

**Title:** Female Subjectivity as Constructed by Women Directors  
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One of the striking outcomes of the collapse of the USSR was the gender-marked replenishment of the ranks of directors in the Russian film industry. The question that governs my ongoing research is the following: Have the real-life liberation of woman's agency culminated in paradigm shifts in what were defined as women's issues, in the creation of heroines empowered with a new ideology, and in the reflection of previously taboo patterns of female behavior?

My paper examines two 2007 films that seem to challenge culturally fixed ideas, but in fact adhere to models deeply rooted in Russian culture: *Puteshestvie s domashnimi zivotnymi* by Vera Storozheva and *Cruelty* by Marina Liubakova. Both narratives spotlight an awakening of female agency as a crucial moment in woman's existence. However, Liubakova's unsparing vision of female agency radically differs from Storozheva's celebratory depiction of a strong female character that invites hope rather than despair.

The story of Storozheva's protagonist echoes that of the heroine of Russia's first feminist film by Abram Room's *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* (1927). Both films engage the issue of female emancipation and underscore male unwillingness or inability to accommodate female aspirations. At the same time, the historical contexts of the films' critiques differ. The concept of the new as a return to old Russian cultural values (restorative power of Russian Orthodoxy) has replaced the idea of the new as their rejection.

Liubakova's film reveals the persistent fear of an active woman's ability to elude male control. A substantial part of the narrative focuses on a female character's acquisition of agency and a new identity by befriending a rebellious younger woman. Her betrayal, however, not only undermines the notion of female bonding, but also rejects the possibility for a post-Soviet woman to function as a *moral* subject. In fact, her morality is unambiguously linked to her status as an object, while her agency stems from her immorality.

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