

About That:
Deploying and Deploing Sex in Postsoviet Russia

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More than a decade after “adult material” began to slip through the state censor’s tight grip, sex in Russia still wears a distinctly foreign face. As of November 1997, 30 percent of the sizable portion of the Russian television audience still awake after midnight was tuned in to a program on the NTV (“Independent Television”) network called *Pro eto* (*About That*), Russia’s first talk show devoted entirely to sex (Carpenter). The program, which features frank discussions of such formerly taboo subjects as masturbation, sado-masochism, and homosexuality, is hosted by one Yelena Khanga, a young journalist whose Moscow accent and blonde wig are a striking contrast to her black skin.

Born and raised in Russia, Khanga is the granddaughter of an American communist and the daughter of a Tanzanian nationalist, the indirect product of the Soviet Union’s troubled love affair with the American civil rights movement and post-colonial Africa.¹ The fact that Khanga sounds Russian but looks foreign makes her a fitting icon for Postsoviet sex; like her subject matter, Khanga, who divides her time between Moscow and New York, is both an export and an import, a native daughter whom Russians seem to have difficulty acknowledging as their own. The wig, added at her producers’ insistence in order to bridge the potential gap between Khanga and her viewing audience, only heightens her exoticism: she is foreign sex in Russian drag.²

If *About That* is meant to acquaint Russians with “deviant” sexuality, the phenomenon of Khanga’s show can provide foreign observers with a rather tidy illustration of the pleasures and anxieties of contemporary Russian sexual discourse. *About That* embodies

all of the problematics of sex in contemporary Russian culture that form the subject of the present study: the sexualized relationship between Russia and the West; the sexualization of politics (as opposed to the politicization of sex); the rigid but unspoken code governing the deployment of sex in "high" and "low" culture; and, fundamentally, the development of a sexual discourse that defies circumlocution and repression while simultaneously relying on them.

Whether or not changes in mores and practices since the gray days of Brezhnev constitute a "sexual revolution" (a phrase rendered virtually meaningless through overuse), the sexual scene in Russia has changed radically in the past decade. Prostitution, a relatively small-scale phenomenon in Soviet times, is now seen by many young girls as a viable career choice;³ male homosexuality has been decriminalized for the first time in more than 50 years, and both gay men and lesbians have made progress in gaining at least grudging acceptance from the public at large;⁴ sex shops are scattered throughout the Russian Federation; and pornography is so prevalent in the streets and stores that it rarely merits a second glance.⁵ Such facts form the backdrop of any study of sexuality in today's Russia, but they are not the primary focus of this article. Rather, in turning to the question of sex in Russia, my intent is to examine the way in which Russian culture addresses these empirical phenomena, the way in which Russia interprets this so-called "revolution"; ultimately, Russian sexual discourse reveals much about the way in which Russian culture represents itself for domestic and foreign consumption.

From the Ineffable to the Unmentionable

Just as the "black Russian" Khanga is a study in contrasts between form and content, the show itself exploits its own obvious disjuncture between signifier and signified. One of the most explicit programs on Russian television hides behind the coy euphemism *About That*. The producers are clearly winking at their audience, albeit in two different directions. In the traditions of "higher-class" Russian pornography, which constantly makes parodic references to the Russian literary and artistic classics in order to cover itself in the fig leaf of erudition,⁶ *About That* takes its name from a Russian modernist masterpiece. The educated Russian's first association with the phrase "About That" is with Vladimir Maiakovskii's famous 1923 poem of the same title, in which the speaker of the

poem agonizes over his passion for a particular woman while meditating on the role of love in the new world. In the poem's prologue, the speaker proclaims the importance of his theme in typically hyperbolic terms, and yet avoids writing out the word "love," as though it were a dirty word.⁷ Maiakovskii's circumlocution flies in the face of the Russian literary tradition, in which the paucity of sexual details is more than compensated for by dogged attention to emotion. Nineteenth-century Russia may not have had a vocabulary for sex, but it did have a language of love. Khanga's show turns Mayakovskii's discomfort back to its more "appropriate" target, and just as the poet spends pages describing the love his title refuses to name, *About That* never flinches in its exploration of the seamier side of sex. In both cases, circumlocution facilitates discourse rather than hampering it.

Perhaps more important, however, is the very fact that the most popular television show about sex avoids the word entirely. Indeed, the word "eto" 'that' is a remarkably apt choice, reflecting a traditional reticence about discussing sexual matters. Though the Russian language is rich in obscene verbs and nouns related to sexual activity, at least until recently it has facilitated the impression that the only polite way to refer to sex is not to refer to it explicitly at all. The euphemism of Khanga's title harks back to a crucial moment in late Soviet sexual discourse, a 1987 Soviet-American "space bridge" hosted by Phil Donahue and Vladimir Pozner. When asked about sexual practices in the Soviet Union, one of the Russian audience-members-*cum*-citizen-diplomats responded "U nas seksa net!" 'We have no sex!', an apparently paradoxical declaration, given that Soviet women managed to give birth to children without recourse to test tubes and pipettes. Obviously, physical sexual activity was not the issue here. As opposed to the native Russian "*pol*" the word "*seks*" is a relatively recent import into the Russian lexicon; even the word's standard pronunciation (with an unpalatalized "s") draws attention to its foreign origins.⁸ Here I would translate "*seks*" as either "sexuality" or "sexual discourse," that is, sex as subject matter rather than activity. One usually imagines that frank discussions of sexuality are meant to titillate, resulting in arousal and even action; yet the issue here is what Michel Foucault calls the "incitement to discourse": the drive to produce more and more discourse about sex, rather than sex itself (Foucault 29-30). When examined in this light, a sexual (rather than verbal) response to

sexual discourse constitutes a short-circuit of desire; sexual discourse exists in order that we talk about sex, but not necessarily that we actually engage in sex. The two activities can (and do) exist quite independently of each other.

Thus despite the apparent absurdity of her claims, the woman who declared that the Soviet Union “had no *seks*” was actually correct: there was no sexual discourse, no “sexual question,” insofar as a question that has not been raised does not exist. But this comic phrase became fodder for jokes on both sides of the Atlantic, a mantra to be repeated and mocked whenever the occasion arose. Over the next ten years, Russian or Western scholars and journalists writing about the “sexual revolution” in Russia would inevitably return to this phrase as the point of departure.⁹ One might argue that the public denial of “*seks*” effectively called “*seks*” into being; the word, once uttered, became infectious.

Indeed, the comparison between sexual discourse and sexually transmitted disease is not made lightly, since the very scene of the introduction of *seks* would prefigure the dynamics of Russian sexual discourse for years to come. The sexual question was, after all, raised by an American; *seks*, like AIDS, penetrated the Soviet borders once vigilance became lax. Sexual discourse in Russia is therefore dependent on the West to a much greater extent than Western sexual discourse depends on Russia;¹⁰ not only is there a great deal of borrowing on all levels, from medical literature to pornographic imagery, but the relationship between Russia and the West acquires undeniably sexual overtones. Finally, one must not forget the particular genre that brought *seks* to Russia: the talk show.

In America, the talk show has defined the limits of acceptability by testing and stretching them, inciting its participants to turn their own sexual experiences into narratives for mass consumption. Just ten years after Donahue and Pozner got their audiences talking, Yelena Khanga's talk show continues the process begun during the “space bridge,” returning to the scene of the crime. If Russians still require a “foreigner” to pose the question of sex, they now have one who speaks their language, the language accustomed to euphemism and denial. Black and blonde, Khanga is both “about that” and “all that.”

The name *About That* also perhaps signals boundaries not to be transgressed: the material may be risqué, but the vocabulary is limited to the coy and the medical. Absent are all of the “unprint-

able” words omitted from standard dictionaries. Thanks to the near-total prohibition on printing all but the first letters of such common lexical items as “ebat” ‘to fuck,’ “khui” ‘cock’ and “pizda” ‘cunt,’ these words still retain a far greater shock value than their English counterparts (despite the frequency with which many Russian men use them in casual conversation). It should come as no surprise that those who attempt to legitimize sexual discourse in Russia studiously avoid even the hint of obscenity. This holds true not only for the various sex manuals and how-to books that have proliferated in the past decade, but also for frankly “erotic” publications that would fall under most people’s definitions of pornography.

In the West, pornographic texts meant for male consumption generally make lavish use of obscene words, perhaps to add to the titillation; indeed, the frequency with which the female characters in American pornography use the most vulgar of terms highlights the availability of the imagined female body to the posited male reader: her mouth is penetrated by his language as well as his organ. But even a cursory examination of contemporary pornographic publications shows that if anything, the opposite is the case in Postsoviet Russia: in these works, the most common terms for the penis are “chlen” ‘member’ and “stvol” ‘shaft.’ The Russian obscene vocabulary, unlike the English, is almost entirely divorced from eroticism: the more the text intends to arouse, the more it resorts to circumlocution.¹¹

Though most participants in the new sexual discourse prefer the language of circumlocution, even the most reticent among them, including those who polemicize against the proliferation of sexual expression, only facilitate the transformation of sex into discourse. On a scale surpassing both the libertinism of the *fin-de-siècle* “boulevard” and the eroticized battlefield of the Russian Civil War and New Economic Policy, Russian culture in all its manifestations would appear to have become thoroughly and overtly sexualized. Certainly, sexual expression is most evident in the “lowbrow” media: in the popular or “gutter” press, represented most notably by *SPID-Info*, Russia’s best-selling newspaper, and by the controversial publication *Eshche*, whose editions and publisher have been subject to detentions by Russian authorities; in the proliferation of pornography; and in the erotic imagery of television, radio, and newspaper advertising, where scantily clad women moan the names of the latest indispensable consumer gadget. Far from being a mere

verbal or audio-visual representation of glandular realities, sexuality has also become an object of study for the professional writers, scholars, and artists who, in the wake of the totalitarian monopoly on expression, now shape Russian public discourse: sex manuals, both imported and domestic, sell on every street corner; newspaper pundits either decry the collapse of morals or praise the end of sexual hypocrisy, and writers such as Valeriia Narbikova and Viktor Yerofeev put overt sexual situations in works printed by “high-brow” literary journals and publishing houses.¹²

One could dismiss the simultaneous rise in both scholarly and nonscholarly discourse as mere coincidence, a happy accident of Western critical fashion and Eastern post-totalitarian experimentation. But the juxtaposition of scholarly and popular examples of Russian sexual discourse reveals a shared belief in the capacity of sex to signify, a conviction that sex can speak of more than just itself.¹³ Both the Russian media and the scholarly literature take for granted that sexual discourse is politically significant, coopting what might arguably have been considered the one sphere of Soviet life that, thanks to the prudishness of the guardians of Soviet culture, was beyond the limits of the official and the public. Now the state of affairs in Russia most closely resembles the situation that Foucault considered one of the defining characteristics of the modern era: “What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret” (Foucault 35).

Only now are sexologists, sociologists, psychologists, and journalists enjoining the populace to enter into a dialogue on sexuality. It was the public acknowledgment of sex as a medical problem that facilitated the spread of sex as discourse. A revealing case (in every sense of the word) is the newspaper *SPID-Info*, which had the highest subscription rate of all periodicals for 1994. Founded in 1989, *SPID-Info* was initially purported to have essentially “prophylactic” goals: to enlighten the public about sexual issues, and to prevent the spread of venereal diseases in general and AIDS in particular. Homilies on sexual hygiene and protracted discussions of fatal diseases, however, do not sell newspapers; from the very beginning, *SPID-Info* carried numerous stories about porn stars, prostitutes, and the sex lives of historical figures.¹⁴ If one charitably assumes that the newspaper’s more sensational aspects were in-

cluded in order to gain a wider audience for the paper's public health message, one is forced to admit that the situation rapidly reversed itself. Though the newspaper still contains detailed information for those with sexual questions, such concerns are clearly secondary to the paper's popular appeal. (See Fig. II.1.)

Indeed, the very meaning of the word "SPID" in the newspaper's title has undergone a transformation that would startle even Susan Sontag (author of *AIDS and its Metaphors*): since the newspaper now contains far less information about AIDS than it does about nymphomania and tantric sex, one can only conclude that the word "SPID" has become little more than an advertisement for sexual subject matter.¹⁵ In 1994 the editorial board in a rather dubious rhetorical sleight of hand explained that the newspaper's goal is to provide information as rapidly as possible; now the masthead uses Latin letters, spelling not "SPID," but "SPEED." Where "SPID" is a contagion best avoided by abstinence, "SPEED" insists on the necessity of its own transmission: "'SPEED-INFO' is a whole world for a couple!" (*SPID-Info* 9 [1993]: 2). (See Fig. II.2.)

Having freed itself from the less appetizing connotations of immunodeficiency, *SPID-Info* is not only a veritable encyclopedia of sexual life; it is a monthly advertisement for sex *as* life. If the newspaper were mere pornography, it would not be at all memorable, for its scope would be limited to stimulating and satisfying physical sexual desire. Instead, *SPID-Info* combines the typical photos of gravity-defying, airbrushed nudes with a relentless torrent of articles about sex and beauty, sex and the workplace, sex and humor, sex and money, sex and crime. . . . This editorial strategy is different from that of Western magazines such as *Playboy*, which purports to rise above pornography by including articles and fiction on nonsexual topics. Rather, *SPID-Info* is a promotional brochure for a brave new polymorphously perverse world, in which sexuality always insists on its place in any given aspect of culture or everyday life. The best of *SPID-Info*'s headlines and rubrics playfully suggests that life can be defined only in terms of sex: for years the newspaper has been printing articles under the heading "Coito ergo sum" 'I copulate, therefore I am.'

Where some of the sex manuals create an appearance of reader participation through a question-and-answer format resembling a catechism, newspapers such as *SPID-Info* are truly interactive. People write in from all over the country with questions about impotence, menstruation, menopause, etc., and the newspaper prints





Fig. II.2 “Everybody’s Doing It!”: *Speed-Info*, March 1997.
Published by New Prairie Press

the letters along with professional replies. *SPID-Info* features a marvelously entertaining rubric entitled "Family Consultation," in which fictional patients confess their most personal problems to Professor Konstantin Tumanovskii. In the early issues, the column was accompanied by a picture, in which "Tumanovskii" is seen talking to "real" people, whose eyes are blacked out to protect their identities, while the photo's perspective suggests that the reader is sitting with them in the office, watching unnoticed from the side. As in Russian newspaper interviews, all extraneous conversation is edited out of these "sessions," resulting in a telescoping of the sexual plot to the point of absurdity. Dispensing with any therapeutic foreplay, Tumanovskii often pronounces a complex, Freudian diagnosis after a mere two or three questions. Tumanovskii's "consultations" epitomize both the professionalization of sexual discourse and the paradoxical conflation of the public and the private. His fictional patients, whose problems are general enough to be relevant to the largest number of readers, are reassured about confidentiality while millions of Russians eagerly await his next word. Time after time we see a concerned wife drag her reluctant husband into the sexologist's office, finally convincing him to let the doctor (and the readership) into their sex life. Here, perhaps, is the true Postsoviet "primal scene": the Russian bedroom exposes its secrets to the concerned professional.

SPID-Info exists not to provoke sexual desire, but to provoke the verbalization of desire. Its readers have learned their lesson well. Even more indicative than the practical-minded "consultation" is the "letters" section of *SPID-Info*; here people (mostly women) send in letters about their own sexual experiences, most frequently unhappy ones. They can expect no reply and no advice; instead, they simply feel the urge to talk. Newspapers like *SPID-Info*, by their very existence, suggest to the reader the possibility of turning one's own sexuality into discourse, of joining the mass readership in a well-regulated, professionalized form of textual intercourse.

Publications such as *SPID-Info* constantly trumpet the virtues of the "chastnoe" 'private' and "intimnoe" 'intimate,' yet one can argue that the constant exploration of this once-taboo realm constitutes an all-out assault on privacy by bringing the private realm into public discourse. The title of one of the more popular newspapers of today's Russia, *Chastnaia zhizn'* (*Private Life*) is emblematic of this problem.¹⁶ The virtues of the "private" and the "inti-

mate” are constantly trumpeted in such publications; a new section of *SPID-Info* is called “Intim-Klub” ‘Intimacy Club.’ “Intim-klub” is, of course, an oxymoron, but a particularly revealing one: how can a club be intimate? This may well be the fundamental paradox of sexual discourse in Russia today: we are enjoined to make sex a legitimate object of discourse, to read and write about sexual problems and sexual pleasures, all in the name of the private and the intimate. Yet one can argue that sexuality was far more “intimate,” if not more satisfying, when it could not be exposed in print.

And, in fact, many voices have spoken against the sexual saturation of Russian popular culture. One man’s utopia is another’s apocalypse, and the numerous critiques of sexual “excess” suggest that it is only a small step from scatology to eschatology. In one of the many prolonged attacks on utopian “liberation sexology” featured in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (*The Independent Newspaper*), Valentin Aleksandrov complains that “plaster casts of reproductive organs are displayed for sale on Novyi Arbat and the central squares right under the nose of the Moscow mayor’s office” (the Gogolian implications of this sentence are staggering). He proposes that the vanguard of sexual revolution will need its own new titles, such as “Vashe Erotichestvo” ‘Your Erotic Highness,’ “Vashe Seksual’noe Erotichestvo” ‘Your Sexual Erotic Highness’ (Aleksandrov 8).

Aleksandrov’s moral outrage is necessarily limited to invective and misinformation (he blames lesbians for the spread of AIDS), but governmental “organs,” on occasion, have resorted to the familiar harsher methods. Though dozens of graphic, hard-core publications freely circulate throughout the Russian Federation, in 1993 the publisher of a peculiar newspaper called *Eshche* was imprisoned for spreading pornography. If *SPID-Info* presents an erotic utopia that is left largely unexamined, *Eshche*, which its defenders, such as Zufar Gareev, call a “postmodern phenomenon” (*Erotika* 13), comically proclaims that the former USSR is a “Edinoe Eroticheskoe Prostranstvo” ‘Common Erotic Space’ (a parody on then-current phrases such as a “Common Cultural Space”). Where *SPID-Info* takes a decidedly international perspective, *Eshche* presents a sexual vision as seen through an entirely (post)Soviet lens. Its erotic adventurers are truck drivers and collective farm workers, and its stories about sexual experimentation in other countries are told from the point of view of the bemused ex-Soviet sex tour-

ist. Dmitrii Stakhov sees the newspaper as a catalogue of a “dying breed”: “the Soviet people.” He writes:

Eshche is a mirror for Soviet man. “Both you and your intimate manifestations are open to the gaze of another. Look at yourself!” *Eshche* seems to be calling. “You’re still Soviet in a world no longer Soviet.” (Erotika 14)

Whatever the accuracy of Stakhov’s assessment, it is worth noting that, even as he defends the newspaper from political persecution, he insists on defining the agenda of *Eshche* in political as well as cultural terms. Stakhov’s interpretation of the newspaper has an added appeal, which he does not make explicit: the very title of *Eshche* (which could mean both “still” and “more”) combines Stakhov’s idea of the Soviet who is “still Soviet” with the more obvious sexual connotation of “more” (i.e., one can never get enough). Why this newspaper in particular has been targeted is still largely a mystery; Igor’ Iarkevich claims it is because *Eshche* refuses to restrict erotica to the “acceptable” realm of night clubs and bars (Erotika 12). For Stakhov, the state repression only reinforces the newspaper’s “Soviet” essence: it was even shut down in tried and true Soviet fashion (Erotika 14).

The Erotic Body Politic

If sexuality has entered the public sphere for the first time in more than fifty years, one would expect to find it in that most public of all realms: politics. And, indeed, sexual questions continue to be debated in the Russian parliament and press: the means (and advisability) of fighting prostitution, the status of women, the pros and cons of the legalization of male homosexuality, the advisability of sex education, and the spread of venereal disease are repeated flash points in sexual politics.¹⁷ But despite widespread attention to such matters in the past decade, Soviet disdain for devoting too much time and energy to the sexual question still survives; Lenin’s dismissal of sex reform as “navel-gazing” is a sentiment that might well be shared by political leaders today (Zetkin 61). Feminism is still largely a dirty word, and gender roles, assumed to be innate, are to be reinforced rather than questioned.¹⁸ In a country where political and economic crises make the headlines on a daily basis, issues of sexual politics usually are relegated to the “feature” sec-

tion of the more “respectable” papers and broadcasts (where they nonetheless do their part in maintaining circulation).

Politics (in the traditional sense) and economics rather than sex per se are the stuff of “hard news” in Russia today.¹⁹ But the discourse of politics and economics has itself become sexualized to an unprecedented extent: sex has begun to provide its metaphors.

The sexualization of politics and economics is predicated on a particular, surprisingly consistent, gender-based metaphorical construction: Russia and the body politic are female, while those who lead (or exploit) the country are male. To a large extent, this dynamic is culturally and linguistically overdetermined; Russia’s very name (“Rossiia”) is grammatically feminine, and the metaphor of “Mother Russia” remains powerful to this day.²⁰ It was “Mother Russia” and “Rodina-mat” ‘the motherland’ who rallied her sons to fight off the German invaders in World War II, not the masculine “Soviet Union.” The male counterpart to Mother Russia, the “otechestvo” ‘Fatherland,’ though grammatically neutral, suggests a paternalistic relation to the state. “Fatherland” and the concomitant paternal imagery are used when describing the country’s economic and industrial strengths (domestically produced goods are called “otechestvennye”—made in the fatherland), or referring to the successful military defense of the country (the former Soviet Army Day is now the “Den’ zashchitnikov otechestva” ‘Day of the Defenders of the Fatherland’). The operative word, however, is “successful”: the country in danger that must be defended is mother rather than father. In times of crisis, Russians seem to turn almost automatically to a feminized sense of Russia. Thus in the years immediately prior to and following the Revolution of 1917, the image of Mother Russia as either the helpless rape victim or the wanton whore selling herself to the highest bidder proliferated across the political spectrum. Such imagery recurs in contemporary Russia, where the country is frequently embodied as an alluring female misused at the hands of the “gosudarstvennye muzhi” (a phrase for leaders that in modern Russian sounds literally like “state husbands”), the nation’s perceived internal enemies (usually Jews and businessmen), or the depraved West.

Nowhere is this portrayal of Russia more clearly expressed than in contemporary pornography. Historically, pornography has long blurred the boundaries between commerce and political expression. In Enlightenment Britain and France, pornographic literature was

often the vehicle for political satire (Hunt, "Introduction" 10, 32-45; Hunt, "Pornography," passim; Weil, passim), while in twentieth-century America, the connection between political expression and pornography has served as one of the justifications for allowing pornographic material to circulate. In the last years of the Soviet Union, freedom of political expression became almost synonymous with freedom of sexual expression; liberal political newspapers and magazines (such as the 1990 Baltic pro-independence paper *Baltiia*) frequently combined punditry on the front cover with bare pudenda on the back. Hence the first issue of *Andrei*, Russia's first and most successful *Playboy* clone, trumpeted its role in the growing democratization of the country, claiming: "The first Russian journal for men . . . is essential today, for it is precisely men who need liberation from stressful aggression and lack of satisfaction" (*Andrei* 1). One of *Andrei*'s competitors, the more frankly sadomasochistic *MaKhaON*, mixes sex and politics in a visually striking manner. One issue contains a full-page, color cartoon of leather-clad reformer Anatoly Chubais whipping a blindfolded blonde whose tattoo of a two-headed eagle and white, blue, and red sash suggests that she symbolizes Russia; with gritted teeth, handcuffed wrists, and pierced nipples, this woman turns her rear to the viewer as hundred-dollar bills fall from her vagina into a box marked "Xerox," apparently in response to Chubais's not-so-tender mercies (*MaKhaON* 1).

It is Russia's most frankly sexual (and uninhibited) political figure, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who has most explicitly and playfully invoked the sexual metaphor of the Russian feminine body politic.²¹ Zhirinovskiy, who once offered to personally impregnate all the lonely and childless women in Russia, turned his silver wedding anniversary into a political carnival. On February 11, 1996, he and his wife Galina had a Russian Orthodox wedding for the benefit of the television cameras, dispensing free vodka to hundreds of pensioners waiting outside the church ("Zhirinovskiy Throws Wedding"). The ceremony was a renewal of vows, a nostalgic remarriage rather than a new union, and explicitly appealed to a longing for lost purity: "Against the background of general political prostitution, the LDPR [Zhirinovskiy's party] is a long-haired, meek-eyed virgin in white," he said during a press conference. "Forty million men will desert all those prostitutes and rush after the virgin LDPR. Let's have group sex on June 16 [the day of

the upcoming presidential election]” (“Zhirinovsky ‘Like a Virgin’ ”).²² By conflating his personal “wedding” ceremony with the more public ritual of the election, Zhirinovsky underscored the election’s role as a “life cycle” rite for the body politic, at the same time mocking the solemnity of the event through his typically outlandish declarations.²³ The wedding ceremony, like all carnivals, inverted standard binary oppositions: now the political leaders are the blushing brides, while the population is male. But Zhirinovsky made it clear that this was only a temporary state of affairs, a necessary ritual for the renewal of the “great power”: after the election, he declared, the wives of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Zhirinovsky himself would have to be sent “to a convent . . . [s]o they don’t interfere with their husbands’ running of the country” (“Zhirinovsky Throws Wedding”).²⁴

Sleeping with the Enemy

While deflecting attention away from rival political programs by creating a more positive (if unabashedly absurd) iconography, Zhirinovsky resorts to one of the most ubiquitous symbols of a wayward Postsoviet Russia in order to attack his enemies: the prostitute. As numerous critics have pointed out, the prostitute, the woman who cheapens a high ideal by according it a monetary value, represents the profound anxieties sparked by the introduction of a market economy. The prostitute has most notably been incarnated in Viktor Kunin’s novel and Petr Todorovskii’s film *Intergirl*, which tells the melodramatic tale of Tania, a nurse’s aid by day and foreign-currency prostitute by night. This wildly successful potboiler simply begs for a political reading. Lynne Attwood’s discussion of Todorovskii’s film has argued convincingly that the prostitute is a symbol of Soviet society as a whole: “everybody is forced, metaphorically, into prostitution” (Attwood, “Sex” 72). Katerina Clark offers a more provocative interpretation of the perestroika prostitute: such works as *Intergirl* highlight the intelligentsia’s anxiety over the fate of culture in the era of the international marketplace (Clark 1993). As Goscilo correctly observes, “The dominant lexicon of *Intergirl* is that of economics (not sex)” (Goscilo “Speaking” 144). Of course, crucial to all these readings of *Intergirl* is the fact that Tania is a *foreign-currency* prostitute, one who disdains mere rubles in her quest for dollars and Deutschmarks. In light of the frequent recourse to female symbols to represent Russia, Tania’s

melodramatic tale becomes a transparent allegory of Russia's relationship with the West: rich in natural beauty, Russia sells herself to foreign suitors, only to be overcome by nostalgia and regret.²⁵

Russia's drama of international prostitution is thus always played out on a number of levels simultaneously: empirically, we witness the unchecked growth of highly paid call girls serving New Russians and foreign businessmen, the boom in Russian "mail-order brides," and the notorious trafficking in women from the ex-USSR throughout the world; allegorically, the export of Russian women is inevitably compared with the short-sighted marketing of the country's oil reserves for Western consumption; and, psychologically and sexually, foreign-currency prostitution contributes to a growing complex of inferiority and insecurity among Russian men, amply demonstrated by numerous publications and broadcasts aimed primarily at male consumers. The very existence of "men's magazines" and soft-core pornography in Russia is a response to the threat of foreign competition, just as sexually oriented broadcasts like *About That* contain traces of Russian culture's conflicted attitude toward the West: strive as they might for uniqueness, male heterosexual erotica and pornography in Russia betray their foreign origins.²⁶

Such publications rhapsodize over the virtues of Russian women, repeating the male mantra that women in Russia are the most beautiful in the world; but they also reinforce the threat that these women will attract the attention of foreign men (through associated projects such as *Andrei's* website). Ironically, these publications, which shamelessly borrowed from Western models such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, eventually found themselves retreating behind national chauvinism when *Playboy* and *Penthouse* began publishing their own Russian editions. Magazines such as *Andrei* experienced the same anxieties as their Russian male readers when faced with foreign competition.

Each issue of *Andrei* contains articles detailing new aspects of the threat to Russian masculinity, printed under the rubric "Prava muzhchin" 'The Rights of Men.' The sixth issue of *Andrei* (1995) contains Viktor Yerofeev's essay for this section, titled "Polet oblaka v shtanakh" 'The Flight of the Cloud in Trousers.'²⁷ This article would be central to Yerofeev's 1997 slim volume of essays, *Muzhchiny (Men)* supplying most of the material for the book's rather polemical blurb.²⁸ After a typical diatribe against feminism

and the controversy over sexual harassment in the West, "The Flight of the Cloud in Trousers" informs us that "Man's fate in Russia looks different, but is no less dramatic," since the Russian man is not merely embattled, but has ceased to exist altogether. Thanks to Soviet power (instituted, as Yerofeev himself admits, by males), the Russian man has lost the honor and freedom that are the hallmarks of true manhood. Though the Russian man is still a "chelovek" 'human being,' still a "muzhik" 'guy,' and still a "muzh" 'husband,' these terms all represent circumscribed, ultimately unfulfilling roles for the potential "real" man. (See Fig. II.3.)

Yerofeev's essay hints at the specter haunting Russian pornography—that of Western culture and Western men. Whereas the Russian man is a thing of the past, the Russian woman is entirely real: "Woman consists of necessity. In Russia 'neobkhdimosti khot' valiai' " 'we have necessity by the ton!' That is why Russia is feminine. Realizing that there are no men in Russia, she is prepared to leave the country and find real men abroad. Once again, the sexual threat is entangled with an economic one: the Russian man posited by *Andrei* laments the competition with Western men, while *Andrei* itself fears competition with American pop culture and the threat of "men's magazines" imported from the United States, particularly the Russian-language edition of *Playboy*, whose contents only slightly differ from the American version. As a "Russkii zhurnal dlia muzhchin" 'Russian magazine for men,' *Andrei* originally accented both "for men" and "Russian." Once *Playboy* appeared, *Andrei* began to emphasize the Russianness of both its models and their settings. An editorial in the seventh issue claims: "*Andrei* puts our woman on a pedestal to be admired; unlike invader magazines ['zhurnalami interventami'], of which there are more and more in the kiosks, it doesn't present her in an unadvantageous and biased fashion next to foreign women so that the 'house' model be MORE sexual and feminine. The invaders' task is simple: to prove that everything Western is better, more expensive, stronger—and also to turn our women into a cheap export that's ready for anything." Not only does the magazine that once identified itself with the allegedly Western values of freedom and democracy now assume an overtly nationalistic tone, but its vocabulary deliberately evokes the rhetoric of war and invasion: Western magazines, like Western armies, are "invaders" on a hostile mission of conquest.²⁹

Though the pictures, stories, and ads in *Andrei* portray a free-spending, luxurious lifestyle available only to the wealthiest of New

Fig. II.3. Flight of that Trousered Cloud . . . : Andrei No. 6, 1995.



Russians, the magazine's implicit nationalism persistently comes through. If one may believe the letters to the editor, the readership has responded to *Andrei's* pro-Russian boosterism. In the best tradition of Soviet-era collective letters, a group of officers from the Baltic Fleet in Tallinn writing to *Andrei* (1995, No. 6) thanked the magazine for mentioning the 300th anniversary of the Russian fleet: "You really are our magazine. Even our national pride, to some extent. Although we've been around and seen many different men's magazines, *Andrei's* nicer and closer to the heart of our Soviet man." The letter's patriotic fervor makes it easy to forget that the subject is a pornographic magazine rather than, say, the launching of a space shuttle; the anachronistic reference to "our Soviet man" by a group of Russian military personnel based in newly independent Estonia only heightens the identification of *Andrei* with a nostalgia for Russian greatness. (See Fig. II.4.)

Even the photospreads exemplify a distinct concern for Russian identity *vis-à-vis* the West. A six-page feature in the sixth issue shows supposedly American porn models surrounded by props from the Russian/Soviet space program; in this fashion, the magazine compensates for "importing" exotic American beauties by spotlighting accomplishments in one of the few areas of Russian industry that could still be the source of unequivocal pride.³⁰ Indeed, the English-speaking models are quoted as uttering only one Russian word throughout the shoot: "Jessica, Kelly, and Christie responded to the idea of a spaceflight enthusiastically. 'Ga-ga-rin!' they laughed, stretching the costumes of Soviet superheroes onto their American breasts." (See Fig. II.5.)

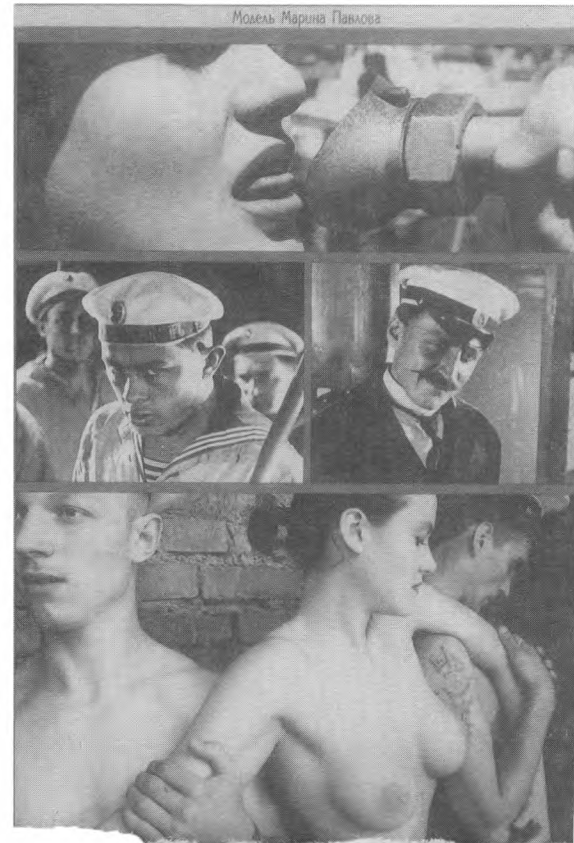
Magazines like *Andrei*, whose economic task is to sell sexual images of Russian women to Russian men, ultimately return to some of the basic questions of sexual discourse in Russia today: how may one reconcile sex and the marketplace? If sexual metaphors characterize the free exchange of goods and ideas between Russia and the West (the source of the marketplace and of the very genres that inspired *SPID-Info* or *About That*), how can Russian anxieties provoked by the commercialization of sex (the incursions on privacy, the threat of foreign wealth and potency) be allayed? (See Fig. II.6.)

Andrei points the way by thematizing the anxieties themselves, continually revisiting them in a light-hearted manner. The seventh issue of *Andrei* includes a feature that incorporates exotic locales while turning the threat of the "export" of Russian women into the

Fig. II.4 Commemorating the 300-Year Anniversary of the Russian Navy: The Male Fleet Protecting Its Equipment: *Andrei* No. 5, 1994. *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, Vol. 24, Iss. 1 [2000], Art. 4



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Borenstein: About That: Deploying and Deploing Sex in Postsoviet Russia

Fig. II.5 The Cosmos and Other Spheres: *Andrei*, No. 6, 1995.



stuff of comedy: a blonde model is photographed in various locales (and various stages of undress) in Cairo and the Egyptian desert, under the heading “Sto verbliudov za russkuiu baryshniu” ‘One hundred camels for a Russian girl.’ Capitalist exchange is replaced by Eastern barter, and the Russians girl’s price, for once, is anything but practical (“We sent . . . the camels on their way to a friend in Tashkent. Will they get there?”). The photospread depends on a sense of two-way exoticism, as well as a broad parody of cross-cultural kitsch; in the corner of a full-page photo of the naked Russian woman on a camel is a fully clothed Arab woman on a tractor. The contrast between the “retrograde” camel and the “progressive” tractor is a cliché of Soviet Socialist Realist tales of the struggle to civilize the nomads of Central Asia, but where the USSR brought communism, *Andrei* pretends to bring the example of sexual liberation. The caption reads: “The magazine for men was welcomed by a few emancipated women of the East. Out of solidarity with our struggle for the beauty of the body, one of them even climbed up onto a tractor—the symbol of progress.” The Eastern locale allows Russia to take on a missionary role familiar from the days of communist internationalism, while displacing and defusing cross-cultural anxieties by turning Russia into the source of sexual “export.” Here Russia gets to be the West, raising the sexual question in a mysterious, repressed East. Sex, it seems, can wear a Russian face with pride and confidence, after all, if only in a situation when it assumes cultural superiority.

Notes

1. Khanga is the author of a memoir about her life as a “black Russian,” titled *Soul to Soul*. For more on Soviet attitudes toward Africa and African Americans, see Blakely (Chapters 7-9).
2. NTV Executive Producer Leonid Parfyonov was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying “A Russian black girl has never been seen on television. . . . I believe in cosmopolitanism—showing that not all Russians are blue-eyed and blond.” But when the show was in rehearsal, a stylist fitted her for a blond wig and blue contact lenses; Khanga agreed to the wig but balked at the lenses. Parfyonov’s response: “We didn’t want to go with an Angela Davis, Afro-American Style. We had to make concessions to the viewers” (Stanley, “On Russian TV”).

3. Igor Kon cites a 1989 survey of high-school senior girls in Riga and Leningrad claiming that foreign-currency prostitution "had become one of the top ten most prestigious professions, as well as a survey in which prostitutes ranked higher than journalists, diplomats, and academics among prestigious and lucrative professions admired by Moscow schoolchildren" (Kon 223). Survey results in the former USSR are notoriously unreliable, and should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism; nevertheless, the appearance of such survey results in the Russian mass media has been important in defining the role of the prostitute in contemporary Russian sexual discourse; at the very least, the surveys have created the *impression* that prostitution is considered a desirable profession.

4. Lesbianism in Russia has long had the dubious distinction of being legally and socially invisible; there have never been any laws in Russia forbidding female same-sex activity. Article 121.1 of the criminal code, which made male homosexual relations an offense punishable by imprisonment, was repealed on May 29, 1993. For an overview of the status of gays and lesbians in contemporary Russia, see Gessen, *Rights of Lesbians* (passim), Kon (239-64), and Tuller (passim).

5. On the spread of pornography in Russia today, see Goscilo (*Dehexing* 135-63).

6. Helena Goscilo explores the bizarre juxtapositions of "high" and "low" cultures in the first wave of contemporary Russian pornography, in which "the Venus de Milo is likely to rub elbows (*only* metaphorically speaking) with a *Playboy* centerfold, their sole common denominator being their gendered nudity" (Goscilo, *Dehexing* 146; emphasis in the original).

7. The prologue ends with a rhymed couplet, the last line of which is "The name / of this theme / is . . ." ("Imia / etoi / teme / . . ."); the missing word ("liubov") is made all the more obvious in that it is meant to rhyme with the Russian "lbov" ("foreheads") (Maiakovskii 176). The forbidden character of the speaker's love is reinforced by the title of the section immediately following it, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"; though Maiakovskii's passion in the poem is explicitly heterosexual, the reference to Oscar Wilde's poem written during the author's years in prison for sodomy suggests that homosexuality is not the only love that "dare not speak its name."

In the early years of Soviet power, particularly during the Russian Civil War, love was seen by many revolutionary romantics as a theme too "bourgeois" for the "new world" they envisioned. In particular, the poets associated with the Proletarian Culture movement tended to relegate women, femininity, and love to the dustbin of history (See Naiman Chapter One, and Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, Chapter One). Even writers as distant from revolutionary ideology as the formalist Viktor Shklovskii, for reasons of their own, would treat love as a matter for coy

circumlocution; his 1923 novel *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love*, composed of personal letters between a man and a woman, is structured on the woman's prohibition on writing about love ("Don't write to me about love. Don't. I'm very tired.") (Shklovskii 177).

8. See, for example, the title of M. Rezin's article about the lack of shame among contemporary Russian students: "In Latin, it's sex, but what is it in Russian?" (Rezin). As the subject of *seks* grows less foreign, so too does the pronunciation of the word itself; one hears a palatalized "s" more and more frequently.

9. See, for example, Attwood, "Sex" (66), Gessen, "We Have No Sex" (passim), and Kon (1).

10. This is not to say that Russia plays no role in the Western sexual imaginary; quite to the contrary, Russia has often functioned as the source of "passion" in various Western narratives and fantasies, from Freud's metaphorical connections between Russia and the unconscious (Rice, Etkind, *Eros* 132) to Sacher-Masoch's use of Russian material in his most famous works (Etkind, *Sodom* 12-30). Elsewhere I argue that Western scholars' and journalists' interest in Russian sexuality is also erotic in character ("Slavophilia" 146-47).

11. Ironically, if one wishes to find obscene language in Russian texts and films, one must look up rather than down: it is "high" culture that has availed itself of the linguistic opportunities afforded by the easing of censorship. Writers such as Viktor Yerofeev, Vladimir Sorokin, and Valeriia Narbikova enlist such words in their experimental fictions, availing themselves of their residual taboo value the better to shock a complacent readership. For a discussion of the function of explicit anatomical vocabulary in contemporary Russian fiction, see Goscilo, "Body Talk" (passim). Andrei Zorin argues that "taboo words play a sort of provocative role in the new context [of contemporary Russian poetry], as if they liberate the reader, allowing him to reveal his subconscious aggression" (139).

12. Finally, one must not forget the cultural critics in both Russia and the West who examine these phenomena. The first post-Brezhnev decade has seen an impressive constellation of scholarly works on sexuality and gender in Russia: cultural historians have examined the social construction of sexuality from the middle ages (Levin) to the *fin-de-siècle* (Engelstein) to the Soviet period (Kon), while literary scholars such as Helena Goscilo, Olga Matich, Eric Naiman, and Mikhail Zolotonosov have looked at the interplay between sex and ideology during NEP and the renewed "physiologism" of recent Russian fiction. Three collections of articles on sex in Russian culture have appeared in the United States in recent years (Costlow, et. al.; Kon and Riordan; Berry), one in Switzerland (Heller), and a special issue of *Literaturnoe obozrenie* on "erotica" in Russian lit-

erature was published in 1992 (Prokhorova et al.). This does not include the spate of books published in the past several years on Russian women's studies and gender issues, which are beyond the scope of the present article.

13. Of course, the tendency to view sexuality in terms of metaphysics has a long history in Russia, embracing both pro- and ant-sexual points of view (Solov'ev, Fedorov, Berdiaev). It is noteworthy, however, that in Russia the simultaneous renewal of interest in both sexual issues and Russian religious philosophy means that works of certain Russian scholars attribute to sexuality a moral or metaphysical dimension (see, for example, Mikhail Epshtein's "serious parodies" of Vladimir Solov'ev's erotic philosophy [Epshtein]). Thus homosexuality, for example, is viewed as a sign of necrophilia and a disdain for the family in Boris Paramonov's "Chevengur i okrestnosti," while Oleg Dark argues that "Homosexuality is always a vow, . . . a rejection of the norm. . . . The beauty of homosexuality is its unnaturalness" (Dark 251). In his critique of both Paramonov and Dark, Sergei Tikhomirov notes that, in their treatment of homosexuality, "the most consistent defenders of democratic choice also sometimes get caught up in frankly mythological sequences of thought" (Tikhomirov 5).

14. As Masha Gessen writes, "Though *SPID-Info* contained less AIDS information than *Tema* [an early gay newspaper], which ran safer-sex guidelines in every issue, and its provocative covers featured such topics as fetishes and prostitution, *SPID-Info* carried the morally upstanding cachet of being an AIDS information publication. No one had to be embarrassed about reading it. So everyone read it" (Gessen, "Sex" 220-21).

15. Gessen notes that after its first few issues, *SPID-Info* "ceased providing AIDS-related information" altogether (Gessen, "Sex" 222).

16. Here I must agree with Igor Kon and David Tuller that Western observers at times have made too much of the fact that the Russian language lacks a single word corresponding to the English "privacy." As Kon notes, French also has no such term, and yet no one draws any grand conclusions from this lexicological accident (Kon 80-81). Tuller speculates that "the lack of one specific word has helped to protect the very idea of privacy, for to name it would be to define it, to circumscribe it—and ultimately to debase and destroy it" (Tuller 250). While Tuller's musings are hardly sound from a linguistic point of view, his discussion of Russian strategies for preserving the inviolability of private life has a great deal of merit, especially when he contrasts it with the recent American tendency to extol the virtue of privacy even while turning the most intimate details of private life into fodder for television shows and confessional biographies.

18. Susan Larsen argues that two ideas lie behind the conception of gender circulated by the Russian mass media: "first of all, normative axioms about the biological, and therefore 'natural' basis of the predetermination and life's purpose of women, and second, the conviction that seventy years of Soviet power have thoroughly deformed the 'natural' essence of women in all aspects of life—be they sexual, family, economic, or political" (Larsen 178). Larsen echoes Lynne Attwood's 1990 study, *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR*, which observes the country's growing concern over the perceived blurring of "natural" gender roles, the "feminization" of men and the "masculinization" of women (also noted by Goscilo, *Dehexing* 10-11). That concern recently has acquired a new form of expression. Headlines such as "Bureaucrats have taken everything away from men" (Proshina) continue the old line of complaint, but now coexist with calls to action and bold assertions of "natural" truths. See the headline for an article by sexologist Sergei Golod in the St. Petersburg paper *Chas-Pik* (*Rush Hour*) titled, "Despite everything, male sexuality is still different from female sexuality. And that's good" (Golod).

19. Hence the relatively minor role played by sex scandals in the Russian popular imagination. Russia, like much of Europe, has followed American coverage of the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky story with a combination of bemusement and disgust. Though the daily *Moskovskii komsomolets* described Lewinsky's semen-stained dress in lavish detail (Bershidsky), the consensus in Russia holds that this private affair should never have been made public (Bershidsky; Reeves; Shargodskia; "Russia Would Prefer Sex Scandal" 1998). For Valentin Zorin of the USA and Canada Institute, the Lewinsky story shows that "an element of sanctimoniousness . . . characterizes Americans" (Ustiuzhanin). The American media have noted that, when polled, Russians see Clinton's alleged affairs as a sign that he is a "real man," unlike the old and ailing Yeltsin (Reeves; Shargodskia; Howard and Gajilan).

The rare attempts by Russian journalists to stir up a sex scandal have failed to hit the mark. In June 1997, the popular muckraking weekly *Sovershenno Sekretno* (*Top Secret*) published photos of Russia's Justice Minister, Valentin Kovalev, relaxing with three naked women in a Moscow bathhouse reputed to be a Mafia hangout. Voices from across the political spectrum, including Yeltsin's spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the popular reformer Boris Nemtsov, and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, condemned the violation of Kovalev's privacy (Franchetti; Stanley). *Top Secret's* editor, Artem Borovik, took pride in breaking new ground, as though coverage of sex scandals were a sign of political maturity: "We are absolutely delighted. This is the first scandal of its kind" (Franchetti). For *Top Secret*, the Kovalev story seemed to mark a subtle change of course; the very title of the paper embodies the informational paradox that characterizes

the Postsoviet media. The words "Top Secret" customarily cover government documents not meant for publication, but the stories that appear in the newspaper of the same name have achieved the widest possible distribution. Since the paper's inception, its editors have devoted themselves to violating a long-standing taboo; the paper is predicated on a political, rather than sexual, fetishizing of information. The Kovalev story was an attempt to redirect this fetish to a new object.

20. Such a relationship between Russia and "her" leaders has religious overtones, as well, harking back to the Christian allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs as the story of Christ and the church. The scriptural precedent is the inverse of the contemporary metaphorical situation: in the first case, a frankly erotic love poem is purged of its sexual character and transposed to the realm of bodiless, spiritual love; in the situation described below, sexual imagery is used to describe (and comment upon) a relationship not usually considered erotic.

21. Zhirinovsky is unique among Russian politicians for both his frequent appellation to sexual imagery and his radical stance on a number of sexual issues. As with most of his political views, Zhirinovsky's statements on sex can hardly be considered a coherent political program. In March 1998, he attended a St. Petersburg gay club and expressed his support of "sexual minorities" ("Zhirinovsky Courts"). When the Lewinsky scandal broke in January 1998, Zhirinovsky noted that if Clinton were impeached, "Bill will have more freedom and I will be able to meet him more often . . . We will together recall our sexual experiences" ("Zhirinovsky to Clinton"). One of his more notorious moments occurred during an interview with Jennifer Gould for the American edition of *Playboy* (March 1995), when he proposed that Gould, her interpreter, and one of his bodyguards engage in group sex (Gould 248-49). In the same interview, Zhirinovsky boasts of having "had more than two hundred women, and with every woman I've had it several times. And if you add masturbation, I've climaxed probably ten thousand times." He concludes that he has therefore achieved orgasm 3,500 times in his life (Gould 249).

22. The desire for such political purity was also parodically embodied by the short-lived All-Russian Virgin Party, an organization whose twelve members held their first public meeting in a Moscow nightclub in August 1997 (Beeston).

23. This was not the first time that Zhirinovsky portrayed voting in sexual terms. Before the 1993 election, he declared, "Political impotence is finished! . . . Today is the beginning of orgasm. The whole nation, I promise you, will have an orgasm next year!" (from the *Washington Post*, December 17, 1993, as quoted in Tuller 197).

25. Withholding sexual favors from foreign men therefore becomes a sign of national strength. In April 1997, the local Crimean newspaper *Krymskoe vremia* reported that prostitutes in this largely Russian enclave in independent Ukraine had announced that, as a protest against NATO expansion, they would not service NATO sailors scheduled to take part in exercises off the Crimean coast that summer (Lodge, "Crimean"; Philips "NATO's sailors").

26. *Andrei* makes such anxieties crystal clear in a cartoon in its very first issue: two prostitutes display their wares on a Moscow street; the first, a Russian woman standing under the "M" of the metro sign, looks on in horror at a black woman leaning against the "M" of a McDonald's sign.

27. Once again, the point of reference is the work of Vladimir Maiakovskii. His 1915 poem "The Cloud in Trousers" takes its title from a phrase that the speaker uses in the prologue: "if you want— / I will be irreproachably tender / not a man, but a cloud in trousers!" Yefeev uses the term to suggest that Russian men have retreated from their natural masculinity.

The long-dead Maiakovskii, whose verses celebrated both sexual passion and Soviet patriotism, haunts contemporary Russian sexual discourse. Two possible explanations for the centrality of Maikovskii to the Russian erotic imagination are first, his poetic persona—on the surface, aggressively masculine, but ultimately revealed as androgynous and conflicted; beneath the macho posturing is a vulnerable, emotional side conventionally deemed "feminine." Second, perhaps more pertinently, Maiakovskii's canonization as a revolutionary writer ensured the availability of his entire oeuvre to generations of Soviet readers, including erotically charged works such as "The Cloud in Trousers" and "About That." By default, Maiakovskii was the "sexiest" writer in the official Soviet school curriculum; when the producers of erotic and pornographic materials began to seek legitimacy in the late perestroika era, Maiakovskii was the most obvious "high-culture" icon to hide behind.

28. Other essays were originally printed in *Playboy*, where Yerofeev started publishing not long after his work in *Andrei* appeared.

29. Yerofeev also uses such military rhetoric throughout his article in issue No. 6; for example, when he explains that the successful wife gives her husband the illusion of conquest, she herself will be the true victor: "Then it will end up like fifty years ago: the USSR wins, but it's Germany that celebrates."

30. The rather obvious connection between the launch of a phallic rocket and male sexual response is made in an ad by Upjohn in the following issue: an injectible medicine for impotence is advertised with a picture of a syringe-like rocket blasting off into space.

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