

## Spanking Natasha: Post-Soviet Pornography and the Internet

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**Abstract** The collapse of Communism and the advent of the internet shifted the center of gravity in violent spanking pornography from Japan and Great Britain to the Czech Republic and Russia. Exploiting the vagueness of anti-pornography legislation, Czech and Russian internet pornographers displayed a propensity for realistic violence that surprised even veteran observers of the spanking genre, and viewers have speculated about ties to international slave trafficking known as the Natasha trade. Such links have not moved beyond speculation, and Czech companies have taken steps to distance themselves from such charges, while Russian producers of spanking pornography have emerged as the world's most violent.

**Keywords** Pornography · Spanking · Russia

A pivotal moment in global pornography occurred on January 1, 2002 when the Czech adult film company Rigid East released via the internet its tenth movie, a 45 min feature entitled *The Wild Party*. The plot was not complex. Four young females convene at the home of a friend whose parents were away, where they begin an evening of drinking and light girl-on-girl fondling. When the father of the hostess returns unexpectedly, however, matters take a violent turn. Each of the five young women is stripped and spanked with a heavy rod, and the severity of these beatings surpasses the traditional six strokes of punishment in English public schools, the previous standard in spanking pornography, many times over ([www.rge-films.com](http://www.rge-films.com), 2014). What impressed viewers who copiously posted their reactions on-line was the realism of action. The ferocity of the beatings could not have possibly been faked, a large number concluded, and the young women were not accomplished enough actresses to have counterfeited the surprise and fear they displayed when the

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movie turned from female partying to beatings and humiliation ([www.svrpage.net](http://www.svrpage.net), 2010).

Internet reviewers hailed *The Wild Party* as an instant classic of its genre, even as some speculated that the actresses had been coerced. Surveying the sustained impact of the film, one reviewer would later write:

In the late 90's [sic] Lupus Pictures, which was called Rigid East at that time, undoubtedly turned the spanking industry upside down. It outstripped all the studios then in technical quality, design as well as brutality. They surprised their western competitors with their video called "Wild Party," in which they spanked five fresh young girls in a very brutal way that had never been seen before. ... If one wanted to see a really rough spanking video, there was only one choice: Rigid East ([www.spankfiesta.com](http://www.spankfiesta.com), 2010).

Another commentator noted: "When I saw 'Wild Party' for the first time, I was appalled and delighted in equal measure. It was the kind of video I had fantasized about, but I never expected to actually see it" ([rohrstockpalast.blogspot.com](http://rohrstockpalast.blogspot.com); [www.spreview.net](http://www.spreview.net), 2010). Indeed, by 2006 the reputation of the film was so firmly established that it became the reference against which subsequent films were measured: "'Wild Party' by Rigid East has been the cultic film of the spanking world for those who are fond of this kind of films ..." ([www.spankfiesta.com](http://www.spankfiesta.com), 2010). Aside from the attraction the violence held for the intended audience, there were also suggestions that coercion had existed behind the camera as well as in front of it. Regarding the possibility of involuntary realism in the acting, the commentator Neil Owen declared: "it would be hard to stage or fake the action in say wild party [sic]" ([spanking-reviews.com](http://spanking-reviews.com), 2010). More specifically, the reviewer Ludwig added: "'Wild Party' still stands as one of the classics. It's obviously not for everyone's taste, and more than any other Rigid East video, it gave rise to the rumour of 'starving Czech girls' who are exploited by unscrupulous pornographers" ([rohrstockpalast.blogspot.com](http://rohrstockpalast.blogspot.com), 2010).

Indeed, the possibility of a link not only to "starving Czech girls" in spanking films but also of pornography generally to broader East European sex-slave trafficking known colloquially as the Natasha trade had already been raised by students of the topic (Goscilo 1999). The collapse of Communism had brought on a feminization of poverty in the Eastern bloc that left females vulnerable to exploitation in many guises, and economics gave rise to devious methods of recruitment. Within a year of the collapse of the Soviet Union, human slave trafficking (men were also victimized by a form that enslaves laborers) became the fastest growing organized criminal activity in the world, with forty percent of the victims coming from the former USSR alone. Young women were recruited especially from Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova to work abroad as secretaries, nannies, or strippers. Typically, when they arrived at their destination—victims have been rescued from the Czech Republic, Israel, Turkey, USA, various West European countries—their passports were seized and they were forced into a life of prostitution (Transchel 2009; Friman and Reich 2007). Viewers and scholars thus both speculated that violent pornography might have become one more outlet for the Natasha trade. The unspoken yet implied question was whether even

economically desperate women would undergo the level of pain and humiliation exhibited in *The Wild Party* of their own volition simply for money, regardless of need?

As these speculations swirled, *The Wild Party* turned out to be pivotal on more than one level inside the pornography industry as well. First, for those to whom it was not already evident by 2002, the release of this film signaled a definitive shift of the center of gravity in spanking pornography from Japan and Great Britain to Eastern Europe. Pornographers in the former Soviet bloc were willing to incorporate a much higher level of violence, so that reviewers of the genre now considered the Western and Asian fare that formerly dominated the market—characterized by feigned beatings and exaggerated reactions by victims—to be tame. In 2005, the commentator Webmaster would begin his review of *The Thief* from the Hungarian Company Filmextreme by noting: “It seems as though Eastern Europe is the place to be if you are into CP [corporal punishment] action now days” ([www.svrpage.net](http://www.svrpage.net), 2010). Second, by 2002 Russian internet pornographers were well placed to capitalize on the commercial success of their Czech counterparts. Materials had already been available, predominantly in photographic form, for the spanking fetish audience since the early days of the internet in the mid-1990s on sites with names like The Russian Ass Site. *The Wild Party* spawned Russian imitators. A plethora of Russian sites either came into existence in the wake of *The Wild Party* or expanded existing operations: Russian Bondage ([www.russian-bondage.com](http://www.russian-bondage.com), 2010), Russian Spanking and Bondage ([www.sexis.com/bdsm/spank](http://www.sexis.com/bdsm/spank), 2010), Russian Discipline ([russiandiscipline.com](http://russiandiscipline.com), 2010), Discipline in Russia ([www.spankingdollars.com](http://www.spankingdollars.com), 2010), Russian Slaves ([russian.slaves.com](http://russian.slaves.com), 2010), Violent Russians ([www.violentrussians.com](http://www.violentrussians.com), 2010), and the especially active Her First Punishment ([www.herfirstpunishment.com](http://www.herfirstpunishment.com), 2010). What had begun as a new stage of pornography in the Eastern bloc was taken further in the former USSR, and Russian productions emerged as the most violent spanking sites on the internet.

But to begin in 2002 is to run ahead of a context whose roots were historically deep. Specialists in the history of sexuality have long noted that what is considered pornographic, especially as distinguished from erotic, depends at any given moment on situational moral codes and cultural norms (Pushkareva 1999; Kon 1999). In a seminal work focused on Western Europe, Lynn Hunt defined pornography as “the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings” but in the same sentence cautioned that in this sense “pornography was almost always an adjunct to something else until the middle or end of the eighteenth century” (Hunt 1993). This was certainly the case with pre-revolutionary French printed works, which conflated direct descriptions of sexual activity with erotic fiction and anti-clerical writing, and to be a forbidden book sex and illicit philosophy were both essential (Darnton 1996). The word pornography first appeared in France in 1769 not in a work of titillation but in a tract on prostitution, and it was not used in connection with obscene writings and images there until at least the 1830s. Similarly, pornography did not emerge as a regular category of classification in England until the mid-nineteenth century, and its initial entry in an English dictionary did not occur until 1857 (Hunt 1993).

Russia's history with sexually explicit materials was similarly long, as was its failure to approach anything even approximating a social consensus on what constituted pornography. As was the case in Western Europe, prior to the mid-nineteenth century pornography was approached in Russia as much as a social and political attitude as it was a consistently identifiable set of representations. In the mid-eighteenth century, the poet and satiric writer Ivan S. Barkov earned the distinction of "Russia's first pornographer" with stylistic imitations of French neo-classicism that, for example, portrayed clergy in erotic situations. Based on work in which sexual content was not the only or even most important criterion, Barkovism [*barkovshchina*] became a synonym for pornography in Russian (Hopkins 1977). Hence, by the time Empress Catherine II began her long rule in 1762 the strictures on what could be published and performed publicly paid significant attention to eliminating affronts to the existing order and forbade dramatic depictions of the dynasty, clergy, or police. Censorship during her reign was directed primarily against perceived threats to the prevailing socio-political regime, and by the time of her death in 1796 her efforts to silence dramatic and other forms of unacceptable expression—although printed works with provocative sexual content were translated from French and obtained without great difficulty during her reign—resulted in a remarkably few 340 interventions in the creative process (by comparison, her successor Tsar Paul I launched 234 in 1796–1801). The most scandalous performance of the era to be repressed was *Olinka or Lost Love* in 1796, a suggestive opera whose most overt offense to public sensibilities was that it depicted women withholding sexual favors in the manner of *Lysistrata* (Stites 2005).

The inchoate nature of pornography complicated the implementation of legislation. New Imperial censorship laws in 1804, 1826, and 1828 treated offenses to God, government, and morality as entwined targets and generally relegated the task of defining what was immoral to the Russian Orthodox Church. Relatively more detailed censorship legislation introduced in 1845 and 1865 made specific mention of repressing "corrupting images," but neither law employed the word pornography or defined criteria more concretely than as affronts to "morality and decency." As late as 1910, the Imperial Senate declined to provide a general definition of obscenity and instead referred matters to the courts, where they were to be decided on a case-by-case basis (Goldschmidt 1999).

Because the definition of what was obscene was elastic, greatly based on attitude, and mediated by the Church, the fate of illicit materials could vary widely (Levin 1989; Hopkins 1977). Sexually explicit woodcuts and prints, including some with surrealistically exaggerated body parts, existed in Russia from the seventeenth century and even earlier, and erotic poetry not intended for the general public flourished from the eighteenth century to the end of the tsarist period (Farrell 1999; Pushkareva 1997, 1999; Levitt and Toporkov 1999; Kon 1997; Sapov 1994; Ranchin and Sapov 1994). In the mid-nineteenth century peasants began composing their own songs, *chastushki*, to express personal, political, and sexual ideas that could not otherwise be voiced publicly, and these folk creations were impossible to suppress. *Chastushki*, which consisted of two sets of rhymed couplets and in more elaborate forms might have dozens of verses, included lewd and bawdy songs as

part of the repertoire. From the beginning ethnographers recorded all forms of these songs assiduously, and the population continued to compose them even during the most repressive periods of the Soviet era (Plemiannikova 1929; Danilov 1987; Grimley 1970; *Narodnye russkie skazki* 1997; Kliauc 1996; Tirado 1993; Fitzpatrick 1999; Husband 2004). The late nineteenth century was also a particularly active time in the distribution of sexually illicit photographic images, as the French and Russian examples that have been reproduced in Alexei Balabanov's 1998 film *Of Freaks and Men*—whose plot pivots on the production of Russian spanking pornography at the dawn of the age of silent cinema—testify (Balabanov 1998).

Little changed in the early twentieth century. Both ends of the political spectrum condemned the extremely popular novels *Sanin* (1907) by Mikhail Artsybashev and *Keys to Happiness* (1910–1913) by Anastasia Verbitskaya as pornographic, a charge that even in the waning years of tsarism involved more than depictions of sex. Far more important in *Sanin* were the anti-social elements of suicide (a major obsession of the boulevard press at the time), murder, and free thinking while *Keys to Happiness* included a love triangle involving a sexually liberated woman, three suicides, and an unabashed general disdain for conventional morality. As literary critic and future beloved author of children's books Kornei Chukovsky would write regarding Artsybashev: "Russian pornography is not plain pornography as the French or Germans produce, but pornography with ideas" (Engelstein 1992; Verbitskaya 1999; Artsybashev 1907). He might just as easily have been referring to the trial of artist Natalia Goncharova for exhibiting a collection of twenty-two paintings featuring female nudes in 1910, the only Russian artist tried for pornography for high art. As testimony at her trial suggested, Goncharova's real crime may have been to use art challenge women's social roles (Sharp 1998).

During its first rush of revolutionary enthusiasm the Communist regime flirted with experimental approaches in virtually all spheres of human endeavor, but it soon pushed salacious materials far underground. A marked scientific interest in sex rooted in creating new revolutionary citizens and values thrived during the first decade of the Soviet regime (Bernstein 2007; Carleton 2004; Naiman 1997), and throughout the Soviet period folklorists carried forward their interest in peasant compositions, including those of an erotic and crude character (Nikiforov 1929; Kabronskii 1978; Lazutin and Kretov 1970; Smirnov-Kutacheskii 1925). From the time that Stalinism took hold, however, a Communist priggishness provided the official face of Soviet attitudes toward sex. In the mid-1930s, Stalinist legislation that outlawed homosexuality and recriminalized abortion was joined by the October 1935 law "On Responsibility for Preparing, Keeping, and Advertising Pornographic Publications, Representations, and Other Objects and for Trading Them," whose vagueness opened the door to capricious prosecutions (Kon 1995). But scholarly and scientific interest in sex was never completely abandoned, and during the later stages of Soviet socialism studies focused on sexuality in a socio-historical sense continued to be carried out by Igor S. Kon and others, albeit on a more limited scale and with less public fanfare. Other hints of the far more sensual culture that existed out of view in the USSR also occasionally reached the West in the post-Stalin years (Feifer 1976), but the Soviet state relentlessly promoted a sanitized image in public. This led to official condemnations of Western license, to be sure, but it also gave

rise to incidents like the declaration by a Soviet woman during a joint telecast hosted by Soviet journalist Vladimir Pozner and American personality Phil Donahue in 1987 that “we have no sex here,” which annoyed Russians as much as it amused Americans (Borenstein 2000, 2005; Fitzpatrick 2005; McClellan 2009).

But such gaffes aside, the greater openness that existed under Mikhail Gorbachëv after 1985 encouraged society to indulge its long suppressed demand for sexually frank materials, even though attitudes within the Communist Party scarcely changed. This inconsistency between Party policy and the ideas of its members in positions of responsibility led to confusion in differentiating between pornography and erotica. In 1989, Gorbachëv’s *glasnost* brought forth the first sexual nude scene in an officially sanctioned Soviet film, and when director Vasilii Pichul’s *Little Vera* appeared it confounded expectations both at home and abroad. Fifty-five million Soviets viewed the film during its first year in release, and even before it was widely distributed in the West it took only the news of a Soviet sex scene equivalent to a Western R-rating to turn its female star, Natalia Negoda, into a minor international celebrity. She appeared in *Playboy* magazine in May 1989 in a photo feature entitled “The Soviets’ First Sex Star” and briefly considered a career in Hollywood (Attwood 1993). At the same time, however, Party officials were classifying even films that had previously been shown on Soviet screens and at state sponsored film festivals—for example, Fellini’s *Satyricon*, *Amarcord*, *Casanova*, *La Dolce Vita*—as pornographic, making copies of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* launched at least one criminal prosecution, and *Pravda* vigorously railed against pornography masquerading as erotica. In the final months of Communism in 1991, the USSR Supreme Soviet was considering the resolution “Urgent Measures to Halt the Propaganda of Pornography and the Cult of Violence and Cruelty” before the demise of the regime rendered it moot (Kon 1995). If during the twentieth century pornography had been redefined globally and was virtually everywhere identified—albeit far from uniformly—in terms of its increasingly graphic sexual content, materials more explicit than *Little Vera* still lacked safe commercial conduits to the broad Russian public.

Not surprisingly, Russia’s protracted and not particularly secret interest in both erotic and pornographic materials led to a multi-faceted surge of activity during the first post-Communist decade. To state matters as plainly as possible, restraints disappeared overnight in 1991, and the long pent-up Russian demand for both erotica and pornography gushed forward. Scholars in history, literature, art, anthropology, sociology, and folklore organized a number of exhibitions and conferences on sexuality, gender, and the erotic in the 1990s (although the first international conference specifically devoted to Russian pornography was held not in Russia, but at the University of Southern California on 22–24 May 1998) (Levitt 1999). The publication of erotic and other *chastushki* from repressive periods of the Soviet era experienced an active upsurge (Kulagin 1999; *Oi, chastushka-govorshka* 1992; *Ruskaia chastushka* 1993; Kavtorin 1995; Starshinov 1995; *Ozornye chastushki* 1997; Reznik 1997; Toporkov 1995). The rumor of forbidden archival and library troves (called *spetskhrany*) that Russian acquaintances would tell foreign researchers during the late Soviet era, including a much circulated tale about pornography in the special collections of the Lenin Library, was one Soviet urban

legend that turned out to be true (Kon 1995). And by the end of the decade, Italian and American X-rated videos became openly available at stores on Nevskii Prospekt in St. Petersburg and at Kuznetsky Most in Moscow, as well as in less conspicuous locations (Riordan 1993). Those who exited Moscow's Pushkin Square Metro confronted a wide array of graphic newsprint offerings largely imported from the Baltic countries, and cheap Russian tabloids like *Mister IKS*, *Miss IKS*, and *SPID Info* that highlighted female nudity were on sale in virtually every Metro station for a few kopeks (Goscilo 1993). Western publications such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Maxim* rushed to produce slick Russian editions. Domestic imitators—*Andrei*, *Makhaon*—rapidly followed, providing nude images and high production values while at the same time projecting a chauvinistic Russianness in their editorial policy (Borenstein 1999, 2005). And on the level of small-scale entrepreneurship, at Moscow's Kitai Gorod Metro in 2000, for example, passengers would daily pass two female vendors, one of whom sold cheap imitations of religious icons from a card table for a few rubles while next to her a companion dealt outdated British adult magazines.

Problems arose from the fact that, as had happened under previous regimes, post-Soviet law failed to distinguish clearly between artistically erotic materials and pornography. In 1993–1994 the Press Ministry independently used its own interpretation to single out and prosecute the publisher of *Eshche*, a Russian language periodical based in Latvia that differed virtually not at all in pictorial content from hard core materials widely available in the Russian Federation (Borenstein 2005; Goldschmidt 1999a). Additional legislation failed to resolve the issue. Article 242 of the Russian Criminal Code that went into effect at the beginning of 1997—in the code it follows two articles dealing with organization of or involvement in prostitution—forbade “production for the purpose of distribution or advertising, dissemination, or advertising of pornographic materials or objects, and also illegal trade in printed publications, movie- or video-materials or any other materials of a pornographic character,” punishable by imprisonment for 2 years ([www.russian-criminal-code.com](http://www.russian-criminal-code.com), 1997). According to *Pravda*, however, Russian internet pornography (with the exception of that depicting children) operated without legal interference ([english.pravda.ru](http://english.pravda.ru), 2008). Additional anti-pornography legislation proposed later in 1997 created alliances of support that transcended and confounded the dynamics of usual politics, but questions of how to define pornography and identifying genres to be proscribed slowed its lumbering path through the legislative process (Goldschmidt 1999).

The fact that Article 242 forbade only “illegal trade” and failed to define “pornography” created room for the maneuvering, and with their greater latitude internet pornographers became bolder than producers of other modes. Thus, although hard core imported videos were not difficult to attain, Russian domestic video productions—in an apparent effort to be technically erotic rather than illegally pornographic—largely remained within the limits of what would be labeled soft-core in the West. The popular *Russian Bathhouse* series was a case in point. Sold at ubiquitous street kiosks, the features aspired to the level of the satirists Ilf and Petrov, recognized and beloved by high- and low-brow Russians alike. In practice they achieved less, mixing sophomoric humor with a few examples of truly

accomplished comedic acting and social satire in the best Russian tradition, while the flimsy story lines merely provided transparent rationales for nudity and sexual escapades. Every *Russian Bathhouse* video (by the end of 2000 the series was up to *Russian Bathhouse 4*) contained a series of vignettes that spoofed topics from class relations under tsarism (peasant men using trickery to seduce noble women) and tales from folklore (clever extra-marital frolics among peasants) to the abuse of local power under Stalin (so-called “little Stalins” sexually exploiting young female citizens) to misbehavior in the Communist Youth League (lesbian love between Komsomol activists). At the same time, the small number of hard core gay male films that began to be made in Moscow in the 1990s used Russian actors but foreign, largely American, directors (Healy 2010). Nevertheless, in 2008 when lawmakers once again attempted to define pornography and distinguish it from erotica, and to restrain Russian internet pornography (english.pravda.ru, 2008), their efforts had no discernable effect on Russian spanking sites which, if anything, stepped up their degree of violence.

Russian pornography on internet, or the World Wide Web as it was then called, thus consisted of a riddle of long standing erotic traditions wrapped in the mystery of mixed pornographic media inside the enigma of Russian law. The first Russian adult sites appeared in the 1990s almost as soon as the internet itself, and as we have seen they gravitated strongly toward the spanking fetish market from the outset. There they immediately became renowned for three things: the chicanery of their webmasters, low production values, and above all an unflinching commitment to be more violent than their competitors. Even though many of the more recent Czech productions now surpass *The Wild Party* in their severity, if not their global notoriety, it is in Russia where the brutal example of this pivotal production has been carried furthest.

To understand Russian success among contemporary spanking fetishists, one must recognize that this genre everywhere operates within parameters that distinguish it from other forms of pornography. As noted earlier, the success of *The Wild Party* derived first and foremost because internet reviewers and commentators credited it with realism, their most valued criterion. This sets spanking fetishism apart from bondage-discipline-sadism-masochism, or BDSM. Although both genres rely on the application of punishment by one person to another and at times they overlap, their audiences are not necessarily identical, and the two can by no means be equated. The most important difference is that in BDSM offerings violence is often the end in itself, without requiring even a thin story line. The action can take place in a dungeon, a home, outside, or virtually anywhere, and the need to explain how the scene came about is at best optional. In materials for spanking fetishists, however, this is not the case, and reviewers and audiences of spanking fare also seek at least an attempt to make the circumstances plausible. Long before the Eastern Europeans got into the act, spanking stories thus required a context as well as a rationale: some transgression involving a schoolmaster and misbehaving schoolgirl, the disciplinary intercession a stern uncle or aunt, justice meted out by the police or political authorities (including in Italian pornography some nostalgia for Fascism), resort to the family clergyman or doctor, the vulnerability of women in prison, and of course the punitive role of parents.

The leading Czech and Russian companies worked within these boundaries, but with some variations. In the wake of the reactions to *The Wild Party*, Rigid East changed its name in 2003 by reorganizing into two overlapping companies for production and distribution, RGE Films and Lupus Pictures. In this new incarnation, production values rose significantly, film makers began to employ digital technology more extensively, and complex historical scenarios set in Prague at the beginning of the twentieth century or in Czechoslovakia under Communism became the contexts of choice. Rigid East/Lupus launched an entire series, “From the Headmaster’s Study,” based on punishments carried out against female students at the fictional St. Thomas School ([www.rge-films.com/Movies/?Page=10](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/?Page=10), 2010). Classical music played over the opening credits, characters wore elaborate period costumes, and themes from the country’s past or folklore were explored—as in one offering in which a schoolgirl was beaten by her headmaster in early twentieth century Prague because a teacher found an anarchist pamphlet among her books ([www.rge-films.com/Movies/33-from-the-headmaster-s-study-the-anarchy](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/33-from-the-headmaster-s-study-the-anarchy), 2010). In another RGE film the punishable offense was to have nationalist sentiments ([www.rge-films.com/Movies/7-from-the-headmaster-s-study-unbridled-youth](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/7-from-the-headmaster-s-study-unbridled-youth), 2010). And in the 2003 film *Stalin*, whose success gave rise to progressively more brutal *Stalin 2* and *Stalin 3*, commissars from the StB (the Czech NKVD), complete with Soviet era leather jackets, descended on a school in the 1950s to punish four female students because one had defaced a photo of Stalin in the newspaper *Rude Pravo* with a ball point pen by giving him a goatee and a religious cross around his neck. In a later scene reminiscent of Nikita Mikhalkov’s *Burnt by the Sun*, a male character was dispatched in the countryside with a single shot to the back of the head by an agent wearing a leather jacket ([www.rge-films.com/Movies/38-stalin-1](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/38-stalin-1), 2010).

After internet viewers and critics speculated about the coercion of actresses, however, the Czech companies worked at becoming more transparent. Although it strains conventional sensibilities to think of purveyors of fetish films in terms of the pursuit of respectability, distancing themselves from any hint of nonconsensual violence became paramount for RGE/Lupus. The company began to promote its actresses as individuals and depicted them as ordinary women who simply also acted in genre films. For example, in 2005 the site posted links to the wedding pictures of one of its key actors, Maxmilian Schubert, to a leading Lupus actress, Katerina Tetová. In photos at their religious ceremony and reception that followed, perpetrators of violence on film mixed amiably with cinematic victims, smiles abounded, and—as was surely the intent—these wedding photos appeared no different from any others ([www.lupus-pictures.com/projects/wedding.xml](http://www.lupus-pictures.com/projects/wedding.xml), 2005). Beyond this, RGE/Lupus launched a star system to humanize the cast further. The names of the Czech actresses that roll across the credits at least sounded real, and they gave interviews to internet reviewers and magazines that purported to reveal their actual lives. Michaela Trmotová, who emerged as the biggest star of the Lupus stable of actresses, told internet interviewers that she was tending bar when she made a Lupus movie on an impulse and, although she anticipated not liking the experience, found it not as bad as expected. By 2010, her status had risen to the level that Lupus Films marketed twelve of her films as a package for 609 Euros, and reviewers praised her beauty and performances—she played a variety of schoolgirls,

daughters, vulnerable waifs, milkmaids, and the like—even in vehicles about which they were otherwise less enthusiastic ([www.rge-films.com](http://www.rge-films.com); [www.spankfiesta.com/](http://www.spankfiesta.com/); [adelehaze.com/holiday-spanking-photo-display-7](http://adelehaze.com/holiday-spanking-photo-display-7), 2010). The promotions on the site for new films came to alert patrons when established performers were featured, and RGE and Lupus began to highlight a recurrent corps of actresses who performed in film after film ([www.rge-films.com/default.aspx?Page=2](http://www.rge-films.com/default.aspx?Page=2), 2010). Finally, the promotion of individual Lupus films was designed to silence hints of anything but consensual action. Prospective customers could access photographs of behind-the-scenes activity during the filming of virtually every production that featured cinematic perpetrators and victims together between takes laughing, smoking, drinking wine, and even playing practical jokes on one another. The demeanor of badly bruised actresses in the photographs suggested that a kind of bravado based on an ability to endure the physical demands of their profession had emerged among them, and appearing in a photograph as if nothing were amiss became the highest desideratum (for example, [dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-038/Backstage/001.jpg](http://dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-038/Backstage/001.jpg); [www.rge-films.com/Movies/88-a-new-job/Gallery/?g=/Shooting\\_Backstage/#pictures](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/88-a-new-job/Gallery/?g=/Shooting_Backstage/#pictures); [dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-061/Shooting/003.jpg](http://dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-061/Shooting/003.jpg); [www.rge-films.com/Movies/59-from-the-headmaster-s-study-immodesty/Gallery/?g=/Shooting/#pictures](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/59-from-the-headmaster-s-study-immodesty/Gallery/?g=/Shooting/#pictures); [www.rge-films.com/Movies/40-the-governess/Gallery/?g=/Shooting/#pictures](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/40-the-governess/Gallery/?g=/Shooting/#pictures); [www.gallery.rge-films.com/Actors/Katerina%20Zizkova/011.jpg](http://www.gallery.rge-films.com/Actors/Katerina%20Zizkova/011.jpg); [www.rge-films.com/Movies/40-the-governess/Gallery/?g=/Shooting/#pictures](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/40-the-governess/Gallery/?g=/Shooting/#pictures); [dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-049/Backstage/011.jpg](http://dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-049/Backstage/011.jpg); [dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-043/Backstage/021.jpg](http://dlsrv01.rge-films.com/Shadow/LP-043/Backstage/021.jpg); [www.rge-films.com/Movies/62-the-deep-impact/Gallery/?g=/Backstage/#pictures](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/62-the-deep-impact/Gallery/?g=/Backstage/#pictures); [www.rge-films.com/Movies/57-room-no-34/Gallery/?g=/Backstage/#pictures](http://www.rge-films.com/Movies/57-room-no-34/Gallery/?g=/Backstage/#pictures), 2010).

For their part, Russian pornographers also focused their content on established industry norms adapted to local circumstances, but they do not share the Czech propensity to make their operations accessible to scrutiny. In its story lines the most visible Russian producer of spanking films, Her First Punishment, favors scenarios that appeal to stock fantasies rooted in the past and present, with a few specifically Russian twists. Wandering wives and wayward daughters are punished privately by husbands and fathers but publicly by a *babushka*, older women who act as self-appointed guardians of public morality, if the setting is a peasant village. Schoolgirls are generic victims as they are elsewhere, but in this case young women being trained in the sports establishment of the former Soviet Union are also frequent targets, as are students of ballet academies. Female serfs, nuns, and women arrested in either the Soviet or post-Soviet eras also make recurrent appearances. The technology, including lighting, is less sophisticated than in Czech productions, and the period pieces are far less elaborate, often relying merely on having the actors wear serf costumes to provide a semblance of context. Typically, perpetrators of the violence are predominantly men, but in Russian films women impose a far greater portion of the punishment than happens among foreign competitors. In either case, the severity of the violence—the leading hallmark of a Russian production—is high. And, in contrast to Czech pornographers, the marketing approach is far less personal in Russia. Even though the male actors are recurrent, the actresses are largely nameless victims who appear in one film or so and disappear. There is as yet

no star system, no interviews, no behind-the-scenes photographs to demythologize the process, although a few faint suggestions indicate that this might be changing slowly. Still, the emphasis is overwhelmingly on maintaining the illusion of documentary reality, and separating the coercion in the stories on film from suggestions of coercion behind the camera is not yet a concern in Russia.

Some sites have been content to replicate the standard themes of *Her First Punishment*, but others have taken the level of violence much further. The site Russian-Discipline, for example, continues simply to offer productions that focus on standard spanking in familiar or predictable contexts of male dominance: punishments by terrorists, of serf girls, in religious and other private schools, in reformatories, in bathhouses, at sports training schools, and upon victims of kidnapping ([www.russian-discipline.com/main.htm](http://www.russian-discipline.com/main.htm), 2010). In a slightly different approach, a series of movies from the Nettles Corporation entitled “Russian Slaves” that concentrates on conventional themes in the spanking of women reached volume fifty-eight (“Spanking Debutantes #2”) and fifty-nine (In the Hands of Omon [Russian Special Police]) by 2008 without any hint of a losing momentum ([www.literoticavod.com/video/140211/Russian-Slaves-58-Spanking-Debutants-2/?ct=2543](http://www.literoticavod.com/video/140211/Russian-Slaves-58-Spanking-Debutants-2/?ct=2543); [www.literoticavod.com/video/140185/Russian-Slaves-59-In-The-Hands-Of-Oman/?ct=2543](http://www.literoticavod.com/video/140185/Russian-Slaves-59-In-The-Hands-Of-Oman/?ct=2543), 2010). Yet other recent productions from the same site have expanded these generic Russian themes to include a higher degree of both violence and sexual humiliation. In one such film, three young women are severely disciplined by heavily tattooed captors who threaten to sell their body parts if their orders are disobeyed. In another film, the same miscreants terrorize a mother and her two daughters after gaining entry to their home by asking to borrow water and a potato, and in yet another story in which the entry ruse is an electrical problem in the apartment building, beatings are linked to humiliation in the form of rape through the insertion of foreign objects ([www.russian-discipline.com/dir023.html](http://www.russian-discipline.com/dir023.html); [www.russian-discipline.com/dir022.html](http://www.russian-discipline.com/dir022.html); [www.russian-discipline.com/dir021.html](http://www.russian-discipline.com/dir021.html), 2010). Still other sites—Russian Slaves, Rough Man Spank—retain their basic spanking format but have gravitated more toward sadism-masochism ([russian.slaves.com/](http://russian.slaves.com/); [www.roughmanspank.com/main.html?&path=&nats=NDYuMS4xLjEuMC42NC4wLjA](http://www.roughmanspank.com/main.html?&path=&nats=NDYuMS4xLjEuMC42NC4wLjA), 2010), while others—Violent Russians—have moved past spanking to BDSM altogether ([www.violentrussians.com](http://www.violentrussians.com), 2010).

All this falls far short of proving any connection between violent East European spanking pornography on the internet and the Natasha trade, if such a link exists, and the trail that was so suggestive to internet pundits in 2002 has long since grown cold. But that does not mean we must discount everything we know. With even a cursory visit to their web sites, it is hard not to be convinced that RGE and Lupus are presently using only hired actresses in their films, even as we may shake our heads at the things people do for money. But what about the conjectures by scholars of pornography and active aficionados of this genre that *The Wild Party* utilized coerced actresses in 2002? The subsequent public relations efforts notwithstanding, the company never addressed the issue of whether the five victims in that film acted of their own volition. Indeed, although two had already appeared in Rigid East features prior to their work on *The Wild Party*, not a single one of the five ever appeared in one of the company’s productions again. And in the case of the Russian

branch of the industry, the level of speculation is even greater. It is unlikely that scholars will, or can, resolve this question. As a CBS news crew reporting in the Czech Republic more than a decade ago learned, for investigators even to enter areas where sex trafficking reputedly occurs carries significant risks. What can be substantiated, however, is that once the ferocity of violence in Czech films rose significantly, Russian pornographers equaled and then exceeded the new Czech standard. In turn, Russian competition drove Czech companies to escalate violence to the point of overlap with BDSM in some of their own productions, while in others the strategy has been to incorporate conventional sex acts with spanking to attract an audience (In any event, *Lupus* has offered no new productions since mid-2012). Thus in both countries spanking pornography expanded to include other forms of cruelty, and the once sensational brutality levels of *The Wild Party* became now not only not exceptional, but are routinely surpassed. What we can say with absolute certainty is that violent spanking pornography is thriving globally on the internet, and if such films have an international language, those languages are Russian and Czech.

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