by Sweden two years later. Both countries became central European producers and distributors of pornography: Lasse Braun's production company Beta Film gained wide fame with their Super 8mm porn loops produced in 1966–77 that were also distributed in North American peepshow parlours. The Swedish Private Media group, built around the first full-colour hard-core magazine *Private* (est. 1965), also grew into one of the largest European adult entertainment companies. (Di Lauro & Rabkin 1976: 89–91; McNeil & Osborne 2005: 104–5; Lane 2000: 48–9; Smith 2005: 151.) These developments, along with the already established practice of screening Danish and Swedish films (both art house and documentary films featuring some degree of nudity) in North American sex film theatres, helped to establish persistent connections between Scandinavia and pornography (Williams 1989: 97–8; Wyatt 1999; Kulick 2005: 210).¹

However despite the reputation for liberalism, during this period the relevant legislation governing pornography did not change in Finland, Norway or Iceland. In Finland, a 1927 law regulating offences against 'sexual discipline and decency' – that is, regulating the production, import, export, advertising and distribution of pornography – was not replaced until 1999. This facilitated both easier access to hard-core pornography and a rise in local productions (see Paasonen forthcoming; Jyränki

2007). From the 1970s to the late 1990s, local porn production consisted mainly of print magazines: although films were made since the 1980s (often abroad), they received little attention (Korppi 2002: 147, 150–1). Whilst legislation remained fairly strict – and became stricter with the 1987 video law banning the production and distribution of all material forbidden to under 18-year olds – public attitudes towards pornography have been, and remain, more positive in Finland than in the other Nordic countries. According to surveys, women as well as men are interested in hard-core pornography and it is in mundane use particularly among the younger generations (e.g. Haavio-Mannila & Kontula 2001; Kontula 2008; Sørensen & Knudsen 2006; Anttila 2004).

The new millennium witnessed something of a porn trend in Finland, facilitated by these transformations in legislation, new technologies of production and distribution (e.g. online porn) as well as an increased visibility of pornography in the mainstream media (Nikunen *et al.* 2005). Female porn performers and producers, most centrally Rakel Liekki, Mariah, Laura Sade and Emilia, Laura Lee and Sabina of the ELS productions, helped to redefine Finnish pornography as an arena of female agency and exploration. These women had years of experience working in the industry and their public image was largely that of savvy, intelligent and independent entrepreneurs (see Nikunen 2005; Nikunen and Paasonen 2007). Numerous films by women – like Mariah Production’s *Mariah Pornfolio* (2004), *Filthy Passion* (1999), *Showtime* (c. 2000) and *Truth or Dare* (c. 2000), ELS Production’s *Best of ELS* (2002) and *ELS Behind the Scenes* (2004) or Laura Production’s *Bonneville* (c. 2004), *Ironsteel* (c. 2005) and *Sneaking on my Sister* (2006, shot on HDV) – have tended to approximate the style, feel and production values of international hard-core

pornography. Aimed at broader international distribution, these films have generally been void of Finnish language or any specifically local references.

In the early 2000s, women ran up to two thirds of Finnish film porn production (Korppi 2002: 294) yet the trend was short-lived: both Liekki and Mariah have since retired from the industry, and Laura Productions, operating primarily online, remains the most successful of the current female-run companies. The market for Finnporn remains small and profits are thin, particularly since broader distribution is difficult to achieve. Local film production relies on a handful of active producers (Radical Pictures being the most notable one) whose films continue to be identifiable by semi-amateurism, small budgets and homespun aesthetics. Due to the small-scale production and the central role of women, Finnporn has been framed as ‘fair-trade’ in the sense that it lacks the kinds of exploitative work practices associated with the industry internationally. In a further analogy to locally grown consumables, Finnish performers are often defined as ‘organic’ (*luomu*) in the sense of not having gone through cosmetic surgery and having relatively little work experience in the field. This has helped to frame domestic porn as more ethical and ‘authentic’ than its foreign competitors – and also as more ‘real’ in its semi-amateur execution.

It is noteworthy that the internationally-oriented aesthetic and economic strategies of Mariah, Laura or ELS Production differ from those of other Finnish production companies that highlight the national origins of their products as a form of branding and promotion. Many DVDs come with little Finnish flags connoting nationality and film titles make references to the country in question, as in the Radical Pictures titles *Fucked in Finland*, *Finnish Fuck Film*, *Finnish Teens Fuck* (2005), *Teen Pussies from Finland* (2005), *Teensex from Finland 1* (2006) & *2* (2007), *Finnish Teens 1* (2005) & *2* (2006), *Real Finnish Porn 1* (2005) & *2* (2006), *True*

Finnporn 1 (2005) & *2* (2006), *Girls from Finland* (2006) or *Domestic Heat 1* (2006) & *2* (2006). Like Radical Pictures, Kullervo Koivisto (of KKCane) decorates his titles, including *Finnish Girls 1* (2005), *2* (2006) and *3* (2006), with a small Finnish flag. Considerable emphasis is laid on the national origins of the female performers in particular. Through its repeated commodification, the figure of the ‘Finnish Girl’ has been construed as an object of desire that is both reachable and recognisable as a semi-amateur girl-next-door. Unlike women considered porn stars (e.g. Mariah, Rakel Liekki, Jamina or Candy) selling titles with their own names, ‘Finnish Girl’ is a more anonymous term referring to a contingent group of young female performers. Finnish Girl is then a brand crafted and developed by the production companies – a sexualised fantasy figure connoting amateurism, youth and familiarity.

Homespun and ‘authentic’

Due to legislation, it was largely up to Swedish companies to distribute porn shot in Finland and/or featuring Finnish performers before (and some time after) the year 1999. These films were marketed with promises of local girls – both in titles with an all-Finnish focus (e.g. *Finnish Amateur Action/Finsk amatör action* (1998); *Finish [sic] Nights* (2000); *Finnish Giant/Finska Gigant*, (c. 2000) or *Go Finland!/Heja Finland!* (c. 2000)) and in ones with more of a pan-Nordic approach (e.g. *Nordic Debutantes 2* (1997); *North Sucks/Norden Suger*, (c. 2000) or *So Hot up North/Het så in i Norden* (c. 2000)). Many of these films were shot in Denmark and Sweden while the Finnish performers spoke Swedish or English. The styles of the individual films range from amateur porn to glossier mainstream hard-core action. Regional specificity is manifested through language and accent, as well as the overall packaging and framing: *Go Finland!*, for example, starts with a spinning Finnish flag and the cover

of *Mariana* (2002) comes with an emblem stating 'Made in Finland'. Further local marking is achieved through clothing, décor and other forms of material culture. *Finnish Amateur Action*, yet another film with a large Finnish flag decorating its cover, starts with a shot of a man jogging in a shell-suit, a piece of clothing iconic to the semi-rural and/or suburban post-recession Finland of the 1990s. The sexual acts in this film take place inside a wooden house of the kind seen in abundance in the Finnish countryside. Such references to the local cultural landscape became more accentuated as films catered to a specifically Finnish (rather than Nordic or international) audience in the 2000s.

Whilst Finnporn was an unknown category a decade ago, it has since become a staple niche that is distributed on DVD locally and on the internet globally (as both pay-per-view and torrents) available to all. In most cases, however, the films are not dubbed or subtitled and they remain understandable only to a Finnish-speaking audience (to the extent that dialogue actually plays a central role in understanding and experiencing such films). The films make use of local performers, vernacular language and cultural codes that set these products apart from their international competitors. As Merja Lind (2000) has pointed out, such a multilayered coding of 'Finnishness' has been equally central in porn magazines and their narrative elements. The sense of the regional, the homespun and the familiar are key factors in the films' marketing and assumed appeal to audiences. *Fucked in Finland*, the very first film by Radical Pictures, is shot exclusively indoors and most of the scenes are set in the same bedroom. The performers address the camera directly and interact with the cameraman, creating a feel of familiarity and directness. The back cover of the DVD frames the action as both domestic and amateur:

100% genuine Finnish production where no time is wasted on chit chat. See how Finnish blokes fuck beautiful girls first time in front of the camera. The first timer girls will surely remember these fuck sessions in the next millennium!

The promise of ingénue women involved in porn for the first time is repeated on the cover of one title after another. Closely tied to the Finnish origins of the performers and producers, codes of amateurism and inexperience give rise to a broader assemblage of ‘realness’. This is clearly illustrated by Radical Pictures’ online introductions to their titles:

Are you bored with fake acted basic porn? So were we and so we made this genuine home sex video. It is 100% real thing where all mouning and groaning is for real and the drops of swet are true. See how finnish people truly fuck!
(*Finnish Amateurs 1*, 2005, spelling as in original).

- This material is over the top
 - It is completely finnish, all girls and boys are finnish
 - Models do not act. The action is for real and girls cum genuinely
- (*Finnish Teens 1*, spelling as in original)

In a rhetorical move characteristic of the marketing of gonzo, reality and amateur porn, the titles claim to show the reality of sex rather than fictitious, acted, scripted or stylised variations of it. In contrast to ‘fake acted basic porn’, these films are framed as real, raw and authentic.

Similar framing is used in the promotion of Finnporn more generally and it also seems to play an important role in its reception, judging from online discussions of domestic porn. A discussant on the forum topic ‘Masturbation’, for example, associates his interest in Finnish porn with being bored of ‘the eternal “oh fuck, ooh, ahh, fuck my fucking ass with your fucking big cock, oh yeah...”’ as iterated in US productions (Azor 2008). For their part, the discussants on the Elitisti forum (a ‘popular-elitist film zine’) remain more suspicious of the pleasures, production values and professionalism of Finnish porn making. This is evident in the opening questions of the thread, asking: ‘Is it really so that Finns have no idea as to how make porn? At least all the stuff I’ve seen has worked mainly as social porn...Has anyone here...looked “closely” into domestic productions? Can anything be found among all the crap?’ On pondering these questions, others participants reminisce about some ‘fresh’, ‘spontaneous’ and ““real”” performances, noting that some of Radical’s female performers are ‘pert’ and the films ‘pleasantly stripped-down in their audiovisual expression’ (see Elitisti 2006). Nevertheless, the overall tone remains sceptical.

On yet other forums, Finnporn is repeatedly critiqued for its lack of quality: ‘I’m not too interested in Finnish porn production already for the simple reason that the films and the women tend to be pretty awful’, ‘Finnporn suuuuuucks to no limit’ (see City 2008) and ‘Finnporn equals some fat white broad moaning on some mattress with a hood over her head and some hairy dude slapping her ass with some cunt-leather chain!’ (see Basso 2002) This line of critique is encapsulated in a review of the film *The Magic Birds*: ‘Finnporn reminds one mainly of pimply asses, shaky camera, corny lines and poor quality’ (Paroni 2008). All these comments do, in different ways, set Finnporn apart from general or mainstream pornography and characterise it as

homespun, semi-amateur and ‘raw’, yet they also give different meanings and values to its special characteristics. Rawness is considered both a virtue and a fault (although rarely at the same time), depending on what is identified as desirable or ‘good’ pornography. The films themselves involve a broad play with the local, particularly when it comes to locations, dialogue and cultural references. This works to construct specific relationships between the films, their performers/producers and viewers that can be found appealing, off-putting or both. In addition to being homespun, the films are markedly domestic and ‘homely’. When anchored in identifiable Finnish locations (e.g. cityscapes, landscapes, buildings, monuments, cars or trains), they gain a further sense of realism.

Getting up close



Finnish Fuck Film/Kotimainen pornoelokuva starts with a sequence shot on a lakeside island, Viikinsaari, near the city of Tampere. The very first shot displays a cruise boat with a large Finnish flag swaying in the wind, hence verifying the title’s promises of

domestic origins and focus. Other scenes are shot on location in the Suomenlinna fortress (a UNESCO World Heritage site) as well as the Ferris wheel at the Linnanmäki amusement park. All in all, the sense of the regional is played out at the levels of language, locations and props to excess: in two of the scenes, performers are dressed in a Santa Claus costume (since, according to tourist bureaus and vernacular stories, Santa is Finnish and resides on the Lapland fell of Korvatunturi).² The regional is equally present in minor quotidian details such as shoes and clothes – or even the plastic bag of the grocery market chain, Prisma, wrapped around ‘Santa’s’ penis in an oral sex scene. Local references are ironic and over-the-top, yet also the very fabric that Finnporn is made of.





In one sequence in *Finnish Fuck Film*, a couple are having sex on a rock by the lake as a storm begins: rain starts pouring down and their random possessions are blown over by gusts of wind that also threaten to turn over the camera's tripod. The couple simply gets up and finds another location, and the filming continues despite the pouring rain and visibly chilly weather. This solution is motivated by a low budget and tight shooting schedule, yet it also works to produce a sense of the recognisable to

those familiar with Nordic summer conditions. Similarly, in *Pure Porn: Cock-hawks from the Woods/Silkkää pornoa: metsikön munahaukat* (2001), a couple is performing outdoors on a ski-jumping judges' platform as they notice some passers-by taking an interest in their activities and decide to leave. This is also the end of the episode, midway into the scene. Such impromptu improvisation feeds into, and supports a specific form of pornographic realism, namely the promise of authenticity and directness (in the sense of the non-manipulated and that which has truly taken place) that is central both to pornography as a genre and Finnporn as one of its niche subcategories.

My argument is not that these films would facilitate some easier form of identification with the characters or scenarios depicted. In fact, identification may be too large and loose a term for describing the dynamics and experiences of pornography that entail much more random and shifting moments of recognition and arousal. The films do not generally involve one large narrative but consist of independent scenes featuring different performers in varying positions and places, simply having sex. *Fucked in Finland* exemplifies such stripped-down modality: episodes start as the actors enter (or are seen as already being in) a room and as the sexual acts have reached their climax, the episode ends and another begins. There is hardly any dialogue and no first names are used. Whilst this may be an extreme example – *Pure Porn*, for instance, contains some minimal narrative framing (a man picks up a female hitchhiker in two scenes; a couple hooks up; a man reminisces past sexual adventures when waiting for his date to arrive) – there is little in the films to go on in terms of background or motivation. Overall, character construction and the development of narrative, central to classic analyses of identification within film studies, remain only marginal concerns: there may be no central character, the focus

may be shifting and the viewer is constantly invited to assume the position of an outside observer.

As Laura U. Marks notes, both optimised visibility (of sexual acts, body parts and bodily fluids) and a distance (in terms of identification) between the viewer and the bodies on the screen are characteristic to pornography as a genre (2002: 15–16). In Finnporn, the sense of distance is further heightened by their explicitly performative style: actors look directly at the camera, address the viewer, talk with the production team and follow their orders and suggestions. While the films are ‘in your face’ and ‘up close’ in detailed depictions of sexual acts and the bodies performing them, they do not invite the viewer into an intimate proximity with the characters on the screen by the means of identification. Rather, the modality remains laconic, stripped-down and observational – similar to those of reality television or gonzo porn. This version of *cinéma vérité*, together with the heavy reliance on vernacular material culture and the overall unpolished style of the individual performances, invests the films with an unsettling quality, particularly for the Finnish viewer. It is this sense of the recognisable and the direct that can arguably give rise to awkward moments of discomfort and embarrassment as much as arousal.



Consider, for example, a scene in the porn comedy *Little Dick's Lessons of Life/Pikku-Kallen oppivuodet* (2002) where a couple are seen having sex in the woods next to an outhouse while a swarm of mosquitoes circles and bites the performers. The scene is not only about hard-core heteroporn but equally about ironic references to local vernacular culture. It may be experienced as sexually arousing but arousal is tied into, framed and conditioned by this particular landscape. I argue that instead of identification, the homespun realism of Finnporn enables and encourages forms of recognisability, familiarity and hence overall accessibility of the performers, spaces and acts recorded that may even be felt as getting 'too close'. Such affinities or engagements may involve characters, objects, acts or sounds. The viewer, sharing the codes of vernacular language and local references, is simultaneously an 'insider' (in the sense of 'getting it') and an outsider in the sense that the scenarios are always performed for them as an implied recipient.

National pornography

Similar to *Finnish Fuck Film*, the scenes in the film *Pure Porn* are shot mainly outdoors, with performers driving through the Finnish countryside and performing sex in recognisable environments, such as the ski-jump towers of Lahti, which had hosted the winter sports world championships the same year. One of the scenes is shot in Aulanko, a lakeside hill near Hämeenlinna, which has been considered one of Finland's 'national landscapes' since the national romantic movement of the late nineteenth century. Aulanko has been promoted extensively for tourism and reproduced in scenic photographs to the point of becoming an iconic location (see Eskola 1997a; 1997b). In the film, a couple – Rakel Liekki and Jari – meet up in the Aulanko Jugendstil gazebo, engage in sexual acts in the stone fortress, and perform on the platform of the 1930s sightseeing tower overlooking the lake. Shots of oral sex are intercut with pans of the scenery, tying the acts firmly into the landscape and its multiple symbolic layers. Similar panoramic shots of Aulanko have been used to promote national sentiment, for example as illustration to the lyrics of the national anthem (Eskola 1997a: 77–8). The film mixes the conventions of pornography (loitering around Aulanko, Liekki is licking a large pink lollipop the shape of a penis, dressed in a girly mini-skirt and long socks) with the conventional pleasures attached to this location (such as sightseeing or watching ducklings). The combination of hardcore action, iconic locations and their historically accumulated symbolic layers results in something approximating a 'national pornography'.





The Magic Birds, directed and produced by Kullervo Koivisto (who is best known for his *Finnish Girl* series mentioned above) involves a different, yet equally knowing step in the direction of ‘national pornography’. The film also stands apart from other domestic productions in its narrative and *mise-en-scène*. Set in a mythical past a thousand years ago preceding the systematic rule of the Swedish crown, the film depicts a wintry landscape inhabited by a tribe of violent Amazon warrior women. These Amazons are named Magic Birds (*Uivelot*, as the title goes in Finnish) after a species of duck (smew, to be exact) that they use as inspiration for both their black and white makeup and stylised mode of communication (through bird-like cries and sounds). The Magic Birds are renowned for their cruelty as well as their habit of enslaving men and treating them ‘worse than domestic animals’.



The film opens with shots of the women on the icy terrains of Lake Saimaa dragging a shirtless male sex slave behind them in a sledge, accompanied by a voice-over narration that outlines the narrative framework. Aesthetically, and in its vaguely

early mediaeval costumes and décor in particular, *The Magic Birds* is reminiscent of fictions that draw on the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, such as Kalle Holmberg's 1982 television series *The Iron Age*. Compiled of folklore poetry by Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala* has been an important cultural element in the building of Finnish national sentiment and identity since its first publication in 1849. As a kind of mythical origin story, it continues to influence ways of imagining Finnish culture. For example, Louhi, the matriarch ruler of an evil and cold land, Pohjola, as depicted in *Kalevala*, was one of the central characters of *The Iron Age*: the shores of Pohjola were decorated with bodies of men and Louhi possessed impressive magical powers over weather, healing and even heavenly bodies. Like Louhi, the Magic Birds represent cruel matriarchal power: they are insatiable, aggressive and devoid of feminine softness.

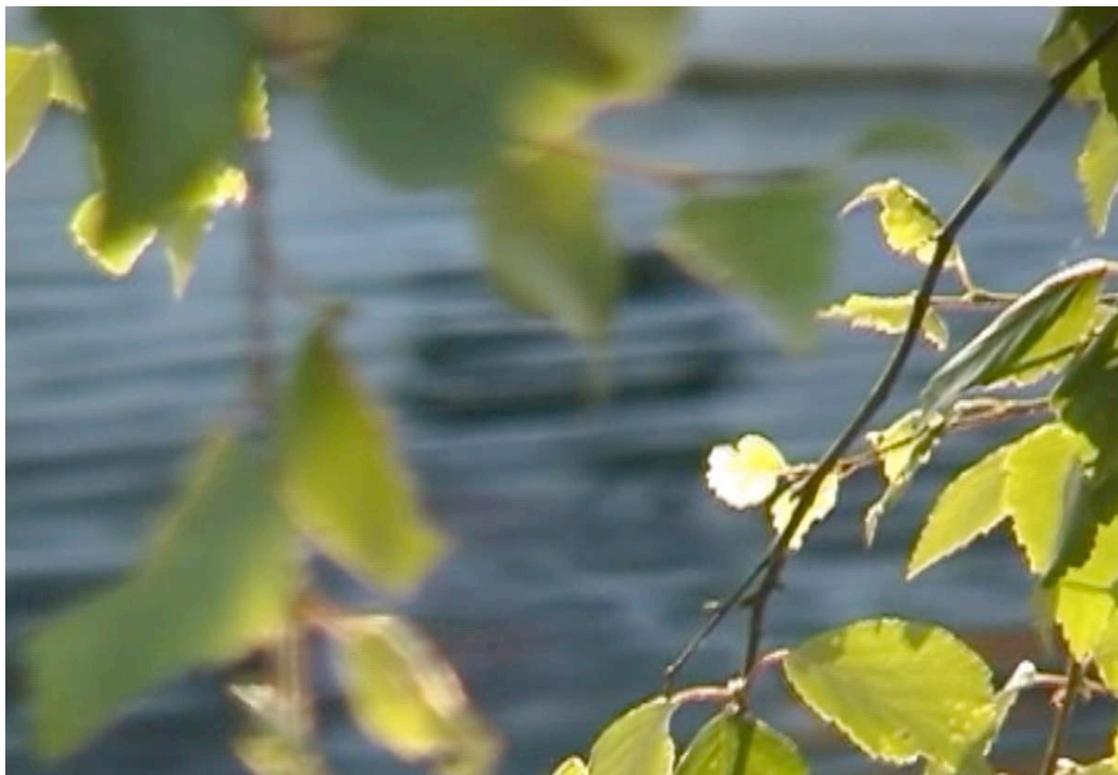


With its explicit referencing of national mythology and its canonised representations, *The Magic Birds* was intended for international distribution and it

was in production for five years. The finished version, however, remains something of a patchwork with less than 30 minutes of higher quality footage set in the mythical past, shot on the wintery lakeside and featuring performers in quasi-historical garb and fantasy make-up. In contrast, most of the film, spanning more than an hour, follows the homespun mode of Finnporn under the headline ‘the Magic Birds of today’. Set in the contemporary, it depicts young sexually active women making their presence and heritage known. The more homespun scenes are mostly stripped of excessive make-up or stylised acting. Despite their drastically different style, these scenes are also saturated with culturally specific references: sequences are shot in a summer cottage, sauna and lakeshore, all locations invested with symbolic meanings – the stuff that Finnish summers are made of. This landscape is partly depicted as experienced through the eyes of a foreign man (Tony Scorpion) in search for contemporary Magic Birds. (He is referred to simply as ‘the Foreigner’ and his alien status is verified by English language, as well as his recurring cries, such as ‘Mamma mia!’.)

In one notable montage sequence, the camera first shows a lakeside ship about to dock, then cuts to shots of a small fox scratching its jaw in the grass, a middle-aged couple getting dressed after swimming in the nude, the calm surfaces of Lake Saimaa in the soft rays of the midsummer evening sun, birch leaves and a country road. All this is accompanied by an accordion sing-along of the popular Second World War era song, ‘Life in the Trenches’ (‘Elämää juoksuhaudoissa’). The song is deeply melancholic; describing a soldier’s longing for home, lost love and the uncertainty of life, and efficiently glues the shots together into a nostalgic cavalcade of things Finnish. As the montage sequence continues and the location changes to that of a dancehall, the sound becomes diegetic. In the following shots, people are

gathered outside the hall, enjoying drinks and dancing, an old man is holding a pint of beer, dressed in a blue-and-white sweatshirt with the word 'Finland'³ written on the front, some ducks have gathered at the shore, the moon is full over the lake and people on the dance floor do the 'letkajenkka', a popular group dance of the 1960s. As the music continues, the camera shifts to the lakeshore where a young woman, dressed in skimpy Magic Bird garb, circles a campfire. The sequence is short – less than a minute long – and shot over a couple of hours as the midsummer sun turns into blue twilight. Since the montage serves no clear function in terms of the narrative or sexual action, its main motivation is to provide a series of quick yet rich references to popular Finnish iconography and to embed the mythological Magic Birds in this cultural landscape.





Strong Finnish women

Female sexual insatiability is a central recurring theme in pornography: in porn, female desire, sexual performance or orgasmic potentiality seems to know no bounds. As Linda Williams has shown, the figure of female insatiability dates back to literary pornography and it has been given comical, threatening as well as positive meanings (1989: 175–82). In the 2000s, this figure is mainly positive and associated with promises of sexual accessibility and abundance (Kangasvuo 2007: 143). On Finnporn DVD covers, women ‘can’t get enough’ (*My Film*, 2002), ‘nothing is sacred’ to these ‘young horny pussies’ (*The Magic Birds*), ‘hardy porn prima donnas keep the male actors trembling with fear in their place’ (*Behind the Scenes*) and ‘sex-loving horny insatiable women give all in the most extraordinary acts...As these lusty ladies get their hands on a man, they dance the horizontal mambo with furious raunchiness’ (*Best of ELS*). In a recurring theme, the male actors are framed as being at the mercy of insatiable women ready to do anything for their own sexual satisfaction. This theme is obviously taken further in the ‘historical’ sequences of *The Magic Birds* where ruthless Amazons keep men as sex slaves. The voice-over explains that the rule of the Birds came to an end centuries ago, the tribe almost died out and men gained their basic rights. Nevertheless, the narrator explains, the legacy of the Birds is still alive among the Finnish female population. Or, as the back cover of the DVD exclaims, ‘oh pity the man who is left at the mercy of the Magic Birds of today’.

In addition to the generic conventions of pornography, the theme of female dominance and insatiability in *The Magic Birds* can also be read as a take on a particular national gender mythology involving strong Finnish women and weak Finnish men. In other words, by following the hyperbolic depiction of gender differences, sexual desires and pleasures characteristic to porn in general, it also

references specific national gender imagery. Film scholar Anu Koivunen (2003) has traced the development of this gender imagery featuring strong women and weak men back to Finland's agrarian history, traumas of the Second World War, male alcoholism and the *Kalevala*. According to Koivunen, this imagery has been mapped out and reiterated since the 1930s in a range of fictions, commentaries and public debates. Narratives on the 'strength' or 'power' of Finnish women have been anchored in 'a past, pre-modern, agrarian world' and, through references to the *Kalevala*, a 'mythical timelessness of repetition and monumentality' (Koivunen 2004: 12). Through such performative reiteration, this story has gained particular power and become a 'foundational fiction' used in making sense of gender in the Finnish context. In *The Magic Birds*, this gender imagery is not only made explicit but hyperbolic: the men are literally held captive and enslaved in cages while the women rule the land and use their dominant position as they choose.

The fact that *The Magic Birds* was finished and released (locally) on DVD owes much to one supporting performer, Johanna Tukiainen, seen briefly topless in the first part of the film. In the spring of 2008, Tukiainen – head of the erotic dance group 'Dolls' – made public some of the erotic SMS messages that Ilkka Kanerva, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had sent her. After publicly lying about the communication, and having been found out lying, Kanerva had to resign. For her part, Tukiainen became a national celebrity (albeit one with considerably low cultural status) and her newly found fame helped to sell *The Magic Birds*. The evening papers made headlines of Tukiainen's participation in the film: a video of her practicing smew-like bird sounds and following the director's instructions on location was viewed more than million times, becoming the most popular video of the year on the website of the newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat*. The same paper published a tongue-in-cheek

review of the film's trailer, comparing it to both *The Iron Age* and Erik Blomberg's classic 1952 film *The White Reindeer* (featuring a young woman turned into a man-killing reindeer) under the title 'Man is a sex slave to the Magic Birds'. The review also noted that 'if Ilkka Kanerva had had the opportunity of watching *The Magic Birds*, he would have mapped the field of action through the eyes of a preying Magic Bird tribe-member, rather than his own masculinity' (Manninen 2008), thereby linking Tukiainen and her actions to the cinematic landscape of dominant women and oppressed men.

Both the release of *The Magic Birds* and the controversy over the case of Tukiainen and Kanerva coincided with a debate on 'women's sexual power' initiated by Henry Laasanen's book of the same name (2008, also mentioned in the *Ilta-Sanomat* review). According to Laasanen, women's sexual power is one of the unnoticed social forces: women control access to sex (the sex in question being unquestionably heterosexual) and men have to pay for sex one way or another while also suffering from performance anxiety and role expectations. This variation of the discourse of 'strong Finnish women' with sexual powers and weak Finnish men suffering from the consequences, as presented by Laasanen, gained some popular attention. The very public incident of Tukiainen and Kanerva was used repeatedly as reference to and further proof of Laasanen's arguments: it was sexual desire that caused Kanerva's downfall, while sex was Tukiainen's main asset.⁴ In these instances, the national mythology of strong women and weak men became explicitly sexualised (in contrast to the more traditional variations emphasising maternal power). The markedly excessive and fantastic imageries of *The Magic Birds* draw on, and contribute, to the stories told about Finnish gender relations – from national mythologies and their displays across the field of media to debates on gender equality

and heterosex. But by drawing on the national gender imagery of strong women and weak men, the film also builds it into a sexualised spectacle that, in its excessiveness and explicit artificiality (in terms of stylised acting, make-up, clothing and the guttural cries of the Magic Birds) also reads as parody of this very imagery. Indeed, the voice of the male narrator outlining the story betrays some amusement, as if drawing quotation marks around it all.

However, as an attempt at ‘national porn’, *The Magic Birds* is knowingly attached to multiple layers of culture in ways that are not merely ironic or parodic. There is a certain seriousness to the film that renders it disturbing as it oscillates between stylised references to the *Kalevala* in the framework of hard-core heteroporn, and scenes that follow the aesthetics of semi-amateurism (with young women urinating in train bathrooms, exploring the pleasures of sex toys or entering a ‘porn cave’ of the rural town of Imatra). Displaying particular kinds of gendered bodies – such as blonde young women or seemingly drunken men – *The Magic Birds* also gives shape to collective bodies through the ‘syntaxes’ of national gender mythology and pornographic hyperbole.

Local porn for local people?

In *Intimate Citizenship*, Ken Plummer discusses the circulation of intimacy as different kinds of ‘flows’: between the local and the global, sameness and difference. With this, Plummer refers to the ways in which ‘local cultures pick up, and usually transform the many features of personal life displayed around the globe’ and how ‘certain stock images of sex, marriage, bodies, and gender roles [...] are packaged and marketed in efficient and predictable forms’ (2003: 119–21). Such a dynamic is evident in Finnporn. Local aspects and references can be subdued (as with ELS or

Laura Production), manifest, heightened or even fetishised (as in the ‘Finnish Girl’ series, *The Magic Birds*, *Pure Porn*, *Fucked in Finland* or *Finnish Fuck Film*). Yet the films also follow the generic codes and conventions of porn in their depictions of sexual acts, arousal, pleasure, body parts and fluids that repeat from one film to another across linguistic and cultural borders.

Like the seemingly contradictory and parallel, yet mutually inseparable flows of globalised intimacies addressed by Plummer, the category of porn is simultaneously bulky and diverse, incredibly repetitive and notably divergent in terms of its aesthetics and production practices (involving studio systems, cottage industries and random sex radicals alike). In the Finnish context of small-scale production, terms such as ‘porn industry’ or ‘porn star’ seem rather grandiose. Since international distribution remains a challenge despite online platforms, Finnish films have mainly a local audience. The films are rich in references to local scenery (landscapes, monuments, buildings etc.) and material cultures of everyday life. These can be seen as attempts at branding Finnporn to an international audience through touristic vistas and local colour, yet I would argue that they involve more of a knowing and marked attempt at catering porn to Finnish viewers. Paraphrasing the BBC comedy *League of Gentlemen* (1999–2002), the pleasures involved in such ‘local porn for local people’ expand from sexually explicit action to mundane details, phrases and cultural references that fail to translate to those more unfamiliar with the cultural landscape. As argued above, the proximity between Finnporn and its viewers is not one of identification inasmuch as shared codes, recognition and familiarity that work to strengthen the films’ claims of homespun authenticity and overall realism. This involves a particular modality unsettling in its familiarity as mundane details, bodies

and objects draw the Finnish viewer close, and possibly even a bit too close for comfort.

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¹ Such tenuous associations are evident, for example, in the naming of Caballero's popular film series *Swedish Erotica*, beginning in the 1970s. Starting with Super 8, and competing with Braun's productions, these all-American films, spanning some 120 titles and featuring major porn stars from John Holmes to Seka, migrated to VHS and DVD and became the most widely sold adult film series ever. However, the films are connected to Sweden by name only.

² The same shots with Santa are also used on the cover of other Radical Productions titles, *Edestä ja takaa – nämä tytöt jakaa* (freely translated as *From the back or front, these girls give*, 2008) and *Ja taas nussitaan* (*And let's fuck again*, 2007), while shots from Suomenlinna also decorate the cover of *Naidaan vaan* (*Let's just fuck*, 2007). Such recycling of the same scenes in a range of titles is standard practice in pornography but it is also telling of the small production volume of Finnish companies and their aim to capitalise on their scarce supply of products. For similar

reasons, scenes in most Finnish porn films include camera flashes as they double as photo sessions for online and print media.

³ ‘Suomi’ sweatshirt: the design was modelled after those worn by the Finnish track and field athletes of the past decades and it has been popular for decades. In this sense, it embodies both nostalgia and national sentiment.

⁴ I stumbled on this connection rather abruptly myself as a journalist from the Finnish News Agency phoned me to ask ‘whether Tukiainen has sexual power’ while making a news item on the theme for national distribution. The connection was also picked up on Laasanen’s blog.