

## **Chapter Six. Das ist fantastisch!! Or ... There is No Sex in the Soviet Union!**

I grew up in a country where there was no sex. To clarify, the people of the Soviet Union still engaged in reproductive or just fun activities involving genitalia but there was no admittance that this was anything natural or, for that matter, joyful. Newspapers, journals, and film never depicted any nudity, moreover people engaging in sexual activities. The closest a Soviet movie would come to depicting a sexual act was panning a camera over a peaceful lake or showing close-ups of a birch-tree, Ken-Burns style, as soon as the main characters ran their hands over each other's body. Any vocabulary related to sex was a taboo and was thoroughly relegated to the realm of private lives. A wholesome Soviet citizen would not engage in promiscuity or fill his mind with "dirty" images that the West is so full of, it was thought. And forget about oral sex—BJs were not something that Soviet citizens engaged in routinely.

All of this changed in the mid-eighties with the newly proclaimed policy of openness of the country to the world. New attitudes started creeping in, replacing the old standards. Earth-shattering in this regard were the so-called "TV bridges," which were live broadcasts between audiences in the USSR and the USA emceed by Phil Donahue on the American side and Vladimir Pozner, a refined, fluently English-speaking Russian journalist, who apparently spent his younger years with his family in the States, on the Soviet side. The TV-bridges were organized mostly in a form of questions and answers from each

audience to another and covered a wide spectrum of topics, from politics to everyday lives. Of course, it was just a matter of time when a member of the American audience asked about the situation with sex in the Soviet Union. “How do the Russkies do it?” was a gist of the question, as the exact wording escapes me now. I was about 16 at the time and the question (and the answer, of course) interested me a great deal; I started watching intently. In what appeared to be the old past raising its head, a matronly Russian woman wearing a blouse with imprints of enormous flowers and an unspectacular skirt got up and, looking straight into the camera, proudly announced: “There is no sex in the Soviet Union.” Both audiences gasped, the American one in shock of disbelief and the Soviet one (including me) in confusion over what seemed to be an accurate but somewhat disturbing answer.

I should point out that what the Soviet “sexless” woman meant was the fact that there was no tolerance of free and unashamed depiction of sexual acts in her country. The very word “sex” sounded so foreign, Western, and simply unacceptable to the builders of communism that admitting its existence in the Soviet Union was just like saying that socialism is a dead-end social system.

The Soviet Union might have been an oppressive regime to some, although I did not personally realize it until much later. As nature moved through my body springing up new sensations and inevitable self-discovery, I started yearning for the sights and pleasures unseen before. And they were definitely unseen. One thing taken for granted by many an American teenager, bare flesh, pictured in a craftily hidden porn magazine or, now, accessible via a quick search on the Internet, was painfully unavailable to

this Soviet teenager, substituted by reading an adult, unedited versions of the 1000 Arabian Nights or Boccaccio's Decameron with a subsequent self-discovery ... . For the time being, I buried myself in those treasured books that provided a glimpse of the adult life with all of its copulations, sexual escapades of the forbidden kind, and the coveted descriptions of willing flesh. That is, until the Soviet empire started crumbling in the mid 80s and the Soviet teenager was introduced to porn.

If you try to relive the first day you discovered porn, you will probably reminisce of the first images and sensations that filled your hitherto-unadulterated mind. Or something like that. You may also think of disgust that made you forever swear off looking at porn again, for religious or other reasons. Whatever it is that you are thinking will pale in comparison with what I remember of the first time I saw a porno film.

When the age of Perestroika and Glasnost dawned on the good old USSR and brought openness and a new hope of change, the forbidden fruit of explicit pornography was the first to be eaten. Overnight, there sprang up numerous "videosalons" where enterprising former apparatchiks would charge people money to come and see what the West had been hiding all along. They would rent a room, install three or four TVs in different corners, and connect them to a single VCR the size of a small fridge. Pop in a tape and you are taken away into the world that is so different from the one you are living in. The Western world offered beautiful people, fast cars, well-groomed lawns of lovingly kept houses, and, of course, sensory delights of sex.

For a number of inexplicable economic and political reasons, the genre to which videosalon-owners turned

first was German porn—untranslated (why?), raw, and clearly representative of how we thought German people engaged in lovemaking. With bated breath, youthful lads and lasses stared at the blurry TV-screens where the verboten was taking place.

Up to this day, I remember one film that forever changed me. My buddy and I went to a videosalon across the street, a converted Communist Party headquarters of a large factory, to check out what the fuss was all about (we had heard stories about how good the film was). About thirty young and not so young viewers were already in the room waiting for the show to start—kids as young as thirteen, fathers who had just come from work. There was no popcorn, mind you—popcorn was not part of the Russian culture then (it barely is now). Besides, what we were about to watch, as advertised by a hand-written sign on the doors, something along the lines of “Girls of Summer,” did not lend itself to eating. We took our seats and excitingly and somewhat tensely waited for the film to start. And then it did.

The story, if we can actually call it this way, took place in a picnic setting, outside of some home, by a pool. A wiry curly-haired man in his forties was having a time of his life with a vivacious young Mädchen. They pulled no stops—in their agonizing love-making they used whip-cream and various fruit, taking unusual liking to pineapple rings which the man placed strategically on his throbbing venous member. And the most striking thing was the sound. As the two bodies were intertwined in unimaginable combinations and gyrating on the patio furniture, the lovers were constantly exclaiming “Ooooooooooooo ..... Jaaaaaaaaa! Das ist fantastisch!

Jaaaaaaaaa .....!" thus indicating the height of their pleasure.

If you ever meet a post-Soviet person born in 1975 or earlier, say the phrase "Das ist fantastisch" and observe their reaction, which will undoubtedly betray nostalgia and amazement as to how you know the phrase and whether you understand its complex social history. "Das ist fantastisch" is a secret password to the world of transition from innocence to worldliness, from oppression to liberation, and, ultimately, from tradition to modernity. As a belated gesture of gratitude, I would like to thank German porn industry for bringing us, naïve Soviets, into the world of unbridled lust and opening our eyes to the shackles of modesty and self-control. The loss of innocence brought about by that flick crescendoed and came full circle for me when one Valentine's Day I found myself in an "Extended Stay America" suite in Ann Arbor, right by the mall, rented out for the occasion by my girlfriend at the time. Although no fruit was involved, the tryst did include an amateur bondage kit purchased at drugstore.com for \$14.99, with its velvety handcuffs, and a German (!) techno pop in the background to create the mood. How far I'd come.