Master's Thesis in Russian and Eurasian Studies

(Marked) Women in Transition – Female Identity in Russian Cinema 1989-2006

An analysis of Pyotr Todorovsky's *Intergirl*, Valery Todorovsky's *The Country of the Deaf* and Yuriy Moroz's *The Spot*

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Introduction

This thesis investigates the topics of female consciousness and identity through the case studies of three Russian films: Intergirl (1989), The Country of the Deaf (1998), The Spot (2006). Firstly, relevant theories and secondary literature will be presented regarding topics such as: gender discourse in Russia, female consciousness and identity, the cinematic role of the Gaze as well as the metaphor of the Prostitute. In the Methodology section, the reader will be introduced to the approach of social semiotics analysis of film. The main body of the thesis consists of three chapters focused on the close-reading of the case studies. Finally, this thesis will provide a conclusion detailing my own observations in relation to previous research.

Since the advent of feminist film theory, it has been mostly preoccupied with the objectification of women on the Anglo-American silver screen.[1] In the past decade however, there have been a number of attempts to look beyond the more traditional representations of women and search for examples that capture females from an alternative, more inclusive and engaging angle. Researching gender and women in particular enables us not only to correct faulty assumptions about the universality of men's experiences but also to establish new perspectives on the nature of socio-political changes in various regions.[2] With this in mind, a number of researchers began to explore non-Western cinema in order to understand how regional trends, beliefs and cultures might influence directors' approaches to women's portrayal.

Inspired by this new wave of scholarship this essay sets out to examine the ways female identity and self-consciousness have been captured in contemporary Russian cinema. By focusing on three distinct visual products from three distinct periods of the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet era I hope to outline how various directors depicted women's identity. In order to establish this, the thesis relies on existing sociological and cultural research as well as the close reading of Intergirl (Интердевочка, 1989) by Pyotr Todorovsky, The Country of the Deaf (Страна Глухих, 1998) by Valeriy Todorovsky and The Spot (Точка, 2006) by Yuriy Moroz.

[1] Bolton, Lucy. *Film and Female Consciousness: Irigaray, Cinema and Thinking Women* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 1.
[2] Engel, Barbara Alpern. "Engendering Russia's History: Women in Post- Emancipation Russia and the Soviet Union." *Slavic Review* 51.2, Summer (1992) 321.

Although there have been a few attempts to analyse these films, I believe some conclusions were not extensive enough. Namely, Emily Schuckmann's research from 2008 and 2018 have worked with the same case studies. Schuckmann's studies mainly focus on the representation of the Prostitute as a social metaphor to the crumbling political system. This thesis on the other hand goes beyond Schuckmann's approach and aims to better understand how the character of the Prostitute is used to explore female identity and consciousness. Instead of predominantly focusing on the Prostitute as a symbol to the Russian state this study aims to add to Schuckmann's observations by researching how the character may or may not embody female identity and consciousness.

To analyse this angle, I have chosen to conduct a social semiotic analysis on the selected films. The reason behind my choice of methodology lies in the fact that it allows me to establish how the viewer is positioned by films and most importantly, how the viewer recognizes the way certain social allegiances and values are promoted over others. In film analysis, social semiotics evaluates techniques and elements in film to reason about which sociocultural fields are addressed by the director.[3] Rick Iedema claims that social semiotics provides researchers with a method to discover what could otherwise remain a suspicion or a vague, intuitive response.[4]

In practice, a visual analysis will be conducted focusing on shots, frames, scenes, generic stage, sequence and the work as a whole. This approach will be utilized to understand the films' meaning-making processes and "metafunctions" (what Lemke refers to as: 'representation', 'orientation' and 'organization'). The social semiotic visual analysis of films will allow me to determine if and how the three films express female consciousness and self-identity. The methodology and its specific implications to this research will be further outlined in the Methodology chapter.

With these considerations in mind, this thesis attempts to answer the following research question:

In what ways are female consciousness and identity captured through the character of the Prostitute in the films Intergirl (1989), The Country of the Deaf (1998) and The Spot (2006)?

[3] Iedema, Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt, editors. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, (London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001) 187-188.
[4] Ibid, 201.

My hypothesis is that at least to some extent all three films focus on women's identity and their development of a self-consciousness.

Literature Review

This Literature Review introduces the reader to what is meant by female consciousness and identity. Furthermore, it provides an outline of contemporary gender discourse in Russia as well as the filmic metaphor of the Prostitute.

Historical context

Gender has always been one of the key organizing principles of the world, and that was no different in the (post-) Soviet system. As this thesis deals with the topic of women's identity and self – consciousness, it is important to understand how women's role was defined and perceived in modern Russian history.

Costlow, Sandler and Vowles argue that by reviewing gender issues on a century of Russian cinema, one realizes that the filmic representation of women and men is not merely a rooted in their sexual differences but is rather connected to the discourse of nationalism.[5] The existing discourse on gender and sexuality in Russian culture is rooted in the historical legacies of the USSR's obsession with the body. In the post-Revolutionary period Russia's gender order was dramatically transformed through Communist ideology. Men and women received new roles: women were assigned the role of worker-mothers who would receive (financial) independence from the state in exchange for their work and production of Soviet citizens.[6] Men were to serve as leaders and managers of the system but were stripped from their traditionally masculine roles of the 'bread-winner' and the 'father'. These two roles were assumed by the state that became responsible for providing and looking after its citizens, and thus patriarchy was embedded into the social-political order. Sue Bridger, Rebecca Kay and Kathryn Pinnick

[5] Costlow, Jane, Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles, editors. *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993) 4.
[6] Ashwin, Sarah. *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, (Florence, Routledge, 2000) Introduction.

note that since the Brezhnev era women began to be represented as 'different', 'special' or 'others'.

> "Since the height of the Brezhnev era with its official concern over birth rate, the media have produced a deluge of images and language portraying women as 'different' and 'special'...For the best part of a decade before the advent even of perestroika, women's characters were being habitually portrayed as inextricably bound up with their sexuality. By the time the process of liberalization began, therefore, the 'otherness' of women had been emphasized to such a degree that to objectify them further in an overtly sexual way was but a small step to take".[7]

This 'otherness' is important because it has become the basis for discussions on women's role and rights in society (e.g. education, healthcare and economics).[8]

In the post-Soviet era, institutionalised gender relations have once again undergone drastic changes. Women were no longer guaranteed independence by the state, social benefits and work outside of the home was no longer a certainty. Men were expected to reassume their roles as breadwinners and fathers, even though the system itself was no longer able to provide them with the once highly paid jobs resulting in many of them becoming unemployed and/or struggling with poverty. In the Yeltsin and Putin eras the institution of the traditional family has been restored and patriarchy was no longer monopolized by the state.[9] Nonetheless, there was no clear alternative imposed and this resulted in ambiguous pluralistic gender norms and values formulated based on Soviet and Western prescriptions to what ought to be the roles of men and women.

Women's Identity and Consciousness

Luce Irigaray writes that "women in patriarchal discourse do not have the tools with which to conceive of themselves, or be conceived by others, as another to men. Rather, they are confined to the parameters allowed to them as lesser men: 'the feminine is now practically assimilated to the non-masculine. Being a woman is equated with not being a man".[10] She proposes that in

[7] Bridger, Sue, Rebecca Kay and Kathryn Pinnick, editors. *No More Heroines? Russia, women and the market* (London, Routledge, 1996) 166.
[8] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing 2008)
[9] Rotkirch, Anna, Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, editors. "Who Helps the Degraded Housewife?: Comments on Vladimir Putin's Demographic Speech." (European Journal of Women's Studies 14, 2007) 356.
[10] Irigaray, Luce, *Je, tu nous: Toward a Culture of Difference* translation Alison Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 71.

order to achieve true disparity, women need a "female imaginary" and "female symbolic". She goes as far as claiming that "the way for women to be liberated is not by 'becoming a man' or by envying what men have and their objects, but by female subjects once again valorizing the expression of their own sex and gender."[11] I agree with her argument that women cannot become subjects by simply attempting to "become men", but by discovering the particularities of their own gender and utilizing them to create their own selves. However, I do not believe that the only way to achieve a cinematic breakthrough on women's portrayal is by exclusively employing female directors to create women on screen. Capturing identity and consciousness is a complex process but with the right tools and a critical eye, male directors are also equipped to explore women's identities. In fact, I do believe that male directors' insights can contribute to a fruitful discussion of gender on both the screen and in society.

In recent years, Irigaray's philosophy has been used as a tool to research female consciousness in cinema. This thesis builds on the concepts outlined in *Film and Female Consciousness: Irigaray, Cinema and Thinking Women* by Lucy Bolton. The author explores ways female consciousness has been portrayed in Anglo-American films that took up a non-traditional approach to capture women. She discusses films that investigate women's interiority instead of merely focusing on their physical appearance or stereotypical behavior. By doing so, Bolton discovers that the existence and portrayal of female consciousness on film can be evaluated through considering whether and how female characters embark on a personal journey and self-discovery.[12] In order to determine whether female self-consciousness is present in a film, Bolton relies on the question: does the inner life and consciousness of the heroine act as the motor of the film and if it does, does it invite spectators to share their own reflections? Kaplan adds that the ways female solidarity is or is not displayed can also act as an indicator for determining how directors understand female consciousness.[13] In short, this thesis will consider if and how female characters develop their own subjectivity and identity in the three films considered.

Theoretical Approach

[11] Ibid.
[12] Bolton, Lucy. *Film and Female Consciousness* (London, Basingstoke and Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 2.
[13] Kaplan, Temma. "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." (Chicago, *Signs* 7.3. Feminist Theory, 1982) 547.

This thesis does heavily rely on feminist film theory. This thesis considers terms such as the "body", "sexuality" or "gender" not as biologically precise constants but instead as ever-changing, "discursively constituted entities that people have imagined and lived with in various ways" in Russian society.[14]

This study also relies on Judith Butler's understanding of gender performativity. Butler claims that gender is not a constant, it is a social construct negotiated, (re)created, and reproduced through (among others) culture. Culture is an important factor in transferring ideas about how gender ought to be performed. Thus, it has the potential to reinforce or transform existing societal concepts, norms and values about what it is to be a man or a woman. This concept suggests that women's identity is ever-changing and is influenced by a number of societal factors. By looking at how women's (gender) identity and consciousness is captured in films, one gains an understanding of how directors perceive women's identity (in Russian society) and/or how they wish to renegotiate it through artistic devices.

Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

In order to better understand how women's identity and consciousness are captured on screen I decided to include an analysis of the cinematic Gaze (or the lack thereof). By investigating women's "being-looked-at-ness" I hope to discover if and how they are objectified or empowered in the films at hand. Their subordination to the Gaze (or the lack thereof) can provide invaluable information about these women's inner life, identity and agency.

Laura Mulvey's analogy of the gaze builds upon the idea that the phenomenon of being able to watch is an important tool for disseminating ideas about gender. Thus, the gaze is a tool of (bio)power because it allows viewers to consume information influencing their behaviour (performativity), norms and values.

According to Mulvey, one of the most important pleasures offered by cinema is scopophilia. Scopophilia refers to the male pleasure derived from watching another person that serves as sexual stimulation.[15] Films offer spectators the satisfaction to watch privately with repressing their exhibitionism and allowing them to project that onto those appearing on screen.

[14] Costlow, Jane T., Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles, editors. *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993) 1.
[15] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen 16*, no. 3 (1975) 6.

By suppressing or reinforcing one's ego, cinema allows audience members to recognize or detach themselves from characters and gaining pleasure in doing so (ego libido).[16]

In an unequally gendered world, roles of looking have been split active/male and passive/female. This entails that the male gaze objectifies the female figure by projecting its fantasies onto her.[17] This leads to a phenomenon where women's role is to be looked at and displayed playing to and signifying male desire. Films combine elements of visual spectacle and narrative. Traditionally, a woman is an important spectacle in a film due to her visual presence. However, she herself has no significant narrative role as her presence is always in relation to men (how he acts as a result of her) and not to herself. She performs her act at the pleasure of male characters as well as male spectators.[18]

According to Mulvey, patriarchal ideology prevents male characters from being gazed at or being sexually objectified.[19] His role is active, he is considered to be responsible for "making things happen" in the film's narrative. He controls the fantasy of the film and therefore of the viewer – he emerges as the one in power. Through allowing spectators to identify with the male protagonist, power is transferred to those watching allowing them to feel in control and feel that they possess the female character through their gaze.[20]

Marked women on (Russian) screen

As this thesis focuses on how women's identity and consciousness is captured through three films in which the female protagonists are prostitutes, it is important to clarify her relevance as a cultural symbol.

Timothy Gilfoyle claims that the character of the Prostitute has become an important tool to articulate otherwise controversial topics such as "social boundaries, problems, fears, agenda and visions".[21] Furthermore, according to Russell Campbell, prostitutes appearing on film have become archetypal in a sense that the Prostitute as a character is often used for symbolic representation of different groups or societal issues.[22] Katerina Clark adds that in Russian cinema the character is not simply an icon from the era of *perestroika*, but has become

[16] Ibid, 8.
[17] Ibid, 10.
[18] Ibid, 14.
[19] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975) 12.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Gilfoyle, Timothy. "Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity." *The American Historical Review* 104:1, (1999) 138.
[22] Campbell, Russell. *Marked Women : Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 6.

an "essential and complex archetype of Russian film". Thus, through observing her representation one is likely to gain valuable insight into ways contemporary Russian cultural-societal norms and values are understood by moviemakers.[23] In addition, by close reading her character, researchers might uncover what social boundaries, problems, fears, agenda and visions are responsible or intertwined with her identity and consciousness.

Her character is paradoxical as she can be considered a symbol of eroticism and sexual liberation in an otherwise sexually repressive/patriarchal society that challenges her endurance and makes her suffer. On the other hand, her filmic existence questions what love and morals' role ought to be, what is to be sold or given for free.[24] Traditionally, she is objectified to serve men's desires and sustained by a patriarchal social order: she is commanded to offer her body as a service and then condemned for doing so. In the meantime, she also embodies an independent woman and can be considered a subject instead of an object: she is (financially) independent and for being so she emerges as a threat to a male-dominated society.[25] A patriarchal society's masculine identity and its limits are renegotiated through offering an alternative female identity to that of the traditional female role: the caregiver in the nuclear family.[26]

Campbell, similarly to Mulvey suggests that the character of the prostitute is predominantly a product of male imagination (as to date the film industry is still male dominated), which is modified for a certain verisimilitude and aligned to the conceptual framework of patriarchy.[27] However, he points out that one cannot ignore that additional factors may also play a role such as female spectatorship, political changes, capitalistic ideology and commercial success. Finally, while the majority of films produced with patriarchy in mind, the feminist movement has been highly influential in renegotiating women's roles in cinema.

Based on Mulvey's analogy, the prostitute's character is significant because it personifies the woman whose primary function is to be looked at and become consumed by both males in the film and the spectators themselves. According to Emily Schuckmann, her

[23] Clark, Katerina. "Not for sale: The Russian/Soviet Intelligentsia, prostitution, and the Paradox of Internal colonization". in Russian culture in *Transition: Transformatsiia russkoi kul'tury: selected papers of the working Group for the study of contemporary Russian culture, 1990-1991* (Stanford, California, Stanford Slavic Studies, 1993) 203.
[24] Campbell, Russell. *Marked Women : Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 5.
[25] Campbell, Russell. *Marked Women : Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 4.
[26] Ibid, 5.
[27] Ibid, 21.

character is particularly important in Russian cinema because she is not only a personification of gender transitions and contradictions, but she is symbolic to Russia's "volatile social and political identity". Similarly to Campbell, Schuckmann claims that her character is a victim of her circumstances, she is punished for her moral transgressions; she is a victim of capitalism but in the meantime embraces it to create her own independence. She is a mother and a whore and symbolic to crumbling patriarchy and of men's impotence. Finally, she is the embodiment of and alien to Russian values. [28]

In Soviet Russia, prostitution was not openly recognized or officially addressed until the period of *glasnost* in the mid-1980s. Prostitution became more widespread as a result of rising unemployment and the economic crisis. With this, sex not only became visible, its meaning had changed to an "easily obtainable product" leading to a profitable exchange. Consequently, the character of the prostitute emerged in not only Russian media but also in cultural products of literature and cinema.[29] According to Katerina Clark, one cannot ignore the significance of the figure of the prostitute during and after the *perestroika* for symbolic sexuality played a central role in Soviet culture. She describes a "positive obsession" with the character in cultural production as she represents a (sexually) liberated woman often going against patriarchal rules. Her figure is both a celebration of liberation from socialist realism and a symbol of cultural reorientation, resurrection.[30] With the disappearance of the strict censorship, new topics were explored in culture among which sex was one elevated to becoming the symbol of newly acquired freedom and independence. Horton and Brashinsky argue that among others, Soviet cinema underwent a rapid transformation and became even more complex and often contradictory, in a way mirroring the social-political transitions Russia was experiencing.[31] Clark goes as far as claiming that the figure of the prostitute had emerged as a vehicle exploring values, norms, societal transitions of the final years of *glasnost*.[32]

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[28] Schuckmann, Emily. "The prostitute as eyerywoman, The role and evolution of the sex worker in Russian cinema" in *Ruptures and Continuities in Soviet/Russian Cinema : Styles, Characters and Genres Before and after the Collapse of the USSR* (Florence, Routledge, 2017) 72.

[29] Schuckmann, Emily. "The prostitute as eyerywoman, The role and evolution of the sex worker in Russian cinema" in *Ruptures and Continuities in Soviet/Russian Cinema : Styles, Characters and Genres Before and after the Collapse of the USSR* (Florence, Routledge, 2017) 73.

[30] Clark, Katerina. "Not for sale: The Russian/Soviet Intelligentsia, prostitution, and the Paradox of Internal colonization". in Russian culture in *Transition: Transformatsiia russkoi kul'tury: selected papers of the working Group for the study of contemporary Russian culture, 1990-1991* (Stanford, California, Stanford Slavic Studies, 1993) 203.

[31] Horton, Andrew and Michaer Brashinsky. *The Zero Hour* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992)

[32] Clark, Katerina. "Not for sale: The Russian/Soviet Intelligentsia, prostitution, and the Paradox of Internal colonization". in Russian culture in *Transition: Transformatsiia russkoi kul'tury: selected papers of the working Group for the study of contemporary Russian culture, 1990-1991* (Stanford, California, Stanford Slavic Studies, 1993)189.

When considering the role of the prostitute in films produced in the late *glasnost* or the Post-Soviet era, one must not forget that its emergence coincided with a period of transition in gender and sexuality discourses. Elizabeth Waters points out in her article *Cuckoo-Mothers and "Apparatchiks"* that by 1988 even the media that had previously adhered to government rhetoric on prostitution had diversified its representation of prostitutes. Media no longer portrayed the Prostitute as a dirty, untrustworthy woman, but instead as a rebellious young woman protesting against the demagogy and falsehoods of the political structure. The period of *glasnost* has also brought other nuances into the prostitute's portrayal: she is no longer exclusively a negative figure although she does still to an extent serve as a tool providing sexualized imagery on screen. In addition, dark aspects of prostitutes' lives are much more represented on screen often symbolizing an every(wo)man's struggles making her more relatable to spectators.[33] Schuckmann claims that more often than not, the prostitute has been used as a symbol to reflect on women's changing roles in society as well as the role of the state and capitalism in the life of an individual. The ambivalent filmic character of the sex worker was welcome by both fascination and horror of the public.[34]

Schuckmann claims that during the era of the *glasnost* the character became symbolic to both the Russian nation, the capitalist ideology and to the emerging topic of women's sexuality. She also argues that films such as Intergirl brought women's economic prospects into the foreground (not being able to sustain themselves by following "legitimate" professions). In other cases, films involve discussions on women's reproductive rights (e.g. abortion), domestic violence and substance abuse.[35]

Though, models of representation following the *glasnost* during the 2000's are still similar, their focus shifts more to the topic of Russia's persistent interest in glamour and other materialistic aspects of capitalism. For example, in most Russian mafia movies from the 1990's criminality and economic crisis are contrasted to a woman's (the prostitute's) response to poverty. In some cases, producers used the character as a status symbol to hyper-masculinity, others allowed her not only to fortify patriarchal norms but also enabled to gain her own voice and respond to the changing societal norms and values. Another common representation her portrayal in popular mafia movies where she serves as a status symbol for male masculinity

[33] Schuckmann, Emily. "The prostitute as eyerywoman, The role and evolution of the sex worker in Russian cinema" in *Ruptures and Continuities in Soviet/Russian Cinema : Styles, Characters and Genres Before and after the Collapse of the USSR* (Florence, Routledge, 2017) 74.
[34] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 25.
[35] Ibid, 27.

and sexual superiority.[36] As she is considered a symbol of Russia, the male figure's control over her is symbolic of him taking control over the chaos in Russia. As discussed earlier, the 1990s brought a number of important changes not only in women but also in men's positions in society. The question of unemployment and loss of social status for men were in a way balanced out by hypermasculine representations of men in motion pictures: "patrimony, patriotism and patriarchy" were considered key elements of post-Soviet Russian identity.[37] Therefore, Borenstein argues that the prostitute herself represents masculinity in crisis, and portrays Russia's humiliation as a male experience.[38] Her character captures anxieties about crumbling Russian masculinity, the loss of the empire, the economic instability and the competition against the West as a sort of male sexual humiliation.[39] While Borenstein's observation is definitely valuable, one must not ignore the fact that through close reading movies from a feminist perspective, one might very well discover different meanings.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the research approach and the means of data collection. It explores how films will be analysed and interpreted with regards to The Handbook of Visual Analysis by Rick Iedema as well as Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

This thesis is based on the social-semiotic visual analysis of three films and findings are combined with observations established by secondary literature in both English and Russian. By combining film analysis with the literature review, I hope to provide a broader societal-cultural context and establish a balance between depth and breadth. The study's methodology relies on the approach described by Carey Jewitt, Rumiko Oyama and Rick Iedema in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* as well as in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

Social semiotics has been chosen as a methodology in order to interpret films' meanings. Theorists such as Iedema, Van Leeuwen and Jewitt argue that film can also be analysed as a "text" and social semiotic analysis ought to focus on evaluating how the film

[36] Ibid, 30.
[37] Ibid, 32.
[38] Borenstein, Eliot. *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2008) 176.
[39] Ibid.

constructs social realities and how interpretations can be situated in sociohistorical context.[40] Nevertheless, Iedema claims that "social semiotics is an interpretive exercise, not a search for 'scientific proof'" and its findings should be understood accordingly.[41]

Iedema, Van Leeuwen and Jewitt deny the gap between "text" (anything that can communicate a meaning such as a book, television show, a conversation, a film etc.) and the audience.[42] They define texts as socially meaningful, entire processes with a socially recognised beginning and ending.[43] Texts can be divided into two categories: presentations or representations of realities. A film belongs to the latter, therefore, this thesis only focuses on representations.

Jewitt and Oyama claim that social semiotics applied to film ought to begin with the description of visual resources, "what can be said and done with images", and how "the things people say or do with images can be interpreted".[44]

When dealing with representations of reality, it is also important to analyse how continuity is constructed. Iedema points out that continuity plays an important role in how audience construct or interpret realities in texts.[45] For this aspect, it is essential to consider how a film has been edited, what has been included, what has been left out. If something was left out, what might have been the reason behind the director's choice.

Rhythm is strongly connected to continuity and plays a role in organizing filmic meaning.[46] Van Leeuwen claims that "rhythmic grouping segments the text, at the level of perception, into units which are not only rhythmically but also semantically coherent. Without meaning in itself, rhythm is nevertheless a necessary condition for meaning".[47]

Iedema describes a six-level-analysis in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*: frame, shot, scene, sequence, generic stage and the work as a whole. Additionally, he highlights a hypothesis that essentially, all meaning-making can be divided into three categories based on

[40] Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt, editors. *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001) 197.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, 187.
[44] Ibid, 134.
[45] Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt, editors. *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001) 188.
[46] Van Dijk, Teun, editor. *Discourse and Communication – New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1985) 223.
[47] Ibid, 223.

their metafunctions: 'representation', 'orientation', and 'organisation'.[48] This thesis will aim to recognize and describe these metafunctions in the selected case studies.

Summarising the means of analysis

This thesis follows Iedema's six level analysis, but mainly focuses on scenes, shots and the work as a whole. The three metafunctions will be evaluated considering the criteria suggested by Iedema, Van Leeuwen and Jewitt.

Representation can be analysed through evaluating what meanings are presented visually, verbally or through sound-design. It is also important to establish who is the subject and what they are doing. [49] Orientation focuses on how characters are positioned by meanings towards the viewer.[50] What is the symbolic distance between spectator and characters? How are sound or other non-visual elements used to construct this distance? Is there an emotional connection between the character and the viewer? Furthermore, the researcher should also consider what cinematic techniques are employed (e.g. mise-en-scène).[51] Finally, Organisation can be analysed through focusing on how the film is edited, structured and what rhythm it follows. It is also important to evaluate how rhythm might interweave both visual and audio elements.[52]

Research Procedure

The Analysis section will be divided into three chapters. Each chapter will discuss one of the films and begins with the Synopsys and a summary of the Context and Reception. The summary of reception is based on online reviews found on the Russian film sites Kinokultura, Kinoteatr and Kinopoisk. It is important to keep in mind that these reviews have been written during various periods (e.g. Tochka's reviewers commented between 2010-2019). The summary on reception will be used not only to determine how local audience perceived the films but also to establish whether spectators reacted to any themes regarding female consciousness and identity. In order to analyse if and how female consciousness and identity

[48] Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt, editors. *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001) 188-189.
[49] Ibid, 191-192.
[50] Ibid. 192
[51] Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Speech, Sound, Music* (London, Macmillan, 1999) 28.
[52] Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt, editors. *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001) 192.

are captured in the movies I will examine themes related to female consciousness and identity borrowed from Lucy Bolton's study. This analysis fill focus on the close-reading social-semiotic analysis of the films at hand. I will look at whether and how women's identity is focused on, how their agency is portrayed. In addition, I will address whether female protagonists go through a journey/personal development. Furthermore, I will also include Kaplan's criterion in the analysis: whether there is any form of solidarity between female characters. Finally, as I realized that there is a theme that is not included in these frameworks but is relevant to understanding how women's identity is portrayed, I decided to add a section on "Limiting Factors".

Themes to be examined:

Women's Identity
Agency
Journey
Limiting Factors
Comradery

If the films do touch upon any of these themes, the Analysis section will provide a number of examples to them and outline how they are approached by the respective directors. In case a film does not provide any examples of a theme, this will be elaborated upon in the Conclusion sections.

Film Analysis

I. Intergirl

Synopsys

Intergirl (Interdevochka) based on Vladimir Kunin's eponymous "documentary novel" was directed by Pyotr Todorovsky in 1989. Both the novel and the film became bestsellers. Intergirl's protagonist, Tatiana is a nurse by profession. Her underpaid job and Russia's economic inflation force her to become a hard-currency prostitute for which she is paid in

dollars. Becoming a prostitute helps her and her ailing mother survive. Soon she realizes the limitations of prostitution and decides to accept the marriage proposal of one of her clients, the Swedish Larson. She agrees to marry him and migrate to Sweden believing she will be able to lead a more prosperous life in the West. She is not in love with Larson but is ready to look beyond that in order to have a better future. Tatiana's mother is hesitant and disappointed about her daughter's decision because she is worried about who will take care of her in her old age. Tatiana reconnects with her long-lost father who blackmails her that he would not grant her permission to leave Russia unless she paid him a significant amount of money. By returning to prostitution Tania manages to bribe her father and emigrates to Sweden. However, her expectations about life in the West are not met. Her relationship with her husband is unfulfilling, she becomes financially dependent on him, she is unable to get a job and she suffers from being labeled an ex-Soviet prostitute. She becomes lonely and isolated. When she finally convinces her husband to let her visit her mother, she gets killed in a car accident.

Context and reception

According to Russell Campbell, one reason that explains the film's popularity lies in its ability to appeal especially to the female audience's empathy and ability to identify with its protagonist as a "victim of patriarchy" and/or a "rebel" against it.[53]

Reviews on the Russian sites Kinopoisk and Kinoteatr are generally positive about Intergirl. Most reviewers deem the film as a true depiction of the Russian reality in the late perestroika. They highlight the resemblance between filmic depiction of hospitals, corrupt officials, the small school and how they personally perceived the era's social and economic reality. Most of the discussion focuses on whether Tania's choice to sell her body and to emigrate to Sweden were morally justified. There are almost no remarks on Tania's physical appearance, and no remarks about her "personal journey" and interiority. Most reviewers focus only on her features that allow her to be characterised as a "Russian soul". While Tania still lives in Russia, viewers consider her a victim of the system whose hopelessness drives her into prostitution. Others argue that she represents characteristics a woman needed to possess in order to survive (e.g. being clever and calculating). Again, others highlight that she is selfish

[53] Campbell, Russell. *Marked Women : Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 33.

and only cares for herself which ends up destroying both her and her mother's life. Overall, reviewers seem divided on the idea whether Tania is a hero or an anti-hero.

Alexander Fedorov, Russian film critic claims that the film focuses on why many Russians so passionately long to relocate or visit European countries. Fedorov also argues that by using the "Cinderella-myth", the genre of the melodrama, and a generally glamorous style, Todorovsky makes serious topics more approachable, but perhaps less realistic or convincing.

Limiting Factors

Pyotr Todorovsky's film zooms in on a number of ways Prostitutes interact with men. Considering how women are positioned in contrast to and interact with male characters offers invaluable insight about whether and how much agency female characters possess, and whose story is being told. In this section I consider whether female characters play passive or active roles, do they initiate action or mainly act according male characters' expectations and follow their lead.

In Intergirl male characters often appear in the role of the exploiter whose main interest lies in financial profit from the Prostitute. Prostitution is a subject that is not considered a taboo, rather an open secret that all parts of society seem to be aware of.[54] The motivation behind male characters' exploitation of prostitutes originates from men's unstable economic situation. Not having a stable income is one of the reasons behind why male characters exploit prostitutes. Both metaphorically and explicitly, prostitutes represent a gateway to the West and its prosperity.[55] Their profession appears as a metaphor to Western market economy in which anything and everything can be sold (when there is nothing left to sell, one is forced to sell their body to survive).[56] On the other hand, hard currency prostitutes are also a direct gateway to the West as they not only interact with wealthy Western businessmen but are paid in Western currencies, which was significantly more valuable than being paid in rubles. Finally, prostitutes' characters and in particular that of Tania's are metaphors to capitalistic Russia selling out to the West.[57]

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[54] Clark, Katerina. "Not for sale: The Russian/Soviet Intelligentsia, prostitution, and the Paradox of Internal colonization". in Russian culture in *Transition: Transformatsiia russkoi kul'tury: selected papers of the working Group for the study of contemporary Russian culture, 1990-1991* (Stanford, California, Stanford Slavic Studies, 1993) 203.

[55] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 115.

[56] Ibid, 115.

[57] Borenstein, Eliot. *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2008)

It could be argued, many of these characters were (indirectly) forced into prostitution because the State, their fathers and husband that failed to protect them and take care of them financially. In the film, men's exploitation of prostitutes may not result in physical harm, but it certainly limits these characters' freedoms. In order to be tolerated, prostitutes have to abide the corrupt regime and its agents (both police and private -usually male- individuals). Thus, prostitutes' conception of identity, consciousness as well as other fundamental freedoms are violated on multiple levels by their metaphorical (the State) and biological fathers. With this in mind, this chapter introduces examples of how and why male characters can be considered "limiting factors" in Intergirl.

Zhenya, the police officer guarding the Inturist hotel appears assertive and authoritative. He appears masculine both in his physique and personality. However, her posture towards him almost perfectly mirrors Zhenya's assertiveness. She does not demonstrate fear and she does not try to seduce him or beg him to let her go. Tania does not consider Zhenya a threat and this originates from the fact that the two know each other quite well. This seems like another routine-encounter. Zhenya (symbolising the corrupt State) is aware of prostitution and handles is as something normal. Tania knows this and knows that eventually he will let her go unharmed because she is more useful if she continues to work in prostitution. They both know that Tania's profession profits them both and therefore, proceed to the basement with a business-as-usual attitude.

Once in the basement Tania finds four other prostitutes ready to be interrogated. They are sitting in a wide-legged posture ("man-spreading") and do not seem bothered by having been caught by the authorities. The two male officers in front of them appear calm, harmless and indifferent to the situation. The women greet each other as if the situation would be nothing out of the ordinary.

At last, the officer begins by reading a document to one of the prostitutes, to which the women respond by mocking him. The prostitutes' response and posture towards the men suggest that though they accept dealing with corrupt authorities as the price for their financial and sexual freedom, they do not respect the State that exploits them.[58]

The officer acts as if he had not noticed the women and continues.

"I promise to go to school to finish the 10th grade and get a diploma…"

"Of being sexually mature"- responds Zinaida and all women laugh.

[58] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 128.

“Zinaida Vasilievna, you are disturbing”

“I’ll be silent”- responds Zina in provocatively obedient voice. With her theatrical imitation of an obedient female character, she both criticizes and ridicules the corrupt system and patriarchal order. She makes fun of the fact that everybody (both the State and society) is aware of prostitution but nobody is willing to do anything about it because it is profitable.[59]

“Besides that, I give you my word, scout’s honour not to attend an Inturist hotel and never ever be a prostitute”- the man continues reading while the women whistle. Whistling is often used as a tool of catcalling or bullying. In this case, female characters utilize it as an act of rebellion.

“Natalya, who wrote this application a week ago?”

“I did.”

“How many times since then… Listen, well, your father, who is he…I think…”, continues the officer, obviously intimidated by the women’s reaction.

“My father is a professor studying the culture of Africa. Though, he has never been to Africa” – the women laugh again. Traditionally, Russia is a patriarchal society with the father being the head of the family. Mocking him (especially by female family members) would be out of question. In his speech the policeman still relies on traditional hierarchy by attempting to convince Natalya, she should behave “properly”, according to what is expected from an influential man’s daughter. Natalya’s response demonstrates that she does not take the traditional power structure seriously and questions all forms of male authority over women.

In the following, individual interrogation takes place while all prostitutes are present. From women’s responses it is evident that they are intelligent, honest and their most prized possession is (financial) independence. At some points during the interrogation, the women repeatedly sing a song with the lyrics: “A woman likes to look nice and hold her head upright with pride”. This song is a statement, a form of protest against the idea that women must look in a certain way in order to please men. It highlights that women are their own independent persons and they are the only ones deciding what they look like and what happens to their bodies.

As Tania walks out of the Inturist hotel, the receptionist (a former army general who is fat, lazy, sloppy and generally unmanly) follows her and asks for money. Tania acts as if she had not noticed him and walks out of the building. She turns back laughing and says: “You are on your knees even though you outrank me?”. Tania’s reaction to the receptionist underlines a

[59] Borenstein, Eliot. "Selling Russia—Prostitution, Masculinity, and Metaphors of Nationalism after Perestroika." *Gender and Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture.* Editors. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux. (DeKalb, Illinois Northern Illinois University Press, 2006) 174-195.

number of important social issues of the era. Her amusement shows the absurdity of men asking for money from women. And though she is amused, she is not surprised because she is used to being asked for "tokens of appreciation" from those aware of the fact that she is a prostitute. Although men are expected to be earning more and providing for women, in this case, Tania earns more in one night than the old general in a month. In a traditional patriarchic world order it would be out of question for a man to ask money from a woman. Men ought to earn their own money and provide for their families. However, this situation is more complex than that. Both characters are aware of the financial inequality between the two. The general does not approach Tania as a woman but more as an "other", which derives from her being of a prostitute. He expects monetary compensation for his "services" (e.g. remaining silent about Tania's possession of foreign currency) as a part of a business transaction. Tania does not give him any money (this time), and simply walks away. Her action suggests that she is aware of her exploitation but that she is not willing to give into it every time a man expects her to.
Secondly, by asking for money, a man denounces his patriarchal superiority to women because asking money shows that he is unable to fulfil his duty of earning it himself.

In another scene Tatiana takes a taxi home from the Inturist hotel. She is captured from a low angle shot. This time, the shot both aims to empower her and play with the expectations of the gaze. The camera first focuses on her feet and moves up to her legs and stops on her upper body. She leans out of the open window with her elbows fixed on the window seal. She appears confident, strong and independent. Her posture is masculine in a way that it expresses independence and fearlessness. She discusses illegal currency exchange with the taxi driver who wants to convince her to do business with him. The man's attitude towards currency exchange and prostitution is another example of how embedded and normalized these topics were in the late-Soviet society. At Tania's serious explanation of the law prohibiting currency exchange the man simply laughs.

"I'm begging you.."-he says.

"You will later beg the prosecutor and not me"- she responds by singing, mocking the taxi driver for not taking her seriously.

"And which article applies to you?"

"There is no article for me yet. In our country this social phenomenon is non-existent. Clear?". She ridicules the regime for wanting to control everything but not willing to regulate prostitution but instead profiting from it.

Todorovsky portrays prostitutes as victims in a great number of scenes. For example, Tania is forced to re-enter prostitution in order to earn enough money to pay her. Before going

back into prostitution, Tania tries to get the money from other sources, but when she does not succeed, she has no "choice" but to sell her body once again. This action derives from an indirect source of force by a man (her father), who is only willing to let her free if she pays him. Therefore, Tania does not sell her body out of her own free will but in order to buy her freedom from a man, her father, who also symbolizes the Russian State himself.[60] Tania's father can be compared to the metaphoric figure of the State as they both had failed to take care of their children, they abandoned their women and are reluctant to acknowledge their inaction. The father had failed Tania and her mother when he became an alcoholic, lost his job and abandoned his family. The State had failed his children through the financial crisis, the withdrawn subsidies, uncertain wages, rising unemployment etc. At the end, both Tania's biological father and her metaphorical father, the State try to exploit her by taking away her money in exchange for her freedom.[61]

When Tania visits her father, she finds him in a small, dirty apartment with two toddlers and his wife. Nikolay Platonovich Zaitsev is a middle age man with a primitive appearance, his clothes unwashed, his long hair greasy, his teeth rotten and his face unshaven. His wife suffers from complications of child birth and due to her condition she is unable to speak, move around or take care of her children. Zaitsev supports himself from the handicap welfare and some money made on the side (from working twice a week) when he is not at home resting. Tania is deeply shocked by her encounter with her father. She asks him why he would not get some dental work done or shave. Zaitsev points out that in his point of view the dentist should do it for free as he is disabled. From his statements it is obvious he does not take responsibility for his or his family's (financial) wellbeing and he expects the State to do so. When Tania explains the point of her visit, her father does not understand why she would want to leave "the Motherland". Her father grabs a bottle of home-made moonshine and insists the two of them toast to Tania. Although, at first hesitant, Tatiana makes the following toast:

"Let's drink Nikolay Platonovich Zaitsev. Because you, son of a bitch, old horny bastard, left us 23 years ago and not a single time you have wondered how your wife Alla Sergeyevna is doing or your daughter, Tatiana Nikolaevna…Let's drink that smelly drink of yours for that you have created two more children but haven't been able to support them." Zaitsev is a tragicomic archetype of the "new Russian man". He is unable to fulfil his role of being a

[60] Borenstein, Eliot. "Pimping the Motherland: Russia Bought and Sold" in *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2008) 82.
[61] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 28.

husband to either of wives or being a father to any of his three children. He fails to provide them with any kind of stability and relies on the State to fulfil all his roles.

On the other hand, Zaitsev's character also serves as an allegory to the once powerful father figure, the Russian State. During the Soviet era, the State took up the responsibilities of the "father" and took care of his women and children through social housing, nursery care, social benefits etc. By the end of the 1980's, the State was less and less willing and able to provide the same benefits it once did to its citizens who perceived this as a form of abandonment.[62] Zaitsev, as a failing father is symbolic to how the Russian State failed to fulfil its duties towards his "children.

Finally, Zaitsev can also be understood as an exaggerated example of Russia's masculinity in crisis: a man with no visible sign of masculinity, physical weakness, alcoholism, lack of financial stability, obsessed with money.[63] In general, most male characters of Inergirl are uninterested in taking care of these women and they only focus on exploiting them financially or sexually.

Agency

Intergirl addresses the topic of female agency in a number of scenes. One of the most important tools used to convey messages about women's agency is the Gaze. Todorovsky often manipulates the ways women's bodies are shown by manipulating camera angles, movement and rhythm. In addition, the director often leaves out certain body parts from sequences capturing prostitutes appearance. Furthermore, another tool he uses is a manipulation of the characters' postures (e.g. taking up traditionally masculine positions) which in turn he contrasts to traditionally feminine images (e.g. sensualizing images of legs, breasts etc.). Overall, Todorovsky's portrayal of women's body aims at empowering his characters instead of objectifying them to their male counterparts' and the audience's gaze.

Agency is also provided to female characters through their financial independence. Todorovsky's prostitutes are to a large extent financially stable and as a result can not only take care of themselves but also people who rely on them (e.g. family members). In the

[62] Borenstein, Eliot. "Selling Russia—Prostitution, Masculinity, and Metaphors of Nationalism after Perestroika." *Gender and Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*. Editors. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux. (DeKalb, Illinois Northern Illinois University Press, 2006) 174-195.
[63] Ibid.

following, I will provide a few examples of these two sources of female agency as pictured in Intergirl.

The film begins with a number of scenes that capture various representations of prostitutes. In these shots, they are shown sitting at the bar by themselves, watched by male bystanders. The camera is positioned in a low angle, showing these women larger and more powerful than usual, depicting them with a sense of authority and agency. Although, they all wear heavy make-up, fake nails and sensual clothing items, they seem fully in control of what they offer to the (male) spectator. These characters not only seem completely aware of being watched, they play along with the male gaze's expectations which makes them active participants of the movie.

These scenes are interrupted by an intellectual montage that is seemingly unrelated to the women themselves: video sequences of St. Petersburg. Upon a closer look, one realizes that these snippets are also symbolic of women's status in the changing socio-political landscape of Russia. One of these scenes focuses on a water truck crossing a bridge and spraying the hot asphalt with water. This shot serves as a reference to the steamy, tense atmosphere in the bar and the intense desire male characters experience on and off screen while they consume women through their gaze. If this scene is understood more literally, it can be perceived as a reference to male orgasm. The second shot shows a tram riding through the bridge while a boat is crossing to the other side of the bridge horizontally. This shot can be perceived both as a metaphor to sex (e.g. driving through a tunnel as symbol of penetration) and to progress (e.g. tram crossing the bridge).

The movie's protagonist, Tania is introduced as a woman who is somewhat fragile in her physique but is conscious and powerful in her decisions. She is first shown in the scene where Larson proposes to her after they have had sex. Tania is staring out of the window only wearing her underwear while she is watching the above described scene of the ship and the tram. As Tania watches the scenery in front of her, she might be contemplating about her role and opportunities as a female and as a prostitute in a crumbling, male-dominated society. It is perhaps not a coincidence that as the protagonist evaluates her situation as a woman, Larson proposes to her, which she instantly agrees to. This proposal comes as a sequence, almost as a response to Tania's thoughts: women's position in society still very much depends on their relationship with men. She believes that by marrying Larson, a foreigner, she is not only going to be able to break out of poverty but will have more opportunities by emigrating to Sweden. To better understand Tania's portrayal one also has to evaluate the way her male counterpart, Larson is portrayed. Larson is captured as a weak, fat, hairy, considerably older and

unattractive man. He is lying on a matrass while Tania is standing. Tania's character is shown from a low camera angle, making her look larger than she is, while her fiancée from a high angle making him look smaller and insignificant. Larson is staring up at her, with both his gaze and manner of speech almost begging her to marry him. This shot makes it seem that he is subordinate and dependent on her as a result of his sexual desire which he is unable to control.

Identity

To a large extent, Intergirl not only aims to debunk taboos around prostitution but also sets out to show these women's interiority. This goal is achieved through introducing viewers to various characters' personal desires, goals in life as well as views on society and gender norms. In the following, I will provide a few examples on how female characters' identity is capture in Intergirl.

The film focuses on two types of women: some who abide to traditional gender norms and roles by accepting they are subordinate to men and others who rebel against it or negotiate its boundaries. Those belonging to the first category represent the minority of female characters and generally belong to the older generation. Younger females (around 20-35 years) mainly engage in anti-patriarchal behaviour or follow hybrid gender norms which is a mixture of traditional and revolutionary norms. Traditional norms in this case include: submissiveness to men in a professional and/or sexual sense, belief in patriotism (e.g. you should never leave your country and/or question its leadership, the man is always right), obedience, nurturing attitude towards males and financial and/or emotional dependence on men. The negotiation of women's own gender norms is part of the exploration of their identities and self-consciousness. This process could be considered a journey to self and is part of their self-creation journey.

Todorovsky depicts prostitutes as individualistic. However, this characteristic is depicted as an essential tool of survival. The director shows that in order to survive in a marketized Russian society people needed to turn their focus on the self. This is in sharp contrast to previous periods of the Soviet era in which caring for one's community was considered the most important priority.

These characters do not consider each other as friends or sisters, but as competitors. They realise that by helping each other they might endanger their own positions or possessions, and therefore believe that everyone is responsible for their own well-being alone. They do occasionally help each other without any altruistic reasons, only if that is in their personal best interest (e.g. they receive money or other rewards for it). After Tania is blackmailed by her

father, she turns to other prostitutes to borrow money from them. Her acquaintances refuse and claim that she should earn her own money because she is capable to do so.

Nevertheless, dreams are also central Todorovsky's prostitutes. These dreams form a stark contrast to their anti-patriarchal gender performances towards their customers or the authorities. The characters repeatedly express their dreams of getting married, becoming mothers after having saved up enough money from prostitution to stabilize their families' financial situations. Among each other, these characters are vocal about wanting to marry men in high positions and good salaries such as "kind doctors or engineers", they hope to move to a village and start their own families.

The movie's protagonist, Tania is a respectable, educated, hard-working nurse by day and a hard-currency prostitute by night. Her character's complexity provides an insight into the hardships women faced in order to survive during the 90's. Although, Tania has an honorable profession, she is intelligent and well educated, she decides to become a prostitute to support her mother and find a way out of poverty. Through her character, Todorovsky illustrates an important dilemma about a prostitute's position. One could argue that Tania had a "choice" of becoming one. On the other hand, the lack of physical force does not necessarily mean her decision was a "choice". In a way, she was forced to become a prostitute as a result of political-social uncertainty, which made it impossible to make a decent living by leading a respectable profession.[64] The State was unable or unwilling to take care of her, which led her to the decision to sell herself.[65] This idea seems to be aligned with Todorovsky's view who highlights in an interview that he perceives prostitutes to be victims. He explains that he does not condemn or judge his characters. When asked about his attitude towards these women, he says he likes or loves them and tries to understand them without generalising their stories too much.[66]

Journey

The element of women's personal journey is depicted through Tania's example. The protagonist embarks on a journey to consciousness about her own role, identity and desires as a woman. This journey begins with her decision to accept Larson's marriage proposal and

[64] Tsyrkyn, Nina. "Tinkling Symbols: Fragmented Society—Fragmented Cinema?" in *Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema.* Editor Birgit Beumers (London, I.B.Tauris, 1999) 65.
[65] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 141.
[66] Bogopolskaya, Ekaterina. Interview with Todorovsky (Sovietsky Ekran, March, 1989) 20-21.

relocate to Sweden. In addition, Todorovsky briefly introduces spectators to another woman's, Lyalka's personal journey who discovers her consciousness by becoming a prostitute.

Tania's marriage to Larson can be seen from several angles. While arguably, she is free to marry him or refuse him, her decision to accept the proposal is indirectly driven by the lack of prosperity and prospect of a stable future in Russia. In this sense, her marriage to Larson is once again not a choice but an escape from the struggles of life under the late-Soviet regime. In a conversation with her mother, Tania explains that she wants to see more, live better than her. Tania's mother represents a generation (of intelligentsia) who has learned to accept suffering in order to do something meaningful with their life (e.g. teaching children) even if that means living in poverty and oppression. Her mother asks why she quit university, and Tania responds that there was no point in studying for five years to be rewarded by a 100 ruble monthly salary. As many young Eastern European women at the time, she wants freedom, which she associates with having her own house, car and the freedom to buy anything she needs or desires.[67] As she puts it: she "wants to see the world through her own eyes". If this means giving up her principles and leaving behind everything she knows or loves, she is willing to do that. Tania's choice to "sell out" (sell her body and profit from Western prosperity in exchange) is a symbol to Russia becoming a market economy and selling itself to the West. She (just like Russia) is mesmerized by the financial opportunities gained by "doing business with the West" and is willing to give up on all her principles in order to reach these benefits.[68] An example to this attitude is Tania's conversation with her mother. Her mother questions her love for Larson. Tania reassures her that she will love him "if it will be necessary". Her statement illustrates how she perceives marriage as a simple transaction.

"Tanyka, but that means that you will have to sell yourself!"

"Right, right mama… But who does not sell themselves nowadays?", points out Tania, in line with the capitalistic idea that everything is for sale.

After her move to Sweden, Tatiana is unhappier than while living in St. Petersburg. She realizes that her idea about money buying her freedom was false. Her new life abroad makes

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[67] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 141.
Malarek Victor. *The Natashas: The New Global Sex Trade (*Toronto, Viking Canada, 2003) 18.

[68] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 143.
Borenstein, Eliot. "Selling Russia—Prostitution, Masculinity, and Metaphors of Nationalism after Perestroika." *Gender and Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture.* Editors. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux. (DeKalb, Illinois Northern Illinois University Press, 2006) 174-195.

her dependent on Larson's money. Her inability to get a job in Sweden further limits her independence, and she is forced to fulfil the duties of a housewife and getting pregnant. Her "job" is to take care of her husband and in exchange she can live in a liberal country with the "freedom" of buying almost anything. Soon after her relocation to Sweden, her husband becomes greedy and is no longer willing to support her expensive shopping habits. By the end of the movie, Tania is stripped from all of the "freedom" she may have possessed while being a prostitute in Russia. As a result, she begins to feel trapped, becomes depressed and runs away from her husband.

Though, Todorovsky does not show Tania's path to prostitution, he briefly describes another character, Lyalka's journey. Lyalka is Tania's teenager neighbor and colleague at the hospital. She comes from a simple family with poor parents who are always fighting. The family is so poor that there is often nothing to eat. There are also obvious signs of domestic violence. For example in a short scene the husband comes and grabs Lyalka's mother by her hair. Lyalka's mother believes her daughter should have chosen for a profession (such as a trolley bus driver) that would have enabled her to earn more than her father does. It is interesting to note the dichotomy of the mother's character. Although, spectators do not get much information, it is obvious that she wants brighter future for her daughter than what she has had. She suffers in an abusive relationship acting as an obedient wife, but she wants her daughter to become financially independent and not to have to depend on men like her father.

At the beginning of the film Lyalka is an innocent, pure, naive girl who admires Tania's independence and material possessions. Tania tries to shield her from her prostitute acquaintances who try to convince Lyalka that she would have a better life if she joined them. Lyalka seems mesmerised by these women's confidence, expensive clothes and bravery. She sees prostitution as a path to liberation from poverty and her abusive family. Lyalka's view of prostitution is not unique. According to a survey conducted among Soviet women, prostitution was ranked their eighth preferred choice of profession from the list of twenty options. In addition, over one-third of high school said they would agree to sell their bodies for hard currency.[69] Lynne Attwood claims that young girls saw hard-currency prostitution as a tool for social advancement as well as one to attain glamour.[70] By watching Tania and her prostitute friends advancing in their finances Lyalka decides to become a prostitute hoping to become

[69] Goscilo, Helena. *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1996) 14.
[70] Attwood, Lynne, and Maja Josifovna. *Red Women on the Silver Screen: Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era* (London, Pandora, 1993) 117.

independent and gain access to the glamorous lifestyle she desires. As many other young girls at the time, Lyalka saw prostitution as the only opportunity to break away from her troubled family and lead her own life.

Conclusion

Although, in many ways, Intergirl is considered to be ahead of its time in its portrayal of women, it still represents society through a gendered lense. Most female characters are shown to be relatively independent, they are still captured in relation to men. All female characters are working women, most of them are breadwinners and take care of their families with absent fathers or husbands. Even in families where there is a male figure, women still appear responsible not only for the household and children but also for taking care of the finances.

These characters are filmic representations of what Marina Kiblitskaya refers to as "breadwinners by default". An example of such a female character is Tatiana's mother, Alla Vasilievna. The middle age teacher separated from her alcoholic, unemployed husband when her daughter was still a little girl. She not only took control of her own life, she single-handedly took care of her child (probably with some assistance from the State). Her role represents common gender norms and roles of the Soviet era. Alla Vasilievna, like most Soviet women at the time was expected to produce offsprings but she also had to work. In the event of an unsuccessful marriage or the husband's death, the State took up the responsibility of the father by providing families with stability through subsidies and social housing.[71]

Nevertheless, it is important to realise that though women are the protagonists of the film, men still play a significant role in their lives. Regardless of having a measure of financial independence, women still rely on men. A symbolic example to this is Tania is required to gain her father's permission to emigrate even though he had been absent for most of her life.

With this in mind, Intergirl paints a credible picture of the gender dynamics of the late glasnost. The use of the Prostitute as a protagonist allows for the exploration of deep-rooted, complex societal issues and dilemmas. One of the major questions of the film is "What is freedom and how far is a woman willing to go in order to gain her freedom"? These questions allow for the exploration of women's personal journeys and introduces the viewer to characters' interiority.

[71] Marina Kiblitskaya, "Russia's female breadwinners: The changing subjective experience" in: Ashwin, Sarah. *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (London, Routledge, 2000)

Though the film is not personally narrated by Tania, it mainly focuses on her experiences and therefore I consider her the narrating subject. A great number of close-up shots of her face and body suggest that above all, the film tells her story from her perspective. Most shots focusing on her body capture her in a position of power. She is also shown to be in control of the cinematic gaze. When Tania engages in interactions with her parents, sexual partners and husband, her speech suggests agency and independence. What she says and how she says it shows spectators that she is in control of what happens to her (or at least this is how she sees it) and is willing to give up moral principles in order to keep her independence. Her concepts of freedom include: financial independence, independence from men (even though she does marry Larson), sexual freedom, and freedom to leave the "Motherland".

Tania and other female supporting characters' portrayal (such as other prostitutes and her mother) is to some extent inclusive and critical of women's self-identity and consciousness. After analyzing the film Intergirl I conclude that the director has placed a larger emphasis on women's identity and only briefly touched upon the topic of women's consciousness. Todorovsky mainly zooms in on women whose identity is in crisis. He shows that no matter how confident characters appear, deep inside they are struggling to define themselves and find their true consciousness. This is shown in not only Tania's character but also in other prostitutes' portrayal. The director included scenes focusing on prostitutes' most intimate desires (e.g. to start a family, find an educated, rich husband, move to the countryside) only to show how vulnerable they are to superficial ideas of happiness. Their identity is divided

During the movie, Tania has undergone a degradation of her identity but after having moved to Sweden she has developed some self-consciousness. This is an interesting process as in order to better understand her true role and desires as a woman, she first needed to lose part of her identity by moving to Sweden and drastically changing her life, only to re-discover herself by the end of her journey. Her journey to self concludes with her realizing that she could only profit from living in the West if she was willing to give up all her freedom and completely change her identity. Her final departure to Russia represents the final step in this journey and symbolizes that she has come to consciousness and realized that she cannot lead a meaningful life if she had to give up some of the most important parts of her identity.

II. Country of the Deaf

Context and reception

The Country of the Deaf (Strana glukhikh) is a 1998 crime drama directed by Valery Todorovsky. The director captures the overarching chaos of the post-Soviet era through the experience of two women. Similarly to the two other films, through the portrayal of prostitutes, Todorovsky addresses some of the social economic struggles of Russia during the late 1990's. His protagonists' lives are examples to how women might adapt to these challenges. In particular, the film focuses on the effects of the economic crisis, drug trade, gambling addiction, prostitution, and the lives of marginalized groups (the deaf community as well as women). Additionally, in her news article on the film, Solovyova claims that the film studio had issues a statement claiming the film was about "the various forms love can take-love as power, love as slavery, love as redemption and love that can kill".[72]

People's social status and relation to the state had significantly changed compared to the years under the Soviet regime. They were no longer supported by the government; their jobs were no longer guaranteed and were expected to return to their traditional gender roles.[73] Women were ought to become primary caretakers while men were forced to reassume the role of the father and breadwinner. Women have lost their right to a number of government subsidies, and once again became strongly dependent on men providing them with economic security. In a large portion of society however, men had either lost their jobs or received salaries that were simply not sufficient to reassume their roles as breadwinners.[74] In such cases, women took up all central roles in the family by also becoming "breadwinners by default".[75] According

[72] Solovyova, Julia. "Passion Abides in World of Deaf." (*The Moscow Times* 10 Feb 1998)
[73] Kiblitskaya, Marina. "Russia's female breadwinners: The changing subjective experience" in: Ashwin, Sarah. *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (London, Routledge, 2000)
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

to a collection of oral histories by Marina Kiblitskaya, Russian sociologist, women often felt that their husbands or fathers were indifferent to earning money. As a result, they felt forced to bridge the gap and earn the missing money themselves in order to take care of the family. A common pattern in such stories is the male's alcoholism and/or gambling addiction.

According to the reviewers on Kinoteatr and Kinopoisk, the deafness of the characters reflects how people live in the modern (capitalistic) world. According to Alexander Fedorov, the film is a lukewarm portrayal of new Russia filled with unhappy love, gambling addiction, criminality. Nothing new and nothing spectacular. There is little attention paid to the characters' interiority, character-development and their personal motives seem shallow and "nothing special".

Most reviewers agree with Fedorov's critique and highlight that characters are shallow and simplistic but they are still generally sympathetic towards them. Some of them argue that the film's focus lies on picturing the general loneliness present in new Russia that can only be overcome with general human kindness and care for one another. Some people perceived Yaya to be a homosexual and were outraged that the director touched upon this theme. Reviewers paid no attention to themes of female empowerment, instead they argue that characters are simply selfish (made selfish by new Russian society). Spectators understood deafness as a coping mechanism with the societal and economic challenges of post-Soviet Russia.

Synopsys

In Todorovsky's film the viewer is introduced to two female protagonists, Rita and Yaya. Rita is a young, innocent woman with a boyfriend, Alyosha. Alyosha suffers from gambling addiction and relies on Rita financially. Alyosha has a substantial debt which he expects Rita to help him with. Rita meets Yaya while she escapes Alyosha's debt collector. Yaya is a deaf dancer at the casino owned by Alyosha's debt collector. She is fired when she slaps an inappropriate customer in his face. The women escape the boat together and move into an art studio. Yaya convinces Rita that the only way to earn enough money is through prostitution. Rita wants to earn enough to help Alyosha with his debt and Yaya wants to save up for a ticket to the "Country of the Deaf". The two women try themselves out as prostitutes but quickly realise the downsides of the business and decide to change business strategy. Rita saves Alyosha's life from the debt collector and takes him into her home with Yaya. Yaya is unhappy about this decision because she believes Alyosha only uses her friend and Rita deserves a better man. Yaya teaches Rita to language who begins working for Pig (a member of the drug mafia)

as a member of his security team. At the end, Rita saves Pig's life who in return, gives her enough money to pay for Alyosha's debt. She accompanies Alyosha to the casino where he convinces her to give him the money that was supposed to cover all his debts. He loses all the money and breaks up with Rita. The debt collector hopes to blackmail Rita to pay her ex-boyfriend's debt by threatening Yaya's life. In order to get more money, Rita turns to Pig who instead of giving it to her gets into a shooting with the debt collector and his men. All men are killed but the two women escape. Rita becomes deaf due to a shot fired close to her head. The two women leave the murder scene together, happily signing with each other.

In the following, this chapter introduces the reader to some of the ways female empowerment is framed in the film The Country of the Deaf. First of all, I hope to highlight how the relationship between women and men is portrayed. Additionally, this analysis will delve into how Todorovsky captures the female body as a source of power. I will also outline how the director understands the relationship between women and depicts it as a form of comradery. Nevertheless, topics such as empowerment through self-creation and through financial independence will also be discussed. Finally, I will analyse the ways Todorovsky addresses social issues and contextualise them through academic literature on post-Soviet culture and society.

Agency

The Country of the Deaf also shows a number of examples of female agency. At the beginning of the film only Yaya could be considered independent but over the course of the story, Rita also gains a degree of agency. Similarly to Intergirl, The Country of the Deaf also relies on the manipulation of the Gaze to express women's agency. Todorovsky shows examples both of how women's bodies are viewed in traditional cinema and others that focus on breaking the expectations of the gaze and providing female characters with agency. Through this agency, protagonists not only realise that they are visually consumed but can also break or manipulate the cycle of their objectification through interrupting the gaze. In addition, there is some emphasis on women's self-creation and great focus on their financial independence. I consider these two themes as indicators of agency and therefore, will discuss such examples in both the "Identity" and "Agency" chapters below.

The storyline begins with the viewer's introduction to Alyosha and Rita. Alyosha and Rita are positioned in a room full of chaos. They are both half naked, only wearing their undergarments and are having a conversation while smoking in bed. The opening shot focuses

on Rita's face and only shows Alyosha from a profile in the background. This shot foreshadows that the film will tell their story from Rita's perspective. Laura Mulvey claims that traditionally, films portray women in relation to men instead of allowing them to play narrative roles independent male characters.[76] In addition, Mulvey suggests that female characters' cinematographic role is often limited to intensifying male protagonists' (and spectators') desire through the gaze. Mulvey points out that female characters on screen are mostly passive while men appear to be in power and are responsible to "make things happen".[77]

In the opening shots, Todorovsky introduces Rita as the film's protagonist who (unlike female characters Mulvey describes) is not simply objectified through the gaze.[78] By positioning Rita in the forefront in the opening scene, the director highlights that this film aims not to capture Rita's character in her relation to Alyosha but will instead treat her as her own person and provide her with an independent voice. This observation is reinforced by the opening dialogue in which it becomes clear Rita would be willing to risk her life to protect Alyosha.

In another scene, Rita is approached by Pig, a deaf businessman who tells her how his wife saved his life. In a business situation she had overheard a conversation between partners who were planning to assassinate Pig. She informed her husband and thus saved his life. "Now I don't have a wife, and nobody can save me", Pig claims. He wants to employ Rita to become "his ears" and protect him in dangerous situations. Rita accepts Pig's offer and accompanies him to a business meeting with a drug cartel. The mafia wants to execute him but Rita saves him. These scenes portray male characters as powerless, dependent on Rita's help and protection in order to survive. Pig's financial power and body guards are contrasted to the fact that he relies on women's help in risky situations. This is example to how Rita felt forced to take up roles that men around her were unable or unwilling to fulfil. Instead of acting as protectors of women, male characters rely on them for security.

In the middle of the night Rita is called by someone at the Casino and learns that Alyosha is being held captive in the boiler room. She goes all by herself and shows exceptional bravery by freeing Alyosha and helping him escape from the debt collector. She carries him off the boat into her home with Yaya. In his recovery process, Alyosha is fed and dressed by Rita as if he were her child instead of her boyfriend. Rita becomes the breadwinner in their relationship. Since Alyosha does not work (and does not seem particularly bothered about it),

[76] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16, no. 3 (1975) 14.
[77] Ibid, 12.
[78] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16, no. 3 (1975) 12.

she is the only one earning money to sustain their household. This scene is another example of how Alyosha relies on Rita to care for him not only according to traditional feminine roles by taking care of the household and nurturing him but also by providing physical protection and financial stability.

In one of the final scenes, Alyosha and Rita are at the casino to pay off Alyosha's debts. The two are waiting at a table to meet the debt collector when Alyosha asks her for fifty dollars. The sequence of events emphasises that Alyosha uses Rita's emotional dependence on him in order to gain access to her money. First, Rita rejects fearing that he would gamble it away. Eventually he convinces her to give him the money. He comes back empty handed and aggressively demands more money. She tries to convince him to leave. He responds, once again playing on her emotional vulnerability:

"You like to humiliate me, don't you? Come on, say that it's your money. Say it! You can wipe the floor with me now. Give it to me! See, I don't even ask where you got it from…"

He violently takes her handbag with all her money and walks away. Not having any money on his own and having to rely on a woman's generosity feels like an assault on Alyosha's masculine dignity. He perceives Rita's hesitance to give him the money as a reminder of this assault and becomes violent. This scenario represents an issue described by Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina as part of post-Soviet Russia's masculinity in crisis.[79] Ashwin and Lytkina claim that men who had relied on their wife's salaries felt they have been robbed of their masculinity and their position of a man in the family.[80] These unemployed mostly working-class men found it difficult to define a new position for themselves after they had lost the position of the breadwinner.[81] This feeling originates from the expectation that had been ingrained in Russian society that a man's sole function in the family is to be the breadwinner. As this role had been inherently connected with the idea of masculinity, not being able to fulfil it made men feel that they had lost their masculine status. Ashwin and Lytkina point out that losing this position had caused such men to feel depressed, angry and disorientated.[82]

The second scene of the film begins with the opening soundtrack, a steamy, instrumental jazz composition that is accompanied by the picture of a woman surrounded by

[79] Ashwin, Sarah, and Lytkina, Tatyana. "Men in Crisis in Russia: The Role of Domestic Marginalization." Gender & Society 18, no. 2 (2004) 189-206.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid, 191.
[82] Ibid, 193.

smoke and red lights. First, only the woman's head and upper body are shown as she sensually moves along to the tunes. Her appearance is undoubtedly sexual: she wears a set of feather bikini barely covering her chest and waist as well as a red, silk skirt, a feather head piece, red gloves and an oversized ring. Through her movements she sensually plays with the feathers around her chest and drops her ring into her skirt. She strips from her skirt and shows off a body perfectly conforming to the era's ideal female beauty standards: porcelain skin, tiny waist, long legs and petite features. Her character plays with the expectations of the male gaze and clearly caters for it through the sexualisation of her body and movements. One could easily believe that her body is objectified to achieve male satisfaction. Mulvey points out that the male gaze objectifies the female figure by projecting its fantasies onto her.[83] In this sense, the stripper's movements, physical features, makeup and the props are all used in order to play with these male fantasies. The stripper's audience seems mesmerized by her performance and both her spectators in the casino and in front of the screen experience a form of visual satisfaction.

Unexpectedly, as she dances around her clientele now only wearing her underwear, she stops and slaps one of the male customers. The music immediately stops, and the stripper walks away angrily. The stripper's reaction to the man in the audience demonstrates that she is in control of her body, no matter whether men are watching. She is the one who decides what she shows of herself and the one who sets the limits to her visual consumption. She controls the (male) gaze and is able to manipulate or interrupt it as she wants to. This is a ground-breaking critique of the gaze. First, the director provokes men by catering to their visual expectations only to break the gaze by the performer herself. This action shows that the female character possesses a certain amount of agency which allows her to break the gaze and in turn her own objectification.

An important source of the protagonists' agency is money. At least, this is how Yaya and Rita perceive it. Both male and female characters are obsessed with money because they associate wealth with happiness and independence. According to Yaya, men have money and because women need it, they need to get it from men. Her analogy depicts the social hierarchy between the two sexes: men are in an advantageous situation because they have it for the simple reason of being men. Since women do not have money, they are dependent on men. Normally, this would mean that in order to survive women would have to be in a relationship with or married to a man. But based on Yaya's philosophy money can be "bought" if a woman sells

[83] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16, no. 3 (1975) 10.

certain services to a man. This way, the woman depends on the man to a lesser extent and is still able to maintain a certain level of independence and control over her destiny. Nevertheless, even if a woman decides to become a prostitute, out of her own free will, she still relies on men, not only on her clients but also her pimps. The negotiation between Rita, Yaya, and their two deaf procurers demonstrate that even though a prostitute earns her own salary, she can only keep a fraction of the money because her pimps (mostly men) will keep almost half of her earnings. This means that even if we interpret prostitution as a woman's choice, her destiny is still dependent on men's decision on how much men take from her salary. Just like Rita and Yaya, the Prostitute has no influence on what percentage they will take from her salary, she can argue and try to negotiate but the pimps ("men") will always have the final say.

In one scene the women are sitting in a popular, Western-style café/bistro. They have not eaten the whole day but cannot afford anything at the restaurant. Yaya says, they are going to a eat a lot now by seducing a rich-looking businessman. Rita argues that "it is (an) uncomfortable (situation)". Yaya corrects her that "it is uncomfortable to starve, and it is uncomfortable not to have any money". The two put on a performance to the gaze, portraying a behaviour they perceive to be pleasing to men. Almost instantly, they are invited to the businessman's table to dine with him. This scene illustrates the economic inequalities between men and women Yaya often refers to in the movie ("men have the money and women have to take it from them"). In some metaphorical ways the characters' behaviour can be considered a form of prostitution. They offer a physical but non-sexual service: their performance to the gaze. For this they are remunerated in a form of material goods: food. This scene depicts "prostitution" as both a choice and a must. Nobody directly forces the protagonists to "perform", but their poverty forces them to. It could be argued that Russia's larger societal crisis is directly linked to their hunger and poverty. Which in turn is responsible for why they even consider offering "themselves" to any man in the first place. Prostitution is not judged as right or wrong by the director's representation of it, instead, it is a paradox which is a result of social inequalities in post-Soviet Russia.[84]

Identity

[84] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 188.

The Country of the Deaf only to a limited extent captures women's identity development and general interiority. The story does not really focus on protagonists' personal histories and identity. In order to bridge this gap, I attempted to piece together information about characters' identity through examining their relationship to one another as well as to their male counterparts. In addition, I tried to use some of the dialogues to understand characters' priorities in life and desires for the future which can be considered important to their inner lives and consciousness.

From the opening scene it becomes clear that Rita not only acts as Alyosha's caretaker, which would be aligned with what is traditionally expected from her as a woman. She explains that she would even sacrifice her own safety just to protect him. This is an interesting combination of traditional female and male characteristics in the female protagonist. In the 1990's Russian society it was expected that men provided women with financial stability and physical protection. In this case, Alyosha fails at fulfilling both of these duties, instead Rita offers to protect him and provide him with financial stability. This situation could be likened to the ones from Kiblitskaya's oral histories: when men failed to fulfil their duties, women felt forced to "bridge the gap" and take on duties that would traditionally belong to men such as becoming breadwinners and protecting their families.[85]

The only way Alyosha could be likened to the era's traditional masculine ideal is through his physical appearance. His muscular upper body, broad shoulders, strong jawline and strong abdomen are physical traits that conform to the idea of what a strong filmic male ought to look like.[86] In contrast, he seems like a weak character: he not only fails to take care of Rita, he is unable to take care of himself and instead of solving them, he runs away from his problems or relies on other people's help. He is obsessed with money, but he does not seem bothered by not having a job. He has accumulated a large debt as a result of gambling and he seems unable to control his addiction. His character is in stark contrast to his physical appearance: even though he appears as a strong, attractive man, he is weak, desperate, out of control and unable to take care of himself.

From this scene, it is obvious that Rita is more empowered than Alyosha, even though she is not aware of it. She possesses qualities and attitudes that are traditionally associated with male characters on film: bravery, cold-headedness, protectiveness and stability. She appears

[85] Kiblitskaya, Marina. "Russia's female breadwinners: The changing subjective experience" in: Ashwin, Sarah. *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (London, Routledge, 2000)
[86] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16, no. 3 (1975) 10.

less emotional than the male character and she seeks solutions instead of waiting for men to solve issues.[87]

Rita and Yaya move into a sculptor's workshop. It is filled with enormous sculptures of men and women and one enormous male overlooking all the others (and symbolising the male gaze).[88] One of the sculptures is modelled after Yaya. Her sculpture is a goddess with six arms which is a reference to the Indian goddess, Durga. Durga is the warrior goddess in Hindu culture. She fights injustice, wrong, violence and uses her power to destruct in order to liberate and empower creation. One could see this sculpture (and that it was modelled after Yaya) symbolic to Yaya being somebody who goes against toxic social norms, traditional gender roles and offers protection for those suffering under their constraint. She is protective of Rita from the debt collector and Alyosha and inspires to become independent.

Another important theme in the protagonists' life is self-creation. In order to adapt to the challenges of "New Russia" as well as to gain their independence, protagonists alter their behaviour, appearance and perception of self. An example of the process of character's self-creation is Yaya's name. Yaya (Я) is a made-up name. It comes from the Russian word for "I" (Я). According to Judith Butler, conceptions and performances of gender often derive from childhood experiences and education.[89] Her rejection of her birth name suggests that through denouncing the ideas and influences she was prescribed upon being born and growing up as a woman, she takes control of her destiny and that she created her own self. With having chosen the name Ya-ya, the character emphasises her focus on herself, doing things for herself, being confident in herself and creating herself. Tsyrkyn and Hashamova point out that Yaya's name is no simple linguistic turn, it reflects the character's independence, her approach towards men and her almost narcissistic love for herself.[90]

Rita and Yaya often experiment with expressions of femininity and negotiate their own idea about what it is/ought to be to be a woman. Among others they do this through playing with various clothing items such as hats, dresses, scarves but also through makeup, body movements, facial expression and laughter. In one scene Yaya puts on a hat and asks Rita to comment on her ways of laughter. She imitates different types of female stereotypes through

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[87] Ibid, 11.
[88] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008)178.
[89] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 2006)
[90] Tsyrkyn, Nina. "Tinkling Symbols: Fragmented Society—Fragmented Cinema?" *Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema.* Editor Birgit Beumers (London, I.B.Tauris, 1999)
Hashamova, Yana. "Castrated Patriarchy, Violence, and Gender Hierarchies in Post- Soviet Film." in *Gender and Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture.* Editors. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux. (DeKalb, Illinois Northern Illinois University Press, 2006) 196-224.

vulgar, sensual or hysterical laughter. Yaya's imitations are ironic, exaggerated and reflect her ideas of societal expectations towards women's behavior. Based on her perception society expects women to be overly emotional, irrational, sexual and/or flamboyant. Rita suggests that maybe she should just smile instead. Yaya imitates a naïve, obedient woman's smile, which builds upon another stereotype.

Journey

Rita's personal journey is one of the main catalysts of the storyline. At the beginning of the film she is introduced as a naïve girl who lives in her boyfriend's shadow. She emotionally dependent on Alyosha and allows herself to be manipulated. Through the course of the film, she becomes less dependent on him, and eventually realises that she needs to put her own needs first instead of letting Alyosha use her. It could be argued that she undergoes a journey to consciousness by the end of which she becomes an independent, empowered woman.

In one of the final scenes Rita sees Alyosha through a window as he loses all her money on roulette. The director's use of the window is a metaphor to Rita's final stage of empowerment. At this point she comes to consciousness about her own power and Alyosha's lack thereof. She is now able to see her situation objectively and realises that she is superior to her boyfriend who is enslaved to gambling and has nothing to offer her.

In the following shot the couple is captured on the river bank: Alyosha sitting with his head between his legs and Rita standing, almost towering above him. Even though she is now aware that she is superior to Alyosha due to her strong character and financial stability, she lowers herself down kneeling in front of him and confesses her love for him. This change in posture indicates that against her realisation that Alyosha has a weak personality, Rita is not yet ready to give up her feminine role to nurture him.

Alyosha says that she failed him because he asked her not to give him money. In a way, he blames her for his own mistakes, which is another sign of his powerlessness compared to her. She asks for his forgiveness for which he ridicules her. By apologising to Alyosha, Rita practices obedience. He claims that she is a saint and he is just a normal guy. "Can you imagine how it is to feel like a piece of shit next to you", he screams at her. He argues that she gets pleasure from his misery and that he just wants to live his life his own way. Through this phrasing he aims to normalise his own behaviour by elevating Rita to the level of an "abnormal" human being (a saint) instead of acknowledging that he is unable to fulfil his masculine duties.

Comradery

The Country of the Deaf portrays an instinctive bond between female characters, though there is no clear explanation to its existence. As a result of this bond, the protagonists manage to escape a number of potentially life-threatening situations. In this sense, female comradery is portrayed as an essential tool for survival. Nevertheless, Todorovsky points out that at the end of the day women are also self-interested and tend to prioritise their own needs over collective needs. In the following, I will highlight a number of scenes related to the protagonists' relationship with each other.

After a meeting with his debt collector, Alyosha leaves Rita behind as a collateral for his debt. When the opportunity arises, Rita tries to find an exit and escape. Rita finds Yaya in the changing room who offers to help her when she explains she is in danger from men. Yaya says she "hates all men". Without any further explanation, Rita seems to understand her. The camera captures them running through corridors, stairs and dark rooms as they eventually reach the shore. This could be understood as a metaphor to the characters' liberation through realising that their oppression is a collective problem and they can only escape by cooperating with one another.

At the end of the movie, Alyosha's debt collector finds Yaya and uses her to blackmail Rita into paying her boyfriend's debt. Though Rita and Yaya had experienced a number of conflicts, Rita feels responsible to rescue her friend. Even though she is aware that by helping Yaya she is risking her life, she does not hesitate to do so.

Conclusion

Overall, The Country of the Deaf depicts only some elements of female consciousness and identity. With some focus on Rita's personal journey, the theme of female consciousness is introduced but only to a limited extent is expanded upon. The director shows that the relationship between women is complex and often serves as a tool of survival but also points out that comradery should not be taken for granted. The complexity of female relationships is not thoroughly explored however, and therefore it is difficult to draw a conclusion on what exactly the director intended to do by introducing this theme into the storyline.

The topic of female identity is briefly touched upon by showcasing Yaya who appears as a woman who had created herself by altering her appearance, name and some of her inner

characteristics. Nonetheless, Yaya's identity is mainly constructed around the idea that she wants to be different and independent but is not nearly as confident as she acts in public. There is very little to no information about her past, deepest desires (with the exception of reaching the Country of the Deaf). With this in mind, I do not believe that the movie focuses on introducing spectators to the complexity of women's identity.

Perhaps one of the most noticeable features of the film is that it allows its female characters a relatively large degree of agency. They seem to be able to navigate their lives relatively freely as soon as they gain a degree of financial stability. Additionally, by manipulating the gaze, Todorovsky makes a point that camerawork and editing may alter spectators' view of women's physique in order to allow female characters to become subjects instead of objects.

Finally, it is notable that though the film suggests these women turn to prostitution as a result of poverty, it does not focus on explaining how this factor limits the protagonists exactly. Furthermore, it does not seem to be the director's focus to discuss any other potential limiting factors to the women's lives.

In conclusion, The Country of the Deaf only to a limited extend delves into some of the themes Bolton and Kaplan consider when researching female consciousness and identity. I have found that this observation is in line with online reviews which almost completely dismissed the themes of women's consciousness and identity.

III. The Spot

Synopsys

The Spot tells the story of three prostitutes: Ania, Kira and Nina. The film revolves around their individual experiences as well as their collective story of being prostitutes in a Moscow *tochka*. Although, through the course of their lives these women go through a genuine moral decline, without victimising his characters, the director demonstrates explicit sympathy towards their sufferings.[91] It is important to note that similarly to Intergirl and The Country of the Death, Moroz does not judge prostitutes, but instead is critical of societal issues or

[91] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 232.

behaviours in Russian society. The film captures almost the entire Russian society ranging from oligarchs and intellectuals to corrupt officials, homeless people and blue-collar workers.

The cinematographic depiction is frank, naturalistic, rough and almost documentary-like. The camera work introduces Russia as a decaying world through picturing cramped spaces, filthy streets, abandoned industrial areas, rundown, graffiti-filled buildings and collapsing infrastructure. The film is an eclectic mix of scenes and flashbacks portraying the characters as adults and as children. Most of these lengthy flashbacks are inserted in the middle of the primary action in order to provide context on characters' present-day actions and decisions. This tool is used to emphasise the disjointedness of characters' lives as well as the effects of their childhood experiences on their adult personalities.[92] According to Elina, with Moroz's style blurs the line between "fact and fiction", which lends an authorial tone to his film.[93] Furthermore, she adds that Moroz approaches prostitution and the economics of daily Russian life with a "reporter's interest".[94] This allows Moroz to capture his subjects and societal issues with a form of "truthfulness".[95] This style is used to emphasise the movie's main messages which are that violence drives every part of society and "New Russia" is about selling not creating. As a main conclusion Moroz highlights that no matter how sophisticated people act, the only law they live by is the law of the jungle.[96] Those who are unable to adapt to or accept these set of rules will not survive.

The main storyline of the film takes place during the 2002 World Cup accompanied by a number of flashbacks detailing the path that led the three protagonists to prostitution. Nina (portrayed by the director's daughter Darya Moroz), the youngest woman is first introduced as a young girl who is forced to take care of her abusive, alcoholic parents and little brother. Her only way to provide for her family is to sell her body. Ania is a woman with a model-like beauty who is not only attractive but also seems well informed and intelligent. In her past she was repeatedly abused sexually by her male family members and she chose the path to prostitution in order to lead a more independent life. Kira (played by the director's wife, Viktoria Isakova) is the oldest of the three heroines. After the loss of her boyfriend in the Chechen war from whom she got pregnant of, she goes through an abortion and is forced into prostitution to pay for the procedure.

[92] Ibid, 237.
[93] Elina, Natalia. "Vybor 'tochki'." (*Samarskie izvestiia*, 28 July 2006)
[94] Ibid.
[95] Schuckman, Emily. Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film. Washington: University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008, 232.
[96] Shervud, Olga. "Tochka': nikto ne brosit kamen." (*Iuga*, 19 June 2006)

In the following, this chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of how the film portrays prostitution as a consequence of Russia's moral corruption and economic instability. Secondly, it will be addressed how and why prostitutes are depicted as the "Other". Finally, it will be discussed what moral and social goals are put forth in the movie and how these serve as a form of critical review of Russian society and women's position in it.

Context and Reception

The 2006 film, Tochka was directed by Yuriy Moroz. *Tochka* can be translated to "The Spot" and it refers to the areas where prostitutes find their clientele. According to Christina Stojanova, Canadian media historian, The Spot plays a significant role in the discussion about prostitution and human trafficking. She claims that ever since V. Todorovsky's Intergirl, media have been mainly silent about this societal issue. She points out that historically, prostitution and sexual exploitation of women were deemed alien to Russian culture and considered a "typically Western" phenomenon.[97] During Communism, "the oldest profession" became a prerogative of the secret services who were responsible for managing and even encouraging it. It was common practice to employ prostitutes for blackmailing and spying on foreign or ideological suspects.[98] Of course, these practices were carefully guarded secrets of the State whereas on the surface, Soviet policy was focused on the liberation of women.[99] It is also important to realise that most of the Eastern-European filmmakers working in the early 2000's were educated under Communism and had been trained to avoid controversial topics that would not align with the official State narrative.[100] No to mention, that as Stoljanova also claims, the political and economic elites in Russia in the early 2000's have been "comprised of the former elites or their progeny". Often these elites were personally involved in conjunction with traffickers of women which was perceived as one of the most lucrative and risk-free businesses in the underworld.[101] In conclusion, the "oldest tradition" was often considered too dangerous to be discussed freely in cinema.

Russian film critic and journalist Olga Shervud, adds that Russian society in the early 2000's was simply not willing to recognise the "real prostitutes", though prostitution was

[97] Stojanova, Christina. "Iurii Moroz: The Spot (Tochka, 2006)." (*KinoKultura*, 2006*)*
[98] Williams, Christopher. "Victim, Villain or Symbol of the Market Transition?: Whores in Modern Russia." *Irish Slavonic Studies* 16 (1996) 31-55.
[99] Stojanova, Christina. "Iurii Moroz: The Spot (Tochka, 2006)." (*KinoKultura*, 2006*)*
[100] Stojanova, Christina. "Iurii Moroz: The Spot (Tochka, 2006)." (*KinoKultura*, 2006*)*
[101] Ibid.

accepted "as a matter of fact".[102] Shervud argues that the Russian government's corrupt attitude towards prostitution strongly contributed to the chaos and wilderness that is shown in The Spot.[103] The critic also highlights that in order to best understand Moroz's view on the issues he presents, one has to apply concepts of humanism to the analysis of The Spot. Humanist films focus on those suffering, fighting for their day-to-day survival. Without conveying their own moral judgments, directors zoom in on humans seeking help, trying to protect their family and their desire and actions to keep living. In this sense, Moroz tries to highlight the ways in which his protagonists fight for survival even in the midst of the most tragic events of their lives. Through his film, Moroz shows that instead of it being an individual's choice, prostitution is often a consequence of social and personal circumstances, as well as psychological dispositions.

Tochka is a critically acclaimed film both in Russia and in the West. However, this does not mean that it has reached a large public. From reviews it is obvious that mostly frequent visitors of art-house cinemas have discovered it. A few reviewers mention that they have seen the film on television but it is not clear where and when the film was shown. There has been a DVD version of the film but it has been heavily censored and generally not available to a large public. Most reviews focus on the director's choice to not to portray prostitutes as "saints" but to describe them and their interiority as accurately as possible. Most reviewers praise Moroz and the actresses for capturing controversial topics such as domestic abuse, prostitution, poverty and abortion through a critical lense. Reviewers also highlight that the film is "truthful" and "honest". Upon having watched the movie, most people argue that capitalism and the new political system is responsible for turning simple girls into "monstrous creatures". Some critics find the topic of prostitution disgusting but agree that it is necessary to discuss it in order to achieve a change.

Limiting factors

One of the most important focuses of The Spot is to introduce the topic of violence committed against women. Moroz uses his film to illustrate the moral corruption of "New Russia" and societal inequalities suffered by women. The director not only describes societal issues rarely ever addressed in film but also shows how many of these became daily realities for women in

[102] Shervud, Olga. "Tochka': nikto ne brosit kamen." (*Iuga*, 19 June 2006)
[103] Ibid.

the process of the transformation to the free market.[104] Moroz emphasises that though these taboos may be more common among prostitutes (e.g. physical abuse), they are present in all parts of Russian society. Addressing issues such as poverty, child abuse, abortion and violent acts committed against women is important because they strongly affect one's identity, and conception of self. The director not only breaks these taboos, he also demonstrates how they affect women's lives and interiority.

Nina is physically abused already on her first day at the *tochka*. She is pushed into a police car and is expected to give a blow job to one of the policemen. The protesting Nina bites into his genitals. The man opens the door of the moving vehicle and pushes her out. The appearance of the police car already in one of the first scenes suggests that Russian authorities were not only aware of prostitution, they exploited it.[105] This is an illustration of how male officials exploited prostitutes through their powerful positions. Nina biting into the policeman's genitals reflects her rejection of this male authority and disobedience of corrupt authorities. By pushing her out of the car, the officer abuses his power and punishes the woman for disobeying him. This is a symbolic reminder that prostitution was only tolerated as long as prostitutes agreed to cooperate with the State and its officials.[106]

Together with other prostitutes Nina and Ania are taken to a villa to entertain oligarchs. A businessman orders the girls to strip and enter a freezing cold swimming pool in the garden. The women are forced to stay in the pool for about eight hours while being watched by two men. One of the men sits in a large throne-like chair in front of them while the other one stares from a balcony. The man on the throne appears as a sort of king, while the women as his harem subjugated to his wishes. The spatial situation between characters and the authoritative tone of the businessmen illustrates the power imbalance echoing gender and social inequality between prostitutes and men. This scene highlights that not all abuse towards women is sexual, they are often harmed without any physical contact. This observation is supported by Yablokova and Badkhen's study who note that there are a great number of Russian news reports about violence against prostitutes, which often include murder.[107] Through his representation of this societal trend, Moroz addresses the issue that in New Russia anyone who is wealthy is free to exercise his power over those with lesser means.

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[104] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 260.
[105] Williams, Christopher. "Victim, Villain or Symbol of the Market Transition?: Whores in Modern Russia." *Irish Slavonic Studies* 16 (1996) 31-55.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Yablokova, Oksana and Anna Badkhen. "Drive-by Attack on Prostitutes Injures 16." (The Moscow Times 8 Sept. 2000)

In the first flashback Nina is caught showering as an adult woman. Her flashback paints a memory of her childhood self. In the following shot she appears as a ten-year-old child living in a poor provincial town. She lives in a messy house with her infant brother, paralysed father and unemployed mother. Her mother orders her to empty her father's bed pan outside. The child takes out the bed pan to the outdoor toilet and instantly throws up out of disgust. By the time she comes back in to the house, her mother is conversing with representatives of the child protection services. The officers question the conditions the children live in. As a response the mother grabs a bed pan filled with faeces and empties its contents on Nina's head. These shots immediately create strong emotional reactions in spectators: pity, disgust, shock and outrage.

This scene explains not only the story of why Nina continues to be obsessed with cleanliness (through the shower and shaving her head), but also points out how Nina's body has lost its integrity in the girl's eyes. Evidently, Nina is not only violated physically, but her inner life and conception of self is also strongly affected by her childhood trauma. In her early teenage years Nina turns to prostitution to provide for her family. Although her situation is tragic, Nina's story is not unique. The 1990's saw a steep rise of unemployment and alcoholism, and especially in the provinces life became even more difficult. This is supported by Womack's 1999 article on the issue, which describes a town in which a high number of underage girls offered sexual services to truck drivers and other passers-by for as little as a few dollars.[108] Emily Schuckmann points out that by openly portraying child abuse, the director breaks an important taboo and brings forth a very real issue of modern Russian society.[109]

The scene in which Ania is brutally beaten up by a client is another provocative introduction to a taboo: violent, often life-threatening acts towards women. In the scene, Ania is captured in the back of a car at night. She seems irritated by the fact that her client has taken her into the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night. The client's face is not shown, the only close up of him is of his pierced ear, his dolphin earring and strong hands lifting a cigarette to his mouth. His voice is authoritative and cold. Even if the camera only shows his hand and ear, their owner appears threatening as the light falls on to the cigarette smoke. He instructs Ania to undress herself and get out of the car into the rain. Ania obeys him and stands in the rain while the client also follows her. There is a heavy rain and the expensive jeep's front lights almost blind the spectator. The man stands in front of Ania and kicks her in the stomach.

[108] Womack, Helen. "Faces and Voices: Mother Russia Sells Herself on the Roadside." (The Moscow Times 28 Aug. 1999)
[109] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 239.

Shocked from the sudden pain, Ania falls into the mud and tries to crawl away from harm's way. The car's front light falls directly on Ania's wet, muddy, naked body as it takes another hit from the client's foot. In the meantime, the man remains fully in the shade and only his pointy boots are shown from close by. He continues to beat Ania and almost drowns her in a larger pond. She manages to stand up and leans on a tree. He comes from behind, pushing his hand into her mouth and rapes her. Ania is unable to resist his force and screams out of despair.

This scene is not only another example of violent acts committed against prostitutes. On the larger scale it highlights women's situation who have suffered physical and sexual abuse. The fact that the perpetrator's face and identity were left unknown in the film is symbolic to the real-life situation in which women do not have the resources or courage to take action against their aggressors who as a result will remain free men, unknown to the justice system. In Russian society (similarly to many others around the world) rape and/or other types of physical violence against women remain taboos, and their filmic representations such as Moroz's, contribute to raising public awareness and critical discussion.

Agency

Agency is another important theme to consider in The Spot. The director departs from the general trend to objectify the female body through camera work. Women do not subordinate themselves to male desire and scenes do not attempt to reinforce any erotic fantasies. In addition, the director showcases a number of intimate flashbacks which are though not narrated by the protagonists themselves but are shot from their perspectives as if they were telling the story themselves.

Despite her childhood trauma, as a young adult, Nina seems in control of her body. The scene of her in the shower directly after her flashback visualises this control. Her naked body is shot through a hole in the wall. She realises she is being observed by somebody and quickly plugs the hole with a washcloth. It seems that Nina has not only been observed in her physical nakedness but the unidentified spectator on the other end of the wall (and the silver screen) had also caught her vulnerable through her flashback. On the other hand, Nina's action of plugging the hole reminds spectators that she controls who sees her and how.

Ania's flashback introduces spectators to her seven-year-old self. The seven-year-old is captured in a theatre's dressing room dressed in a traditional Russian costume. The camera is positioned as directly next to her mirror creating a feeling that she is not only aware she is being looked at, she is playing with how she is being seen by the spectator. She is meticulously

putting on her makeup while her gaze is fixated in the mirror. In the background her middle-aged step father on his knees. He is desperately pleading to Ania not to tell her mother that he had molested her. It appears that even though Ania was raped, as a seven-year-old girl she holds power over this much older adult man. Without turning to look at him, Ania reassures him that she will keep quiet about the incident, but he should never come near her again. Her voice is cold and calculated, her speech well-articulated and confident. As Ania is intensely looking into the mirror, she is consciously putting on a mask for her audience on the other side of the screen. This camera angle allows spectators to view Ania as she wants to be viewed. Ania's flashbacks, similarly to Nina's raise an important taboo topic: incest. In the same way as domestic child abuse, incest is also a subject that is not openly discussed. Ania's background provides important context to understanding her presentday character and could even justify her attitude towards men.

Kira's flashback takes the viewer back to her early adulthood in a small military town. She falls in love with a young soldier from her father's regiment, but her father disapproves of their relationship and claims that she has to study. Kira's lover is sent to the Chechen war (probably by the disapproving father). Soon after the boy's departure, Kira realises she is pregnant. She travels to Moscow where she is told by the soldier's mother that he was killed in combat. Kira is visiting his grave and is approached by a man. He drugs her and takes her to an abandoned railway wagon. He and his wife perform an abortion on Kira and force her to prostitute herself to pay for it.

An important moment of the flashback is the montage of Kira's clients. The camera is fixed and shows a several men's portrait in front of a dirty wall. On the wall next to the men's heads, a newspaper cut-out emerges portraying a newly-wed couple with the headline: "Congratulations on your new happiness". It is probably used as a contrasting element commenting on Kira's reality. Kira is shown only at the end of the sequence. During forced intercourse she intensely shakes her head to the side and screams into the emptiness. The only sound effect during these scenes is that of objects shattering apart which is inserted instead of Kira's actual scream. This artistic choice strengthens the dramatic effect and is used to describe the effects sexual abuse on Kira's mind and body. Through her forced prostitution she is robbed from her control over her body, one of her most fundamental human freedoms. As a final solution to her suffering, she attempts to commit suicide. Kira's story, the same as Nina and Ania's stories is based on a taboo which in this case is domestic trafficking, forced prostitution and abortion. In addition, as some of the first directors (including Nikita Mikhalkov, Aleksandr

Sokurov and Valery Todorovsky), Moroz addresses the Chechen war's devastating effects on society.[110]

Identity

In many ways, the Prostitute is portrayed as the "Other. Her character not only provides an alternative angle on what is traditionally considered feminine, but she also appears as a symbol of rebellion towards the political and societal system of post-Soviet Russia.

The prostitutes' position as "Other" derives from a number of factors. First of all, they are women in a society where men are considered the norm. The female body, desire and lifestyle are subordinate to that of males. Anna Rotkirch points out that under the Gorbachev and Putin administrations it has been repeatedly emphasised that women's returning to the domestic sphere was an essential element of stabilizing Russia.[111] Especially Nina and Ania refuse to subscribe to this narrative and live according to their assigned roles in strictly divided masculine-feminine spheres.[112] According to Schuckmann, it is also important to realise that though protagonists are often captured from a humanist angle, they are not depicted as "victimised angels".[113] They are aggressive, exhibitionistic, rude and eager to get ahead ignoring any kind of principles. They decide to embrace the market instead of returning to domesticity and embracing motherhood.[114] None of them are obedient, kind or possess an "inner goodness" and morality often associated with women. Their non-conformist attitudes lead to their becoming labelled as "Others".

Secondly, for practicing a profession that both satisfies and threatens patriarchy, Moroz's prostitutes are labelled as "Others". As I have argued earlier, the character of the prostitute is paradoxical because she symbolises both eroticism and sexual liberation in a sexually repressive/patriarchal society that challenges her endurance. In addition, her filmic existence questions what love and morals' role ought to be, and what is to be sold or given for free.[115] She is commanded to offer her body as a service and then condemned for doing so. In

[110] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 242.
[111] Rotkirch, Anna, Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova. "Who Helps the Degraded Housewife?: Comments on Vladimir Putin's Demographic Speech." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14 (2007) 356.
[112] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 258.
[113] Ibid, 239.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Campbell, Russell. *Marked Women : Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 5.

the meantime, her character is independent: a subject instead of an object. Due to her (financial) independence and refusal to being subordinate to men she poses as a threat to a male-dominated society.[116]

Thirdly, Moroz's protagonists can be likened to "foreigners". Moroz's characters live on the edge of Moscow in a segregated area among Chinese workers. According to Dmitry Shlapentokh, Moscow emerged as a symbol to male power: "the giver of money and sexual pleasure".[117] The fact that Moroz's prostitutes who are essential to the city's sexual prowess, live on the edge of Moscow symbolizes their exclusion from the economic benefits and the community of the city. The characters live in a sort of bubble segregated from those living in the city. Their foreignness also appears in a more literal sense as Ania is Moldovan and not Russian and the other two girls come from the provinces.

Another interesting metaphor to the characters' identity is that of the Rotting Home the three women live in. By expressing the protagonists' identity through this metaphor the director allows viewers to better understand how their respective life experiences as well as different aspects of the Russian society had shaped their inner lives.

What Schuckmann refers to as the "Rotting Home" is the metaphor of the decaying house often used in the genre of chernukha to illustrate the ruin and the crumbling structure of the late Soviet Union.[118] Although, Moroz's movie is set in the early 2000's with a number of flashbacks to the Soviet era, prostitutes' home symbolises not only the chaos and the rotten society; it also reflects the effects of the social-political changes of Russia on their lives and identity.

The path to the women's home leads through train tracks and an abandoned industrial area covered by debris and weed. The house's structure resembles more of a patchwork of rotting wood, old tiles, asphalt and brick. It seems unsafe to live in, strongly exposed to natural elements and it could fall apart at any moment. The protagonists still consider it as their hiding place, a little safe haven they carved out for themselves. They do not seem to care to repair it. Instead they cover the cracks on the walls with posters and newspaper cut-outs of beautiful women smiling happily.

According to Schuckmann, the house is symbolic to the rotting "communal home", Russia. With this allegory, Moroz critiques both the State (the "house's" owner) for neglecting

[116] Ibid, 4.
[117] Shlapentokh, Dmitry. "Making love in Yeltsin's Russia: a case of 'de- medicalization' and 'de-normalization'." *Crime, Law & Social Change* 39 (2003) 140.
[118] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 251.

its duties to take care of it as well as its inhabitants' indifference to saving it from decay.[119] On the other hand, the house also symbolises the women's lives and their bodies. Their lives and bodies had survived a number of assaults of society, but they all bear the marks of each of these on their character. The patchwork of materials that holds together the structure could be likened to their own personal experiences and methods of survival. The fact that they do not try to save the house could symbolise that they are unaware of their own wounds or that they simply do not think the process could be reversed or corrected. The glossy, colourful posters decorating the house represent the heroines' dreams. They dream of a future in which they could afford to be careless and happy. These dreams are the only way to remain sane and fight for a better tomorrow.

Journey

In the final scene, Kira is pictured at the very same broken bridge where she and Ania had first met. She repeats the same movement and scream as in the scene with Ania and steps into nothingness. It is not captured on film, but she likely falls and dies as a result of this. Kira's suicide is a consequence of both her personal tragedies and "Otherness". Perhaps most importantly, Kira's choice to end her life relates to her lack of community or family. As a societal outcast, she needed to feel safe within her own bubble. Although, the women lived and worked together and acted as a form of family, their relationship still did not provide Kira with a sense of belonging, security or happiness. The final proof of this was when Ania and Nina stole her money in order to establish their own *tochka*. Ania and Nina's betrayal shows the they considered their friendship as a means of getting ahead instead of an honest comradery.

Her choice to jump off of this particular bridge is therefore significant because it symbolises her broken hope in her friends and in the damaged, unstable world she had been living in. One could argue that Moroz used this final scene for dramatic effect. However, if considered together with the previous scenes (in which Ania and Nina open their own *tochka*), it appears that the director does not see any other alternatives for women that became "Others": continue working in prostitution and live as an outcast or end it all by suicide. Once a woman becomes an "Other", she can no longer turn back and be accepted by society. This conclusion

[119] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 251.

is grim and thought provoking and its goal is to encourage spectators to reshape their own views regarding prostitution and demand action from the State.

Comradery

Even though, Moroz seems cynical about the existence of genuine female friendship in the world of prostitution, he does provide a couple of examples of female solidarity. In his eyes, the women's relationship is a coping mechanism, not something women instinctively long for. Unconsciously, the characters' relationship with one another mimics the institution of the family. Kira acts like the mother figure, Ania assumes the masculine role by becoming the "voice of reason", and Nina (nicknamed as "moidodyrka") the role of the child who surrounds herself with an army of soft toys to hide away from the darkness of the outside world.

Ania and Kira get to know each while they are on a yacht entertaining businessmen. An unidentified gunman opens fire at everybody and the women only manage to escape thanks to Kira, who pushes Ania off the boat. After the shootout, Ania and Kira are captured running on an abandoned bridge above the highway where Kira once again saves Ania's life by warning her about the broken asphalt on the end of the bridge. Symbolically, the women stand at the end of the broken bridge, on top of the world, gazing down on the cars driving by underneath them. As a protest against their situation and perhaps as an absurd celebration of life, they scream with arms held up. Within these two scenes it becomes clear that the two women would have both died without each other's help. Being women, they are perhaps more vulnerable physically than men but by helping each other, they are able to protect themselves from the dangers of their profession. Without even knowing one another, the protagonists have protected themselves through an instinctive gesture to help each other. Their position on top of a broken bridge can also be understood metaphorically. In art, bridges often symbolise transitions, a form of progress and hope. By entering the bridge, the heroines hoped to escape from danger and perhaps even the lifestyle that has brought them into harm's way. The fact that the bridge is broken and hangs in the air without an end symbolises that although, there may have been a transition that began (a larger societal change such as the end of Communism or the rise of women's movements), it has been interrupted and its goals have not been met. The broken bridge symbolises that the characters have no way out of their situations, they can only move forward and accept their problems as they are.

Kira also appears in a motherly role when she takes home the injured Nina after her first day at work. Kira brings the shocked and bleeding Nina to her and Ania's home where she

nurtures and nurses her until she recovers. Kira also decides to take in Nina permanently and continues to take care of her throughout the film. In the meantime, Ania instinctively assumes the masculine role and stands up to their pimp. Her action, posture and words portray her as fearless and calculating. She is not intimidated by the pimp and makes sure justice is served in Nina's case.

Although, the women's relationships with each other resemble a family structure, Moroz does point out that their comradery is more circumstantial than altruistic. Their goals in life do not align, Nina wants to save up to take care of her brother, Ania to move into an apartment with her child. As the women discuss these goals one night, the camera intensely zooms in and pauses on a framed photograph showing characters as a happy friendship group. Only after watching this scene a number of times does one realise that the framed photograph points out the fragility of the friendship and reinforces the idea that no matter how close these women seem, they all strive for individualistic goals and their relationship is only a tool for survival.[120] With the depiction of this artificial, shallow family structure, Moroz makes a reference to the myth of communal living and reinforces the idea that living together does not necessarily result in a close-knit community.[121]

Conclusion

The Spot touches upon a number of themes that Bolton and Kaplan consider important to the analysis of female identity in film. First of all, it has a complex introduction into the protagonists' inner life through their flashbacks which serves as an intimate narration of their way to prostitution as well as to the factors that influenced their identity formation. Secondly, the Rotting Home can be considered a description to what is a form of communal/collective identity of the female characters.

On the other hand, Moroz also focuses on how these protagonists relate to each other and what might justify a form of female solidarity. His complex analysis of this connection concludes that though there is little space for friendships in the realm of prostitution, women do often rely on each other in difficult life situation and there is a certain amount of altruism present in their relationships.

[120] Schuckman, Emily. *Representations of the prostitute in contemporary Russian literature and film* (Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008) 255.
[121] Ibid, 252.

Women's agency is captured in various ways. Protagonists are pictured as "others", rebels against a number of societal expectations. They do not subordinate themselves to men, offering them sexual pleasures is simply "part of the job". On numerous occasions they are shown to be disobedient against (male) authority. They withdraw themselves from society and lead their lives in an independent manner. Though their bodies are often violated by others, they still show a large degree of ownership about their physical appearance and how it is viewed by the outside world.

What mostly distinguishes The Spot from the other two films in the study is that it not only focuses on women's inner life and consciousness, it also delves into the societal factors and life experiences that shape them as persons. The taboos that The Spot introduces are eye-opening and provide context about the protagonists' decisions, identity and personality.

Though the section the protagonists' journey only highlighted Kira's example, there are a number of elements of the film that (in)directly describe the protagonists' personal evolution. As the movie tells the story of three women's road to prostitution, it could be argued that it showcases their personal journeys. Flashbacks inevitably serve as illustrations to these journeys and introduce spectators to different stages of the protagonists' lives. As a conclusion of this journey, Moroz makes a point that the film's prostitutes cannot expect a happy ending. Their stories all end in a form of personal tragedy (e.g. suicide or moral degradation). These characters' journey shows that even though by the end of the film they arrived at a point in life where they carved out some agency for themselves, their total isolation from society in combination with limiting factors made it impossible to achieve self-fulfilment and satisfaction.

Although, The Spot does to a large extent deal with female protagonists' inner life, journey, agency, most spectators only focused on the ways it addressed some of the most urgent social issues in Russian society. Naturally, this does not mean that local audience did not recognise these themes, rather that they felt it was strongest in debunking age-old taboos around poverty, violence, abortion and trafficking.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of three films between 1989-2006, this thesis attempted to point out how three Russian directors had understood their female protagonists' identity and inner life.
In addition, these chapters devoted special attention to how the filmic portrayal of prostitution had played a role in the directors' criticism of societal taboos, gender relations as well as the effects of Russia's transition to becoming a market economy.

By showcasing the stories of prostitutes, directors introduced viewers to various concepts of feminine identity, comradery, agency, journey as well as factors that affected these. It has been discovered that in different ways and to various extent all films interacted with these themes. The most common feature among case studies was that they all looked at female characters' agency. Most of the times, their agency was approached from their financial stability, dependence from men as well as control over their bodies and physical appearance.
What the three directors struggled with was to enable their characters with a unique voice that would have enabled them to share their stories and create a more intimate connection between spectators and protagonists. It is also evident that none of the films show positive life prospects for female characters: without exception all protagonists go through a moral degradation as they try to carve out more independence for themselves.

The films portray prostitutes as societal outcasts and explain their otherness with their being women who disobey patriarchal authority and live from selling their body. Theirr positions as non-traditional women, uninterested in domestic duties and motherhood make them all the more foreign. In addition, many of these filmic prostitutes are depicted as entrepreneurial, confident, non-conformist, cunning, self-focused and manipulative. Above all, the Prostitute's otherness represents that there is not one, but many female identities and gender performances. Though this could serve as an important element in the films, the complexity of female identities is only to a relatively limited extent explored in the movies of this study.

The directors approached women's journey more as a path towards independence instead of a journey to consciousness or self-discovery. Prostitution comes with a degree of financial stability which might enable women to lead independent lives of their families or

men. In addition, the films show that through prostitution women are not only able to make their own money, but they can also express themselves in ways that does not fall in line with traditional feminine norms (e.g. in behaviour, speech, physical appearance and clothing, choosing the number of their sexual partners.)

Nevertheless, all films arrived at the conclusion that that women can only achieve some degree of freedom by sacrificing their membership to certain societal groups and becoming outcasts. Additionally, becoming "liberated" often comes at the price of losing one's identity, giving up fundamental values and adopting one's personality. Though all female protagonists' journey ends with having achieved freedom, their sacrifices often outweigh their gain (e.g. suicide, depression, not reaching goals such as having their own family etc).

With regard to the culture of the 1990's, directors portray the Prostitute as an allegory of Russia's transition to market economy. Her struggle to make her ends meet by selling her most precious possession - her body - is a provoking outcry for realising the large-scale poverty and social uncertainty many Russians were forced to accept. Her desires also serve as a symbol to people's escapist fantasies by imagining a different way of living and a more prosperous future.

Interestingly, the films do not provide a clear solution to Russia's emerging "gender trouble" they so eagerly try to outline. However, they do provide a fresh view on taboos and women's positions in society. With this, the three films became important cornerstones in Russian cinematography aiming towards a more critical representation of the society in transition by "presenting measured exposes of social problems together with clearly implied or openly identified causes of those problems".[122]

After having discovered the representations of feminine identity and consciousness through the character of the Prostitute I realise her versatility and universality. This study focused on her representation in three Russian films made during Russia's political transition period. In the future, I would like to extend my study by looking at how films made in former Soviet republics and satellite states depict women's identity and consciousness through the character of the Prostitute. This could allow for investigating country-specific interpretations and general themes revolving around her metaphor. Potentially, this would allow me to conclude to what extent the conclusions of this study are rooted in lingering Soviet ideology and gender norms.

[122] Graham, Seth. *"Chernukha* and Russian Film." *Studies in Slavic Cultures* 1 (2000) 15.

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