

Clap Hands for the Orgy

Harpo

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(UPS) One of the most feared (and most frequently fantasied) of sexual activities is the orgy.

Right now you are probably fantasizing one of your own, right?

The word "orgy" is ambiguous. In its broadest sense it connotes a sensual activity which is pursued without restraint of appetite, or an "unbridled exercise of passions," as my dictionary would have it.

One conjures up a mental picture of satyrs and nymphs in Roman garb devouring grapes, wine and each other for days on end. Presumably, the party breaks up when all participants are thoroughly sated and probably exhausted.

In another sense, the orgy is simply a collection of nude adults who participate in some composite, collective sexual act.

After all, one does not speak of "orgies" performed by a proper married couple, no matter how violent the gyrations of the connubial bed. "Unbridled passions" is not enough without some extra people.

Two's company; three's an orgy. These two senses of the word are separable, in fact as well as in theory.

Indeed, some contemporary West Coast orgies do not all satisfy the first definition. In fact, they do not satisfy.

They involve collective sex, but may be only two hours or less in duration, after which none of the participants is sated.

Such eat-and-run affairs are largely the prerogative of the more daring members of the bored middle class, who fancy themselves as "swingers."

One reason they are in such a hurry is that they have to get home in time to relieve the baby-sitter.

To make a gross characterization, there are "hip" orgies and "square" orgies. The former is more often known as a "love party" or "love feast."

The latter is often called a "modern" or "sophisticated" party "for swingers *only*." Although in both cases there are men and women using their mouths, hands, and love-organs in various combinations, there are very major differences in the attitudes of the people involved, in their notions of what it is they are doing, and consequently, in the entire spirit or feeling-tone of the happening.

Notions about sex condition the entire notion of personhood. Whether a woman, for example, is considered a chattel or an independent and free agent will be clearly reflected in sexual attitudes.

The use of the body and its parts is no less than the behavior of the person.

Contrast a love feast and a "swinger's party."

At the love feast there is much good feeling. Most of the people know and like each other. There is some Ravi Shankar or some blues on the machine.

Candles are lit; incense burns. All senses are turning on. With much joking and hugging, the six or eight people begin preparation of the meal. One cuts tomatoes, someone else chops onions, a third slices the meat.

Shish kabob and rice

Mattresses and cushions have been spread. They sit down and casually begin to strip off their clothes. They are mostly nude by the time dinner is finished.

After dinner, an octopus of a hookah with many protruding tubes provides a communal smoke.

Couples pair off in different places. After awhile the couples change. Permutations and combinations develop.

And all the while there is the gentle laughter of people who like each other, some of whom really love one another. And the candles, and the music, and...

It is morning. Everybody kisses everybody goodbye. Sleepy and happy, they pack their much-caressed nerve endings into their cars and leave.

The "swinger's party" is quite another style. No food. Nobody knows anybody. Nobody even *likes* anybody.

How shall they start? Something they saw in a dirty movie once: strip poker. But most of the people don't know how to play poker.

Small talk, nervous inanities. How will we break the ice?

One of the men goes out and brings back a big bottle of gin. That's it, drink up, you'll feel more relaxed. (I know, I know, they used pot at the love feast, but was it really the same thing?)

A few daring souls start to take off their clothes. They are nervously stared at for a few minutes.

Then all hell breaks loose.

Everybody rips off his clothes. How did that fantastic scene over on the couch develop in just-thirty-seconds? There are three, four, yes (count 'em) five people involved in that.

"Fuck me, you bastard," says the good-looking chick with the lacquered hairdo.

You caress her head.

"No, no, don't touch my hair, I just had it set. Anyplace but my hair."

As soon as you get hold of an inviting-looking woman, three uninvited guests have joined you. They are frantic, they are mechanical, they are anonymous.

At a love feast you might actually get to know someone, but not at a "swinger's party." Combinations of two are not allowed, by unwritten rule.

In anonymity there is no threat to one's inadequacies and jealous fears. ("You can screw my wife, but you better not have a relationship with her.")

Ugly potentials hang in the air. First names only. ("God if my boss ever found out I'd be ruined.") The specter of blackmail.

Why do they feel dirty and uptight? Because the swinger's party is an escape from life which reflects their lives. It brings no real escape. There is no exit.

It is an attempt to forget the humdrum day, to escape the non-communication and non-relationships. But it is a spectacular failure, only a different kind of non-communication and non-relationship.

The love feast, on the other hand, is an affirmation and a celebration of life. It is part of life rather than an escape from it.

One pays a price for love feasts however. After a few good ones, other kinds of dinner parties tend to drag.

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